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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Contextualising Syriac Anathema: Bridging the Gap between Suggestions of
Comparison in Late Antique and Nineteenth Century Christian Ritual Practice

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
2016

Preface

‘Thus I beheld, at last, the goal of my journey from Luristan, and was not disappointed. Glorious indeed is this Kurdistan world of mountains, piled up in masses of peaks and precipices, cleft by ravines in which the Ashirets and Yezides find shelter, every peak snow-crested, every ravine flaming with autumn hints; and here, where the ridges are the sharpest, and the rock spires are the imposing, is the latest refuge of a Church once the most powerful in the East’.¹

Isabella Lucy Bird was one of a number of travel writers and missionaries, whose attraction to the allure of the Orient or whose sense of evangelical mission, had led them to traverse the mountainous and largely impervious regions of Northern Kurdistan in the Nineteenth-Century. Her travel diaries, like so many of the accounts of this Kurdish world of mountainous peaks and precipices, would describe a land of ‘antique heritage’, one which had been isolated as a consequence of its physical geography, and insulated from the influences of the Mesopotamian plains by the ‘fierce behaviour’ and ‘lawless habits’ of its marauding Kurdish tribes.² Up there in the mountains of Kurdistan was a window into what was perceived to have been a far older Mesopotamia; a landscape which in its antiquity “presented to the eye so many of the aspects of the biblical Eden”.³ Indeed, to travel through the environs north of the city of Mosul had been like ‘traversing lands of biblical scenes’, to view the mountains of Hakkari ‘like being carried back thousands of years on the wings of time’.⁴ This ‘Mesopotamia of the mountains’, would seem to have preserved a rich and evocative landscape for the imaginations of those familiar with the narratives and landscapes of Old Testament narratives, but as Bird and a number of other travellers were to imply, the isolation of this seemingly ‘antique’ landscape had also confined and thus preserved the remnants of an equally antique community, one which had professed a belief in Christ for Fourteen centuries.

1 I. L. Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, (London: John Murray, 1891), p.286.

2 E. L. Cutts, *Christians under the Crescent in Asia*, (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1877), p.1.

3 L. Coleman, *Ancient Christianity Exemplified in the Private, Domestic, Social and Civil Life of the Primitive Christians* (London: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1852), p.566

4 A. Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes: Containing Evidence of their Identity An Account of the Manner, Customs and Ceremonies* (London: John Murray, 1841), p.26 and p.54

According to journal entries and missionary reports, those remnants of an antique Christian community among the mountains of Hakkari were ‘a very different people’ to those who had professed a faith in Christ upon the alluvial plains of the Mesopotamian valley; both on account of the nuances which defined their various doctrines, and the seemingly primitive quality of their customs, rituals and speech. Where the promise of association with a European power had converted a large number of those living on the Mesopotamian plains to the doctrines of Catholicism, this forbidding and largely inaccessible landscape of mountain peaks and precipices had seemed to preserve fragments not only of a distinctly Oriental Church, but of a Church which had maintained tangible links to the earliest threads of Christianity in Mesopotamia.⁵ Bird’s journals would describe largely ‘unintelligible conversations’ peppered with a vocabulary similar to that which had been spoken by Christ, and a variety of customs which had been a ‘touching reminiscence’ of those to be found within Old Testament narratives: the fantastically romanticised accounts of a Victorian orientalist perhaps, but Bird was by no means alone in suggesting that she found there to be ‘something strikingly biblical’ about so many of the customs and rituals of these ‘mountain Christians’.⁶ Austin Layard, a contemporary and fellow traveller, would similarly assume that their ignorance of the ‘superstitions of the Church of Rome’ and their ‘more simple observances and ceremonies’, may ‘clearly be traced to a more primitive form of Christianity’; one which in its simplicity, seemed uniquely untouched by the ecumenical councils and creeds which had elsewhere defined the Christian faith during the centuries of its founding.⁷

5 Where the missions of the Catholic Church had been entirely confined to the urban areas of the Mesopotamian plains, particularly Amida or modern day Diyarbakir, the mountains of Kurdistan were seen by those 19th Century missionaries and explorers to be the last refuge of a Nestorian, and Oriental Christianity, one which had preserved links to a more primitive expression of the faith.

6 Bird, (1891), p.242. The same assumptions were also made of those Jewish communities living within the remote and mountainous world of Kurdistan. Owing to the rugged nature of the area, as well as the constant threat of brigandry on the few and potentially perilous roads which penetrated this otherwise inaccessible world of mountain peaks, the Jews of Kurdistan were assumed to have preserved a primitive, though somewhat debased expression of a more ancient Judaism. Those few Jewish travellers who visited Kurdistan in the 19th Century, such as I. J. Benjamin, would describe their regret at the shallow knowledge expressed by these communities in matters of Jewish Law, especially when compared with their relatively near metropolitan communities of Baghdad and Damascus, but also their excitement at the seemingly ancient practices and customs with which they expressed their Jewish faith. Benjamin writes of his excitement at having witnessed one seemingly biblical custom in particular, suggesting, ‘where I went during harvest time, I found a custom strictly observed by the Jews which brought to my mind the precepts of the bible. Neither the ears of corn, nor the grapes, nor fruits are wholly collected, but the portion of the widows and orphans is always left, it is even allowed to go into a ripe cornfield to break the sheaves, and there and then to boil the corn in water, but the ears of corn must not be cut, neither may they be carried away’. Practices such as these had derived from ancient oral traditions, and had been transmitted from generation to generation, rather than in learned abstract precepts. See I. J. Benjamin, *Eight Years in Asia and Africa* (Hannover: 1863), pp.130-131. For a more recent assessment of the ancient Biblical and Talmudic customs assumed to have been retained by Kurdistan Jews, see J. J. Rivlin, *Sirat Yehude hat-Targum* (Jerusalem 1959), pp.47-56.

7 A. Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains: A Narrative of an Expedition to Assyria*, (London: John Murray, 1867), p.184. There was an ancient story- one which spoke of the legacy of a man whose doctrines had rocked the Christian world in the Fifth Century. His name was Nestorius, a Patriarch of Constantinople, whose doctrines had attempted to negotiate some of the provocative questions facing the Christian church in its formative period, quite controversially, how one was to understand the humanity of Christ, and how one was to refer to his relationship to the Virgin Mary. At the first

After the lapse of a long history defined by schism, excommunication, Muslim conquest and more recently Catholic mission, here was a Church and a community high up in the mountains of Kurdistan whose ways spoke of the legacy of an entirely independent and ancient Oriental Christian tradition, one which had been born in the theological environment of Late Antiquity, and as a consequence, at least in part, of adhering to the beliefs of a 'heresy'. Its preservation was deemed to have been nothing less than 'a matter of wonder'; a story of almost unprecedented ancient Christian survival in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.⁸ Yet, the romanticised narrative of these missionaries and explorers would also allude to another, rather more unfortunate reality: one which would describe how an antique Christian community, surrounded on all sides by the geographical impediments of a mountainous terrain as much as the human encumbrance of theological difference, had also been gradually worn down and steadily debased by the passing of time and as a consequence of its solitude. The commentary of Isabella Bird would describe a Christian community 'at its lowest ebb', 'absolutely sunk in ignorance' with 'no exposition of the Bible and all worship performed in the ancient Syriac tongue', whilst the notes of reverend George Percy Badger would similarly imply that its Bishops were 'generally illiterate men, little versed in scripture, and thoroughly ignorant of ecclesiastical history. They [those bishops] scarcely ever preach, and whilst all of them can, of course, read the Syriac of their rituals, few thoroughly understand it'.⁹ Indeed, the lower orders of the clergy were described as more illiterate still, with an education for the priesthood limited to what Badger would describe as a mere 'perusal' of the Syriac rituals, whilst Bird's

Council of Ephesus (431 C.E), we are told how Nestorius spurned the theological convictions which described the Virgin Mary as "Theotokos", for Mary was not the mother of the second person of the trinity as such an appellation would suggest, but the mother of Christ's humanity- the 'Christotokos'. Christ therefore had two natures, one corporeal and one divine, both united in one hypostasis, and it had been his physical body rather than his deity which had died and suffered on the cross. For how could it be any other way, 'How could a mother give birth to her creator?' and 'If God died then who had the power to resurrect him?' Such were the questions which would fuel perhaps one of the most potent schisms to have divided the ancient Christian world, such were the teachings and doctrines which widened the breach between a Western and Oriental Christian tradition, and it was in the mountains of Kurdistan that the tangible legacy of this breach had been preserved. It is perhaps worth noting at this point that this association with Nestorius was, and indeed continues to be for the contemporary Assyrian Church of the East, an enduring contention, given the mostly derogatory use of the term since the fifth century. John Joseph would describe how the Eastern Christians of Kurdistan, though having once identified with the designation 'Nestorian', were inclined to refer to themselves and their doctrine as belonging to the 'Church of the East', having been made aware by Christian missionaries of the derogatory connotations which the term was intended to convey. Indeed, the accounts of a Reverend Justin Perkins would describe how the habit of referring them as such had once inspired the bishop Mar Yohanan to threaten 'we shall soon be at war, if you do not cease calling us Nestorians'; while those of Asahel Grant reported that they disliked the term largely because they never derived either their doctrines or their rites from Nestorius. 'Nestorius', said they 'was not our Patriarch, but the patriarch of Constantinople. He was a Greek and we are Syrians. We do not even understand his language, nor did he ever propagate his doctrines in our territory'. The so-called 'Nestorian' church, which, it needs to be emphasised, actually preceded Nestorius, separated from the mother church of Antioch in the fifth century at the Merkabha Synod of 424. For further reading on the contention of the designation 'Nestorian', see J. Perkins, *Residence of Eight Years in Persia among the Nestorian Christians with Notices of the Muhammedans* (New York: 1843), p.180; A. Grant, *The Nestorians or the Lost Tribes* (Amsterdam: 1841), p.171; J. Joseph, *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbours*, (Princeton: 1961), p.14.

⁸ Layard, p.184.

⁹ See, Bird, (1891), p.228. and G. P. Badger, *The Nestorians and their Ritual: with the Narrative of a Mission to Mesopotamia and Koordistan in 1842-1844*, 2 vols. (London: Joseph Masters, 1852), I, p.61.

commentary would describe the 'Patriarch's sister and two or three nuns' as exceptions to a more general rule of female ecclesiastical illiteracy.¹⁰ These written testimonies; of Bird and Badger, but also of a number of 19th Century European commentators, would seem to emphasise an unusual disconnect between the theology and traditions of the Nestorian church, and a people who had continued to profess and maintain them through centuries of ever-increasing ignorance. Indeed, 'few could distinguish the particular points on which they differed from other Christians' and 'fewer still were able to give a reason for the faith which they professed'.¹¹ Such had been the inefficiency of its clergy; such was the general ignorance of the wider community, that the bewildering preservation of this distinct body of professing Christians was assumed to have had less to do with a thriving ecclesiastical tradition or intellectual energy, than with a culture of rites, oral tradition and 'elaborate' rituals which had defined this community since Late Antiquity.¹²

Survival had evidently come at the cost of this community's once prodigious ecclesiastical and intellectual vigour, yet to use the analogy of a husk or a shell; a culture of rites and traditions was assumed to have nevertheless preserved both a handful of Oriental Christians and the fragile kernel of an ancient Oriental Church. Corruptions may have crept past its nurturing protection, and the passing of time might have caused the delicate and more complex aspects of its intellectual heritage to steadily perish, but Layard implied: there are 'no sects in the East and few in the West which can boast of such purity in their faith'.¹³ Badger's detailed and valuable study sought to study them to understand and record the 19th Century face of a Christian creed which had seemed remarkably untouched by the interference of the Church of Rome, but if this isolated Christian community; its rites and its rituals were indeed antique, then what might these 19th century patterns of Christian religiosity tell us about the more ancient identity of this distinct and Oriental church? The scope of this study's enquiry intends to illuminate one aspect of this 'primitive' culture of rights and rituals in particular; a pattern of Nestorian religious behaviour all but ignored or at least dismissed by the memoirs of Victorian explorers, as little more than the unfortunate and unsavoury expressions of the least enlightened. Indeed, just as missionaries and writers like Badger and Bird, Grant and Layard began publishing their romanticised memories of a primitive Christian Orient, a variety of the manuscripts

¹⁰ 'not a woman could read, and in the whole Nestorian region they were absolutely illiterate with the exception of the Patriarch's sister and two or three nuns', *Ibid*, p.61

¹¹ Badger, (1852), II, p.27

¹² Badger, (1852), I, p.63

¹³ Layard, (1867), p.184

many had brought with them, started to contribute to an understanding of the ‘antique’ patterns of Nestorian religious behaviour. Some alluded to formal aspects of the Church; including references to its liturgy, the principles of its theology and a variety of rich accounts of the lives of those who furnished its hagiography. But, amongst these literary traces of Nestorian Orthodoxy, were the literary traditions not only of a far more colourful but generally more complex pattern of religious belief and behaviour.¹⁴ Collected and composed within small compendiums, these manuscripts from the environs North of Mosul described a frightening and fundamental reality: an ancient and well-documented Mesopotamian belief, that humans shared their world not only with visible and familiar expressions of creation but with a multitude of almost unfathomable and powerful supernatural entities. Consisting of various angels, myriads of spirits and entire hordes of evil demonic counterparts, these inexhaustible legions of supernatural beings not only inhabited this remote and rugged world of mountain peaks but exerted a powerful potential within it, often with important repercussions for the daily lives of their vulnerable and unsuspecting human neighbours.¹⁵ The whim of a malevolent demon was considered sufficient to afflict a variety of the otherwise inexplicable and insufferable misfortunes, from illness and infertility, to the distressing and unexpected outcomes which arise in one’s personal and business affairs, whilst any one of a huge number of God’s angels might potentially bestow all kinds of unexpected blessings and divine favour. It was this dynamic of exchange between the material and supernatural worlds, between man and his afflictions and the supernatural inclination to inflict them, which many of these manuscripts sought to ritually negotiate and artificially manipulate, to allay and to counteract, but also to invite with either benevolent or rather more malevolent intent.¹⁶ But to what extent were these patterns of religious behaviour; practised until as late

14 By ‘colourful’ and ‘complex’, I have tried to avoid labelling them as ‘Unorthodox’ or even ‘less orthodox’ for not only are these terms culturally self-serving, but one cannot necessarily be certain of the extent to which these patterns of religious behaviour were indicative of deviant practices or part of an accepted religiosity. For Hunter’s description of these practices as ‘less Orthodox’, see E. Hunter, ‘Saints in Syriac Anathemas: A Form-Critical Analysis of Role’, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 32:1, (1987), p.83.

15 Nine manuscripts and Codices are available to the scholar at present, including: Mingana MSS Syr. 316, 583 (Selly Oak Library); British Library MS Or. 6673 (British Library); Sachau MS 95 (Staatsbibliothek, Berlin); Sachau MS Oct. 553 (Staatsbibliothek, Berlin); Cambridge MS Add. 3086 (University Library), Harvard MD Syr. 159 (Houghton Library, Harvard College).

16 It is perhaps with an understanding of the active verb (‘asr) ‘ܐܫܪ’, so frequently articulated by the authors of these texts that one might begin to interpret this aspect of Nestorian religious behaviour, preserved in the mountains of Kurdistan. Indeed, in a world where the problems of disease, inexplicable misfortune and even the mundane frustrations like the stubbornness of an unruly cow were understood according to the demonic inclination to cause mischief and misery, these manuscripts sought to offer an equally potent supernatural solution, one which contractually bound (ܐܫܪ) but also physically incarcerated the malevolent and malicious entity with the terms of its efficacious utterances. As the modern day contract binds the signees to the terms which have been agreed and stipulated, the incantation of these texts demanded that the identified demon or malignant spirit comply with the will of its author, albeit according to the threat of potential reprisal rather than the written agreement of the offending entity. In much the same way as authority of the law and the promise of reprisal ensures that each signee honours the terms of a modern contract, so the divine power of a variety of angels, archangels and on occasion even God himself, ensured the efficacy of these incantations against

as the Nineteenth-Century, part of the fabric of rites and rituals assumed to have defined this Christian community since Late Antiquity?¹⁷ To what extent were these codices of written recipes for ritual incantation, indicative of an ecclesiastical dialogue with the divine and the demon, which had extended throughout the centuries?¹⁸

The questions alluded to in this preface are significant echoes of those similarly posed by Sir Herman Gollancz and his enquiry of three Syriac codices, known collectively in their 1913 publication as ‘The Book of Protection’. Indeed, in many ways the genesis of this investigation; these codices had all alluded to the premise of a similar dynamic of interaction between ‘men’ and the ‘supernatural’, all had contained a selection of varying ritual recipes with which to command the attention of the divine or to contractually bind those demonic entities synonymous with a variety of human maladies, yet for Gollancz, the true value of these texts and indeed the premise of his enquiry, was to be discerned not just from the ideas they articulated but from the language in which those ideas had been couched. To use the words of one contemporary review, ‘every kind of literature has, as it were, a language of its own; none so pronounced as that of charms and conjurations, for very old material is preserved with great tenacity, and corruptions will be transmitted from generation to generation...the more barbarous the words, the more efficacious they are deemed to

the invisible forces of adversity, all of whom are called upon to enforce cosmological justice, should the demon or malignant spirit in question be inclined or tempted to transgress. It was an expedient solution- one which assumed that any human being, albeit one with the knowledge of divine names and celestial words of power might fight back against the supernatural cause of any adversity by commanding the culprit to stop. Within their incantations we find words believed to have been spoken by God as part of the act of creation, as well as divine names which, as formal representations of the divinity on earth, were assumed to offer the practitioner an earthly manifestation of its power. These words held much more than simple, worldly semantic meaning. These words could do things, for they were earthly articulations of divinity. Recite them correctly, as so many of these incantations do, and one might wield the divine power with which they were imbued, ensuring a harmonious and benevolent world order and with it, the elimination of all demonic woes. For further reading on the assumption of the innate power of words, especially those of the deity, see S. J. Tambiah, *Culture, Thought and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1985). Tambiah implies that the assumption can be found underlying a number of biblical texts, including Psalms 33:6-9 and Ecclesiastes 43:5, but also and more importantly the creation story of Genesis. This biblical text above all others, implied to ancient readers that speech could create literal reality, and it is within these Christian incantation texts that we can begin to discern something of the pragmatic application of the deities words for human application. For further reading on the translation of the term ܕܡܢܐ within this context, see M. Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009), where Sokoloff translates this synonymous of incantatory terms to denote not only contractual obligation, but physical incarceration and even excommunication from the vulnerable.

17 Hunter's study of these manuscripts suggests that the colophons of these compendiums hint at the very late date of their composition, between C. 1777 and 1817 C.E., alluding to a pattern of Nestorian ritual which had shaped Nestorian Christianity until relatively recent times. See. Hunter, (1987), 83-104.

18 Budge would suggest that the authors of these charms were certainly Christian and that it was quite possible that they were priests or officer of the Nestorian Church to whom men made application for bans or spells and incantatory prayers, and formulae of blessing to help them spiritually and physically. More recently, Hunter has suggested that the supplicatory nature of the charms, as well as the profound knowledge of those legends of the saints and holy writ all hint at the ecclesiastical contexts within which these charms were produced, See. E. A. Wallis Budge, ‘Syriac Amulets’ in *Amulets and Talismans* (New York: University Books, 1961), p.272. & E. C. Hunter, ‘Saints in Syriac Anathemas’ in *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 32:1 (1987), 83-104. The copyists of manuscripts ‘British Library MS Or. 6673’ and ‘Codex B’ claim to have been sons of priests (ܕܡܢܐ ܕܡܢܐ), whilst the copyist of ‘Mingana MSS Syr. 316’ states that he was a deacon (ܕܡܢܐ ܕܡܢܐ), perhaps implying that this was a pattern of behaviour circulating amongst even the higher reaches of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

be'.¹⁹ As a consequence of the sanctity ascribed to the incantation, and the belief that its efficacy depended upon the fixed wording of its formula, these manuscripts and the ritual incantations to which they refer, were understood by Gollancz to have preserved an 'archaic' language through which a more ancient pattern of Nestorian religious behaviour had found its practical expression.²⁰ Indeed, all three codices were evidently of relatively recent composition, though to Gollancz and Gaster, these manuscripts were assumed to allude to the ritualised mechanics a religious praxis far older than the 17th-19th Century mediums upon which they'd been preserved:

'It is evident that demonology has, to a certain extent, survived through many centuries with very little change, and that it has even found shelter in the cell of the monk. The only change which has taken place in those which are of a very ancient origin, is the substitution of the Christian element, such as Christ, the Apostles, and saints for the ancient Gods, who were appealed to for protection against the old shiddim'.²¹

The sentiment of this conjecture was only espoused further by the comments of J. A. Montgomery, author of the 1913 publication 'Aramaic Incantation texts from Nippur', who assumed that he'd identified aspects of resonance between the inscriptions of those Forty, Late Antique, earthen-ware Bowls discovered in the excavations of Nippur, and Gollancz's relatively more recent Syriac codices.²² Both, he assumed, had alluded to similar belief in the pervasive supernatural presence within the affairs of man; both had prescribed a practical and ritualised methodology for preventing or orchestrating its impact, and while the considerable disparity between the dates of these sources had contributed to a variety of nuances- notably the emphasis of those more recent charms upon descriptions of biblical and hagiographical legend, and the evocation of saintly names in place of the largely Jewish angelic names evoked within the older incantations of Nippur- to Montgomery, these Syriac codices were nevertheless:

¹⁹ Gollancz, H. 'The Book of Protection. Being a Collection of Charms' (Review) by: M. Gaster, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 45 (1913), p.453

²⁰ Gollancz, (1897), p.78.

²¹ *ibid*

²² Montgomery would date these earthen ware Bowls to c. 5th-8th Centuries C.E. See J. A., Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Museum Press, 1903), pp.102-105 [102-103].

‘the direct heir of the earlier incantations of the Mesopotamian Valley, familiar to us in the bowl texts of the earliest Christian centuries, and going back to the Babylonian magical texts. Jewish scholars will recognise many points of contact with charms still current in Jewish households’.²³

Suggestions of comparability and even direct descentance between the codices of a relatively recent Christian culture of charms and talismans in the mountains of Kurdistan, and the adjuration incantation devices uncovered amongst the ancient ruins of Nippur, pose a variety of interesting questions, and not only about the antiquity of this particular pattern of Nestorian ritual. John Punnet Peters, chief excavator of the 1888/1889 archaeological expedition which had uncovered those Late Antique Earthen-ware incantations of Nippur, would describe how most had been found within the ruins of a distinctly Jewish settlement indeed, ‘the whole surface of one hill was covered with a Jewish settlement, and in almost every house we found one, or more, Jewish incantation bowls’.²⁴ These areas of Jewish settlement had almost been identifiable simply through the unique presence of these unusual artefacts, most of which were found to contain what he would describe as the ‘Jewish Aramaic’ script.²⁵ Montgomery’s texts were not only far older than the Nineteenth-Century Christian charms published by Gollancz; they would also seem to have been a predominantly Jewish phenomenon. That Montgomery should have discerned aspects of comparability between these seemingly unlikely sources begs us to question not only the extent to which these relatively recent Christian incantation charms are indicative of far older patterns of Nestorian religious behaviour, but to what extent do they reveal something of the ancient relationship and interaction between Mesopotamia’s various Jewish and Christian communities.

Resonance between Nestorian rituals and the incantations of Late Antique Nippur has been noted and discussed by a number of scholars since Montgomery; including Budge and Gaster and more recently Shaked, Naveh and Hunter, yet I would propose that few have sought to engage with the obvious questions and problems which then arise from their suggestion of comparison, namely: ‘how does one begin to

23 J. A. Montgomery, *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 4: 3 (1914), p.493

24 J. P. Peters, *Nippur, or Explorations and Adventures on the Euphrates. The Narrative of the University of Pennsylvania Expedition to the Babylonia in the years 1888-1890*, 2 vols. (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, New York and London, 1897). P. 182

25 Montgomery would refer to it as the ‘Rabbinic Dialect’, comparable to that found in another great and contemporary textual source produced by the Jewish communities of Mesopotamia- the Babylonian Talmud. He describes how this name was a convenient handle for distinguishing the dialect of the majority of these sources, from the few written in Syriac Aramaic and Arabic. See Montgomery (1903), p.26.

explain the relationship of sources divided not only by centuries but by communal boundaries’?²⁶ The problem of qualifying the appearance of their comparability is only further added to when we consider that not a single Nestorian Charm or amulet, whether from private collections or in public Libraries, would seem to date from before the 18th Century. If these relatively recent Christian charms and talismans did indeed maintain the threads of a tradition which had extended from Late Antiquity, as so many have argued, then where are those Christian charms and talismans written within the intermittent centuries which divide these sources?²⁷ In light of the apparent obstacle of their absence, one might assume that any suggestion of the relationship between these sources is, if not impossible, then at least premature, until such times as older manuscripts might begin to contribute to the story of these Mesopotamian charms. Here in this thesis, I argue that this is precisely the conclusion which need not be drawn. Despite the dearth of earlier textual evidence, this study intends to show how the beliefs and mentality which had defined these practices of incantation had permeated the beliefs and identity of the Mesopotamian Church, and how those nineteenth-century charms published by Gollancz were remaining vestiges not only of an ancient dialogue between the Christian and the demon, but of a dialogue between the Christian and Jewish communities of Mesopotamia which had extended throughout the centuries.

These enigmatic and seemingly self-effacing textual traditions may offer the historian precious little in terms of understanding their socio-historical trajectory and milieu, but here I propose that we might trace some of its contours by juxtaposing some analogous literary materials from a related tradition. If, as we are told, the composition of these albeit relatively recent Syriac codices ought to be dated to sometime in the latter centuries of the Late Antique period, then it seems sensible to me to look in the same chronological and geographical neighbourhood for points of

26 Hunter would suggest that whilst Ms. Syr. 3086. is of relatively recent production, the ‘action’ of these charms draws attention to the origins of the genres in the ancient heritage of magical literature, by linking them with pagan texts of Greco-Roman provenance, as well as those incantation Bowl texts from Mesopotamia. Naveh and Shaked’s study would draw upon those manuscripts published by Gollancz not only as a relevant sources for comparison, but at times to look at Gollancz’s translation/interpretation of certain words to confirm the meaning of words from those much older, Jewish and Christian incantations with which they worked. See. Hunter, ‘Genres of Syriac Amulets: A Study of Cambridge Ms. Syr. 3086’, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 236 (1991), pp.355-368 and Naveh & Shaked, (1993).

27 In his discussion of the surprising lack of Nestorian manuscripts more generally, Grant would assume that in a community where only a few ecclesiastics could read, there must surely have been little encouragement to multiply the textual traditions by the slow process of transcribing, especially when such sources were likely to be lost on the perishing scrolls of parchment. What’s more, Grant would suggest that those manuscripts which had survived were often victim to damage and destruction, notably those ancient manuscripts of the Patriarch, which Grant suggests had been destroyed by water some sixty years prior to his visit, whilst crossing the river Zab. Badger echoes Grant’s description of the plight of the manuscripts and textual traditions of the communities he encountered, suggesting that the Manuscripts of the Convent of Rabban Hormizd had been torn in pieces or burned with fire by the men of the Kurdish Pasha’s, whilst those at Deir Zaaferan were found covered with dust and generally disregarded. For further reading, see Grant, (1841) p.121 & Badger, (1852) p.102 and 51.

comparison. Indeed, it is when we begin to look beyond the remains and manuscripts of charms and talismans and begin to navigate through the countless textual traditions which surround the 'Lives' of those Christian and rabbinic Holy Men of Late Antiquity, that we are acquainted with a literature not only furnished with the concepts of ritual adjuration, but all too frequently articulated according to the same vocabulary. Their narratives were frequently shaped by a consistent theme, describing how a perfect devotion to the ascetic principles taught by Christ or through one's search for the meaning of 'the law' and a life in pursuit of its teaching, brought Christian and rabbinic Holy men into spiritual proximity with the 'the father'- expressed here both in terms of cognitive insight and celestial apotheosis. Yet, personal sacrifice and an assumed subsequent spiritual purity would seem to have bought these Holy Men much more than an understanding and affinity with the divine and celestial realm. Indeed, to be proximate to the divine through the endeavour of ascetic devotion; was invariably to be made familiar with the power of its potential, which in the contexts of these narratives, was assumed to have been articulated through the occasional and sometimes spectacular 'coup de theatre'.²⁸ Through a knowledge of Divine names and a ritual rehearsal of other divine utterances, Christian Holy men would negotiate miracles of exorcism and divine blessings in abundance, whilst a dedication to 'the law' had furnished rabbis like R. Nehunya b. Haqanah, R. Ishmael and R. Akiba with a knowledge of the adjurations, seals and celestial names with which to 'ascend on high' and command the divine. In the unfortunate absence of more direct evidence, I am convinced that it's by exploring these literary traditions; their suggestion of the privileged position of the pious and the particular way in which some were assumed to have made their needs known in heaven by means of elaborate ritual performance, that we might begin to better understand how ritual practices divided by centuries could possibly have bared a meaningful resemblance.²⁹

Here, this enquiry will draw upon a range of disparate monastic and mystic sources, both Jewish and Christian, from the earliest generations of documentary and literary evidence of Jewish and Christian ascetic ideals through to the later centuries of the Late Antique period. Its discussion and choice of sources has by no means aimed for

²⁸ See P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982) p.105

²⁹ Marco Moriggi has recently discussed a similar line of thought in M. Moriggi, 'And the Impure and Abominable priests fled for help to the Names of the Devils' in *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies*, 19:2 (2016), pp.371-384. Drawing upon a Memra likely to have been authored by Ishaq of Antioch (5th Century C.E), Moriggi illustrates how evidence of magical ritual practices outlined by the text, can also be found in contemporary Syriac Incantation bowls, which he also argues then found their way into the kind of nineteenth-century Syriac Christian amulets published by Gollancz. By looking beyond the resonances of Late Antique incantation text and more contemporary Christian charms, and instead to the kinds of Late Antique ecclesiastical literature exemplified by hagiography and theological Memra, Moriggi argues that we might begin to understand the evolution and meaning of those resonances, and what role Christian clergy and the monastic environment played in the process of its transmission.

comprehensiveness, indeed there are, to be sure, both relevant texts and aspects of discussion not treated here, either at all or in the detail that a given reader might prefer. I have drawn sparingly and not systematically, generally when aspects of late antique narrative are relatable intertextually or conceptually to the patterns of nineteenth-century Christian ritual alluded to by Gollancz's Syriac codices. A more systematic investigation of these various hagiographical and Hekhalot narratives on their own terms, and in all their complexity, might well reward the researcher. It may even take the investigations begun here in new and exciting directions, but this is by no means the objective of this enquiry or even the desire of its author. This, of course, is not to say that my selection of texts has been arbitrary, but rather based upon their interconnectedness; both inter-textual and thematic. Neither is it a confession of this enquiry's rudimentary parameters, but instead an open and frank recognition of the incredible complexity of the subject which it tries, and perhaps only begins to comprehend and fully articulate. This is an enquiry which attempts to build bridges; between sources which other scholars, having discerned their connection, have so far largely failed to fully articulate. It does so with full consideration of the almost intangible nature of the relationships it tries to discuss, and an over-bearing sense of the methodological unorthodoxy of seeking to do so. Lacking the aid of an accompanying scholastic framework, and conscious of the complexity of those things which scholastic enquiry attempts to delineate, this study represents a frustratingly tentative and therefore admittedly limited foray in the hope of offering cautious, but therefore also meaningful conclusions: unravelling and discerning, but also analysing the common threads of ideas, woven deeply into the fabric of sources divided not only by centuries, but by communal boundaries, and even literary genre. By exploring Late Antique literary assumptions of the efficacy of ritual adjuration, this study contemplates whether we are better positioned to understand the remaining textual fragments of a nineteenth-century Christian ritual practice, and indeed, whether a nineteenth-century ritual practice in turn truly reflects upon a tradition which had extended throughout the centuries.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Bradley Barnes declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

[Title of thesis] Contextualising Syriac Anathema: Bridging the Gap between
Suggestions of Comparison in Late Antique and Nineteenth Century Christian Ritual
Practice

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signed:

Date: 10/01/2017

Acknowledgements

In many ways, undertaking this journey of research has felt uncomfortably close to the ascetic endeavours and intellectual aspirations of those various holy men it has sought to discuss. These holy men had faced an almost insurmountable journey; one of gradual ascent towards an understanding of divine truths, defined by ascetic commitment and an almost total withdrawal from the world. I confess that I have not pursued 'celestial truths' in this thesis, nor sadly have I achieved anything close to the implied potential of having done so. But understanding has often demanded a similar path of almost monkish withdrawal, and dare I say, a certain selfishness, so I would like to thank all who have supported my journey (my 'ܠܒܝܐ') and tolerated my well-attested laments along the way.

First and foremost, my profound gratitude must go to my primary advisor Dr Dan Levene for his continuous support and constant guidance around the various obstacles which have lined the way towards understanding. His patience, motivation and immense understanding have at times bordered on the saintly; while his often uplifting sense of humour has always mercifully maintained a sense of the demonic. I thank you for your ever-generous allocation of time to my development as both a scholar and human being, for our many talks over coffee, for our many laughs and many debates over the minutiae of Late Antiquity. Most of all, I thank you for schooling me in the complexities of the Syriac Language, without which, I would have been unable to penetrate even the most limited understanding of Late Antique Mesopotamia. I could not have imagined having a better advisor, mentor and friend. Deepest gratitude for the equally saintly guidance of my secondary supervisor Dr Helen Spurling, whose ever-patient mentoring has not only profoundly influenced my research but given me an insight into just how devoted a person can be to the promotion of understanding. Many, many thanks for your tolerance of my foibles, your unceasing kindness, and for the time devoted to providing me with the tools to understand. My thesis would never have taken shape nor reached completion without the unwavering guidance of you both.

Special thanks must also be given for the invaluable support I have received from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, whose kind financial support allowed me to pursue understanding in a way which would otherwise have been impossible. My deepest gratitude. I am also very grateful to the University of Southampton and the

Parkes Institute, for its teaching and other bursaries, and for its continued support of Jewish Studies in a time of severe financial restraint.

I do not have an adequate way to express my appreciation to the dozens of others who have helped me along the way. Deepest thanks to friends but more importantly to family, to Mum and to Dad, who have provided steady and unwavering support in what have undoubtedly been the most trying times. You too have shown the kindness, the love, and the patience of saints. You hold a special place in my heart, and I will always be grateful to you for allowing me to follow my passion. Dan, Helen, Mum, Dad and friends, you made my dreams possible and helped them come true. Thank you.

Abbreviations

b. = Babylonian Talmud

t. = Tosefta

j. = Jerusalem Talmud

Tractates of Mishnah, Tosefta and Talmud

A.Z. Azodah Zara

Ber. Berakot

Er. Erubin

Hag. Hagigah

Kid. Kidushin

Meg. Megillah

Men. Menahot

Ned. Nedarim

Pes. Pesahim

R. H. Rosh Hashana

San h. Sanhedrin

Sot. Sotah

Yoma Yoma

Zeb. Zebahim

NT. New Testament

Mt. Mathew

Mk. Mark

Lk. Luke

Jn. John

BoS Book of Steps

Introduction

This study focuses on the particular way in which some were assumed within the literature of Late Antique Jewish and Christian authors, to have communicated the needs, desires, and wishes of human beings to the denizens of the celestial realm; how the especially pious had sought to negotiate terrestrial intervention of the divine through the currency of their spiritual esteem, and perhaps more importantly, through the articulation of prescribed words and supplicatory gestures. Their intervention was imagined to have navigated the entire gamut of humanity various concerns, from the intimate details of ordinary human existence, to the desire for the heavenly knowledge which brought salvation. Women as much as men- young as well as old- sought the celestial understanding that only the angels knew. They requested healing and protection from the grave, from illness and other interventions of the demonic. They asked for good fortune in business, for healthy children, and for alleviation from the variety of afflictions which affect the condition of mankind, and like their rather more well-documented neighbours in Egypt in Palestine, they sought it not only through an understanding of the ascetic's supplication, but on account of his knowledge of the elaborate formulations and celestial names which actively called upon and ritually adjured the servants of God's celestial realm.

The enquiry of this thesis shall take us first to the adjurational techniques of those individuals described by the early Jewish mystical treatises of the 'Hekhalot' and Ma'aseh Merkavah: analysing their ritualised acts through the lens of theories of performative language and action, so as to demonstrate how the words of adjuration and performance of accompanying actions, notably ascetic preparations, were assumed to work together to empower the adjurer with the potential of celestial beings. These textual traditions, of which these adjurations were only a small part, contain a rich combination of mystical, cosmological, and ritual elements that would relate God, a

celestial hierarchy and human beings to one another in complex and variable ways. They include instructions for the ascetically inclined to ascend to the seven heavenly palaces of the celestial realm where they can participate in the liturgy of the angels; numerous hymns that praise God and great angels through the constant repetition of particular and powerful phrases; a portrayal of Metatron's utterance of the Divine name as the climax of the angelic liturgy; but also and perhaps more importantly, the ascender's ritualised use of those names within seals or inscribed amulets of protection to empower his ascent and authorise his safe and successful navigation of the celestial realm.

Here, the scope of my enquiry into the Hekhalot and the motif of ritualised adjurational potential, shall orientate around three foci in particular: firstly, the suggestion of ascetic preparation surpassing rabbinic halakha as an integral and crucial aspect of celestial understanding and adjurational knowledge, but also secondly and perhaps more importantly, the suggestion of the extent and potential of that knowledge both within the celestial realm, and beyond it. Where some of the Hekhalot narratives are perhaps inclined to describe angelic adjuration as an integral but altogether utilitarian component in facilitating the ultimate goal of divine supplication, others would consider the knowledge and potential of adjuration as the impetus and motivation of an ascetic devotee's ascent on high. With the power of knowing adjurational commands and other divine secrets, a number of the Hekhalot's discourses would assume how the ascendeer had acquired not only the potential to bypass the barriers which had hitherto prevented human access to the celestial realm, but the technical know-how with which to command as much as conciliate the divine towards action on earth.

To borrow a phrase from Rebecca Lesses, the adjurations described by the Hekhalot literature were not only the means of spiritual emancipation and enlightenment, but rather expressed a specifically performative character; one which translated beyond the merely theoretical and imaginative potential of literature and emphasised the potential of actual practice. It is for the reason that the third and final foci of our examination of the Hekhalot shall attempt to discern the place of these performative adjurations within a larger complex of ritual practices widespread in Late Antiquity; to question the significance of its resonance but also the place of the wider Hekhalot genre therefore, within the wider spiritual ecology of Late Antique Mesopotamia. Indeed, as Gruenwald, Elior, Schafer and others have noted, both the texts of heavenly ascent and the adjurations of angels use techniques which resonate

with those appearing in Late Antique ‘Incantation bowls’, metal amulets and Geniza fragments; including the adjuration of angels by their names and by the names of God, use of inscribed seals both for protection and as passwords, repetition of names and the use of prayer formulas. The adjurations of angels call for ascetic preparations and repeated recitations of adjuration formula, so as to experience a vision of God; so as to participate in the angelic liturgy; to receive the assurance of God’s love for Israel; revelations from angels and mystical transformation. But of course, the texts also mention other rewards beyond the goals of a transcendent mysticism, based upon the day-to-day personal and social needs of individuals in Late Antique Jewish society. As Meyer and Smith would note in their collection of similar Coptic and Greek ‘magical’ texts, ‘we have transcendent mysticism and chthonic howling, but telling them apart is sometimes difficult; the more closely these texts are actually read, the harder it is to maintain any distinction between displays of piety and sorcery’.³⁰ This statement holds true for our examination of the Hekhalot narratives as well. Here, we shall explore the Hekhalot texts to discern the suggestion of technique and goals; how practices of ritual power were assumed to obtain both the goals of transcendent mysticism and more material gain, and exist therefore on a continuum of ritual practices for various ends. Here, the intent is not to discredit or indeed to distinguish or define the pursuits of ‘piety’ from those of ‘sorcery’; mystical ascent into the celestial realm from terrestrial exploits of the same adjurational means, but rather to acknowledge the various methods and goals of those spiritual pursuits in the Hekhalot as part and parcel of the same complex image of Late Antique spirituality.³¹

To a certain extent the drive of this initial study of the Hekhalot is founded upon the extensive precedent of scholars such as Gershom Scholem and Ithmar Gruenwald, who considered the adjurations of the Hekhalot literature within the overarching framework of ‘magic’ or ‘theurgy’. My analysis draws upon the work of those theorists but also upon the studies of countless others, including Rebecca Lesses and Peter Schafer, so as to explore the Hekhalot’s adjurations not as expressions of ‘magic’ or ‘religion’ but as ritual performances ‘to gain power’. Drawing upon their seemingly common assumption of the efficacy of the word, the performative use of language and the importance of ritual action; this approach produces the means for

³⁰ *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, ed. by M. Meyer and R. Smith (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), p.2.

³¹ As P. Schafer writes: ‘Theology and magic should not be played off against each other’, see P. Schafer, ‘Engel und Menschen in der Hekhalot-Literatur’ in *Hekhalot Studien* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), pp.250-276 [276]. Also see Morton Smith’s comments, which suggest that Hekhalot stories of celestial apotheosis and adjurational command were neither imaginative nor even theoretical, but reflections of actual ritual practice. See, M. Smith, ‘Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati’, in A. Altmann (ed.), *Biblical and Other Studies* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p.154

analysing the Hekhalot adjurations as ritual actions performed within a matrix of ritual practice in Late Antiquity, and permits an understanding of how those who framed the Hekhalot adjurations put their mark on practices of adjuration widespread within the Late Antique Mesopotamian religious environment.

Jews, but also Christians held in common many ideas concerning the ascending levels of piety, the practical potential of ascetic dedication and the possibility for apotheosis. Contemporary Christian accounts of the ascetic devotee would equally describe instances of cosmological exchange between pious reverence and divine gnosis, which were in turn later framed according to common structures of terrestrial adjuration and divine intercession. In the second chapter of this thesis, having provided something of the framework for understanding the nature and place of adjuration within the spiritual ecology of Late Antique Mesopotamia through the established enquiry of the Hekhalot, attention is directed towards an enquiry of contemporary Christian hagiography and its shared assumptions of adjurational potential, and ritualised action. Here, I shall explore how a consciousness of ‘the fine sounds of spiritual intelligences’ and ‘communion with the spiritual hierarchies’, to use the phrases of one Christian mystical text, furnished the Christian ascetic like the ‘Yored Merkavah’ with a celestial vocabulary which, if remembered and enunciated correctly, was equally assumed to have enabled the initiate to adjure and orchestrate the power of an entire celestial hierarchy. With this knowledge of heavenly gnosis and its transformation into more earthly forms of prayer ritual, the Yored Merkavah sought to adjure the Sar-Torah to acquire a perfect memory of Torah, to be saved from all kinds of tribulations and witchcraft, and even to be exempted ‘from the judgement of Gehinnom’, whilst a whole variety of possibilities were often similarly attributed to the saint’s ritual murmurings of divine epithets and efficacious formulae. It’s this Christian association between ascetic piety, mystical encounter, knowledge of the esoteric and its practical consequences, which I hope to explore over two parts in this thesis; firstly by exploring the theological basis of Christian preconceptions of piety’s power and the potential of the esoteric in Late Antique Mesopotamia. It is then by exploring precisely how that celestial gnosis was used and more precisely, how it was perceived to have been made manifest at the hands of the holy man through a complex of ritual and adjurational practice, that this study also considers the possible wider implications of the ideas and understanding, underlying these texts.

A number of historians have attempted to exploit saints ‘Lives’ for what they reveal about the historical and mainly political contexts in which they were produced,

including the early but innovative studies of Van der Essen, who concluded that hagiographical traditions depicting the 'Lives' of holy Men reflected not only political and sociological realities, but the ideas and literary conventions of the age in which they flourished.³² His suggestion was, of course, a logical one. Indeed it would be difficult to believe that the various literary motifs and rhetorical stratagems employed to describe the glory of Mesopotamia's Late Antique Holy Men had uniquely evolved in isolation. Yet the suggestion causes us to question precisely what ideas and literary conventions the hagiographers were reflecting when they wrote about the enhanced ideas of piety's potential, and the ritualised means through which it could supposedly be exercised on cue. To adopt the logic of Van der Essen's suggestion, the catalogue of Late Antique Mesopotamian hagiographies and the various motifs which defined them, including the fundamental premise of piety and the acquisition of gnosis, and the potential of that gnosis when exercised through adjuration, were not entirely native to the imaginations of Christian hagiographers, but were rather reflections of and responses to more popular patterns of Late Antique Mesopotamian spirituality. Mesopotamia's Christian hagiographers then, according to this line of thinking, were not only in immediate contact with the same spiritual environment which had helped shape the kinds of Late Antique Mesopotamian incantation texts, discovered and published by Montgomery. Their texts were also responding to the same sorts of stimuli which had shaped the incantation text's particular pattern of spirituality, and the implicit emphasis of this thesis is to try and understand whether this shared cultural environment might perhaps begin to shed some light, not only upon the particular nature of the hagiographical motifs and themes under examination in this chapter, but also rather interestingly, upon the possible historical precedent of the thoughts and beliefs of those 19th century incantation texts, described and published by Gollancz.

Suggestions of parallels between literatures raise several vexing questions, not least among which concern the value and meaning which might be attributed to their correspondence. In his 1961 critique of biblical scholarship, S. Sandmel described how biblical scholars had been under the influence of an academic disease which he would

32 L. Van der Essen, *Etude Critique et Littéraire sur les Vitae des Saints Mérovingiens de l'ancienne Belgique* (Louvain, 1907), p. xi. On this, Peter Brown remarks 'just as the lives of saints have been quarried by the social historian for evidence of the life of the man on the street, so have they been used, in this past century, as a sort of bathyscope, that enables the historian to penetrate into what he regards as hitherto untouched depths of popular superstition'. See P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy man', p.81. For further reading, one immediately thinks of N. H. Baynes, 'The Thought World of East Rome', *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London: Athlone Press, 1955) and more recently the numerous works of Peter Brown, including P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001).

refer to as ‘parallelomania’; a crippling condition, whose primary symptom was an ‘excessive piling up’ of assumed literary parallels between New Testament texts and more ancient, Jewish sources.³³ They had overemphasised and sometimes falsely proclaimed their similarities, supposing some direct relationship between the two; though Sandmel knew that ‘parallelomania’ was not a disease suffered by New Testament scholars alone. Sandmel himself would hint at its wider implications of his critique not only for biblical scholarship, but for more general scholastic method, and it is for this reason that this chapter attempts to avoid any suggestion of direct textual comparison.³⁴ Not one of the texts examined here are the same, either in terms of the physical form which those texts take, or in terms of the rich and varied motifs, woven into the literary fabric of each textual tradition. Nowhere are we able to identify examples of direct comparison and nowhere are we able to assume relationships of literary dependency, but whilst it is, therefore, important to emphasise the flaws and dangers of ‘parallelomania’, this chapter does not propose to examine these texts in isolation, far from it.

Just as Sandmel identified the tendencies and inaccuracies of ‘parallelomania’, so scholars like J. J. M. Roberts and Halo would identify the flaws of the instinctive reaction of ‘parallelophobia’, a condition which they assumed inhibited the historian from identifying and exploring sites of useful comparison.³⁵ The goal of this study, just as it had been for Roberts’ and Halo’s exploration of the parallels between New Testament and contemporaneous Jewish sources, is not to find the key to unlocking every aspect of comparison. Rather its intent is to silhouette the motifs of the hagiographical texts, just as Roberts and Halo had with a selection of New Testament texts, against the background of their wider literary and cultural environment.³⁶ The various parallels of its literary motifs to the patterns discerned from Mesopotamia’s Late Antique incantation texts, is here assumed to have had less to do with the immediate contact of authors, then with their indirect association through a general cultural milieu. This does not allow us to presume that one text provides ‘background’ for another. It does, however, provide us with what Visotzky would refer to as an

33 S. Sandmel, ‘Parallelomania’ in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 81 (1962), pp.1-13. A less ‘psychiatric’ diagnosis had also been given by Cozijnsen, who speaks of ‘comparisonitis’. See B. Cozijnsen, ‘A Critical Contribution to the Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti: Jude and Hesiod’ in L.V. Rutgers (ed), *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), pp. 79-109

34 Cf. Sandmel, ‘Parallelomania’, p.1: ‘I shall not exhaust what might be said in all areas which members of this Society might be interested in, but confine myself to the areas of rabbinic literature and the gospels, Philo and Paul, and the Dead Sea Scrolls and the NT’.

35 J. J. M. Roberts, ‘The Ancient Near East Environment’ in D. Knight and G. Tucker (eds.), *The Hebrew Bible and its Modern Interpreters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp.89-96. For the ‘contextual method’ espoused by Halo, see W. W. Halo, *Biblical History in its Near Eastern Setting: The Contextual Method* (Oxford: Pickwick Press, 1980).

36 See W. W. Halo, ‘The Limits of Scepticism’, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 110:2 (1990), pp.187-199.

‘impressionist viewpoint’ of the era in question.³⁷ Visotzky suggests that the historian is like a Lepidopterist, requiring-in the interests of good method- that the butterfly be pinned down for proper study, yet observations must sometimes be made from a distance when the subject is not so easily captured. It isn’t exact scholarship, but it gives the impression of how to understand the subject in the broader field of its natural context. It is for this reason that Visotzky would refer to each text and its parallels as giving an impressionist viewpoint of the ideas and conventions of the age in question. The closer one gets to discern the finite detail of the picture we thought we were looking at, the more it turns into a series of nondescript dots. Step back from the various dots, and we are offered an ever larger and ever clearer picture of the parallels formed.

³⁷ See, B. Visotzky, *Fathers of the World: Essays in Rabbinic and Patristic Literatures* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995), p.8

2

Ascending and Adjuring:

Approaching and Negotiating the power of the Divine in the texts of the
Hekhalot

‘And what Mortal man is it, who is able to ascend on high, to ride on wheels, to descend below, to search out the inhabited world, to walk on the dry land, to gaze at His splendour, to dwell with his crown, to be transformed by His glory, to recite praise, to combine letters, to recite their names, to have a vision of what is above, to have a vision of what is below, to know the explanation of the living, and to see the vision of the dead to walk in rivers of fire, and to know the lightening? And who is able to explain it, and who is able to see it’?

Hekhalot Zutati, §§349-50

Who indeed? Who is this extraordinary individual, able to transcend the cosmological boundaries which had otherwise divided mankind from the presence of God since the moment of its primordial damnation? Who rides a divine chariot on high and knows the place of the dead below, who looks upon divinity directly and is thereby transformed into a creature resembling mankind’s original condition, and thereafter, exercises the power of this transformative gnosis on earth for the sake of those around him? Far from serving to emphasise the unequivocal sentiment of former scriptural hermeneutic, the author of this excerpt was evidently inclined to believe that somebody- perhaps even anybody- could, and even should: someone apparently unlike Moses, Isaiah or Ezekiel, whose visions of God and the celestial realm had been framed according to concepts of divine theophany rather than suggestions of apotheosis. This startling figure, whoever he might be, was the subject of a corpus of interconnected Hebrew texts known as the ‘Hekhalot’ and *Ma’aseh Merkavah*, and is, in fact, the focus

of this chapter's enquiry.³⁸ Indeed, this study intends to explore something of the way in which some among the Jewish communities of Late Antique Mesopotamia, had imagined that God could be experienced not just after death, nor eschatologically on the last day according to Christian concepts of final judgement, but immediately and as a consequence of engaging in the activities and behaviours supposedly reflected by stories of primordial ancestors and scriptural heroes. Though divine theophany, rather than apotheotic experiences of individual ascent, had shaped an understanding of both the nature and limitations of man's relationship with the divine throughout the biblical corpus, the rationale which had contributed to these scriptural paradigms would neither remain forever fixed, nor forever upheld by successive manifestations of unaltered textual tradition- in fact, quite the contrary.

Echoing the suggestions of Moshe Idel, perhaps one of the significant developments within the mentality of post-biblical Judaism was the growth of what he refers to as the 'apotheotic vector'- namely the potential role of the individual- within the general economy of Judaism.³⁹ Indeed, just as a nascent Christianity underwent change throughout the earliest centuries of its founding, Judaism, in turn, had quite naturally developed new ways of describing aspects of reality which would qualify- sometimes rather dramatically- former tenets of scriptural explication and doctrine. As such, Idel has implied that where motifs of ascent do occur, they do not reflect an unaltered imitation of the models found in canonical writings, but instead relate to intellectual developments and changing mentalities which would place emphasis on man's ability to not only transcend his mundane situation, but also penetrate the parameters and secrets of the divine realm. Those formerly revelatory texts, attributed to biblical characters like Moses, Isaiah and Ezekiel, were by no means ignored but rather recast retrospectively into the mould of developing theories of human

38 *Hekhal* is translated to mean 'palace' or sanctuary. The *Hekhalot* (הֶחָלוֹת) are a series of ever more holy cosmic shrine rooms which form part of the heavenly world; the *Hekhalot Mystic* passes through them on a long and perilous journey towards the divine throne room. *Merkavah* (מֵרְכָבָה) means 'chariot', and alludes to the divine chariot throne described in the first chapter of Ezekiel's visions. *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is the 'work of the chariot', and is the name which the corpus collectively known as 'Hekhalot' gives to speculation on the divine- throne world. It is perhaps important to note here, that the term *Merkabha* or 'chariot' is not used within the description of Ezekiel vision of the divine throne, but is rather referred to the 'throne of Glory' (כִּסֵּא הַכְבוֹד). The imagery is deeply rooted in the Hebrew biblical tradition. The term is derived from the book of 1 Chronicles, 28:18 where it refers to the 'chariot of the Cherubim' that carried the Ark of the Covenant in the holy of holies. In Isaiah 6, a central text to the mystical tradition of ascent and divine encounter in the Jewish tradition, the prophet encounters the enthroned deity, and the Seraphim that Isaiah sees above the throne evidently correspond to the Cherubim of 1 Chronicles.

39 M. Idel, *Ascensions of High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), p.25. It is important to note that the process of change between biblical and post-biblical models of ascent and encounter was by no means a unilateral development. Ascents on high took a variety of forms which, whilst perhaps contemporary, may nevertheless articulate entirely different characteristics. For further discussion on the modes of ascent described within the textual traditions of the inter-testimonial period, See Moshe Idel's qualification of former statements in M. Idel, *Ascensions of High in Jewish Mysticism*, pp.25-31, as well as M. Smith, 'Ascents to Heaven and the Beginning of Christianity', *Eranos Jahrbuch* 50 (1981), p.415.

apotheosis, with the characteristically enigmatic phrase: 'Enoch walked with God' (Gen 5:24) embellished and expanded upon in a number of the Hekhalot texts to describe what the Patriarch had seen and learned on an extended tour of the cosmos.⁴⁰ For the authors of these Hekhalot texts, celestial visions were no longer conceived of as something belonging to the past, or even as the exclusive preserve of biblical heroes. Nor indeed, were they mere revelations of the divine realities to which they pertain, but rather immediate and individual experiences of transcendence beyond those conventional boundaries which had otherwise defined all former concepts of human existence. Over the course of the following chapter, this enquiry intends to gain an insight into precisely what 'ascent' was perceived to entail, but also an appreciation for the evident concern of the characters of these texts, to understand and later teach others about the process of their ascent and into the celestial realm.

The literary motif of 'ascent' in Late Antique religious literature has received extensive and widespread scholastic consideration.⁴¹ Since the earlier work of Gershom Scholem, debate has focused on the possible Late Antique date of Hebrew texts in which ascent motifs appear to describe ascent, not just as an exegetical exercise but as a ritual practice.⁴² Indeed, Scholem believed that perhaps as early as the pre-Christian and Second Temple period, some Jews had not only told stories about ascent

40 In many ways, these texts were providing counter readings of the old scriptures, recomposing the stories through a new hermeneutic for a contemporary audience. This retelling of the biblical narratives is a natural function of communal memory and oral tradition, for further reading, see B. Zelizer, 'Reading the Past against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies' in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12 (1995), 228; M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). For further reading on the transmission and recomposition of Biblical narratives within the mystical tradition, see, A. Orlev, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition*. TSAG 107 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); Idem. *Jewish Interpretation and Transmission of Scripture* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), H. Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 41-69 & A. D. DeConick, 'What is Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism?' in A. D. DeConick (ed.) *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2006), 6-8.

41 An extensive array of contemporary consideration concerning 'ascent' in Jewish and other Late Antique religious texts, is offered within Moshe Idel's survey in M. Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2000), esp. pp.23-26. Few topics preoccupied Ioan P. Culianu as much as the ascent of the soul, as his three books dedicated to this issue are perhaps worth noting here specifically, see I. P. Culianu, *Psychnodia I: A survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Leiden: Brill, 1983); Idem., *Experiences de l'extase: Extase, ascension e recit visionaire de l'Hellenisme au Moyen Age* (Paris: Payot, 1984), and finally what he would refer to as his 'history of otherworldly journeys' Idem., *Out of this World: Otherworldly Journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* (Boulder, CO.: Shambhala Publications, 1991). One might also consult the various contributions of A. F. Segal, M. Himmelfarb and others in the edited work, *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys: Essays by Men and Women*, (ed. by) J. J. Collins and M. Fishbane (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1995). References to further works of those writers cited can be seen in M. Idel's aforementioned survey.

42 The 'Hekhalot' texts continue to confound scholars with their diverse and often hard-to-decipher manuscript evidence. Indeed, rejection of Scholem's early dating of the material in the Hekhalot continues to revolve around the status of the textual evidence available to the scholar. Peter Schafer, for example, questions whether the texts ever existed in 'original' editions, due largely to the sheer extent of variation found between various manuscripts. Rather than depicting these texts as a single original text, Schafer decided instead to present them in synoptic form, as individual units. This fluidity of tradition is assumed to be evidence of the impossibility of reconstructing Late Antique versions of the texts, hence it is unknown what, if anything, goes back to the first centuries, see Schafer, P., M. Schluter, and H. Von Mutius, *Synpose Zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1981). More recently, there has been resurgence in support of the position that these texts have sufficient coherence to be viewed as identifiable texts from the earliest centuries of the Late Antique period. Morray Jones is one such protagonist, offering an alternative reconstruction of the editing of the rabbinic texts that is more favourable to Scholem's thesis. See C. R. A. Morray Jones, 'Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic- Merkabha Tradition' in *Journal of Jewish Studies* 43(1992), pp.1-31

but had themselves attempted to attain and pursue the prerequisites of a heavenly vision- that 'ascent' was something which might be experienced rather than attributed to the biblical heroes, and merely admired from afar.⁴³ Perhaps one text which would seem to present particular evidence of the image of 'ascent' as an obtainable ritual object, is the Hekhalot tractate *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (The Working of the Chariot), characterised by Gruenwald-whether rightly or wrongly- as part of a corpus of 'technical guides or manuals for mystics'.⁴⁴ The form of this celebrated, but largely divisive insight within the Hekhalot corpus, takes the form of a continuous set of dialogues in which a certain 'R. Ishmael' had questioned the renowned mystics 'R. Akiba' and R. 'Nehunya', and an assortment of various celestial beings, about those dimensions and form of a celestial cosmography otherwise beyond a human capacity for cognition, and the processes through which one might transcend human limitations and 'ascend' to become part of the heavenly world themselves. As often as not, their answers are given in the form of hymns descriptive of the heavenly realm which the mystic is traversing- as though their dialogue had transcended the parameters dividing the supernatural from terrestrial realities to accompany the mystic at the moment of mystical experience- but, since these hymns are indeed answers, they would seem at the same time to have had the weight of instructions for the aspiring ascende. It is as though the author of this excerpt would like his readership to imagine that R. Ishmael, and perhaps anyone else for that matter, might ascend in the manner of R. Akiba and R. Nehunya if only they understood the wording and potential implications of reciting these hymns for themselves.

Throughout the narrative of these texts, R. Ishmael's role is unequivocally that of a questioner: one who evidently knows something of the possibility of celestial ascent by the nature of his questioning, but who seeks to understand firstly 'why', but also precisely 'how' one might strive, in order to do so. Though at least once, having received the 'announcement' of a description of the heavenly realm from R. Nehunya, it would seem that he himself had managed to look directly upon the 'Hekhalot' of heaven: that is to say that his dialogue with ascendant rabbis had not only transcended the

43 A number of Scholem's writings might be consulted on his matter, though see in particular G. Scholem, 'Merkavah Mysticism and Jewish Gnosticism' in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941) pp.40-79, and *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965).

44 I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), p.99 and more recently Idem, *A Transparent Illusion: A Dangerous Vision of Water in Hekhalot Mysticism: A Source- Critical and Traditional-Historical Inquiry* (Leiden: Brill, 2002). One might also consult J. R. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People behind the Hekhalot Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) and V. D. Arbel, *Beholders of Divine Secrets: Mysticism and Myth in the Hekhalot and Merkavah Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003). Further discussion on the sources of Hekhalot is also given more attention in discussion below.

parameters of his terrestrial contexts, but facilitated his own transcendence and gradual 'ascent' into the celestial realm.⁴⁵

'R. Ishmael said: I asked R. Akiba for a prayer by which a man prays the praise of RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel. Who knows what is it? He said to me: Holiness and purity are in his heart and he prays a prayer: 'You are blessed forever on the throne of glory. You tabernacle in the chambers on high and in a majestic palace, for You revealed the mysteries and mysteries of the mysteries, you concealed things and the concealed things, to Moses, and Moses to Israel about accomplishing the Torah by means of them and multiplying learning by means of them'.⁴⁶

On inspection, it is, in particular, the exact words spoken by each mystical figure in their individual accent that would seem to interest R. Ishmael; as though he somehow sensed that words themselves had been integral to the empowerment of all ascenders. His first question addressed to R. Akiba, and indeed the first stanza related by *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, would describe his enquiry into 'the prayer that a man does when ascending to the chariot', as though the particular words and act of prayer were a deed and a pre-requisite of efficacious ascent. What is more, we read how each character addressed by R. Akiba would seem to have offered the aspiring ascendeer various tokens of potentially efficacious vocabulary; each token in its different way an example of language that 'does', or perhaps, to put it another way, an example of language that might affect different aspects of the initiates prospective ascent. These words, even those seemingly descriptive of the heavens, are typically words of praise: 'He said to me... "You are blessed forever on the throne of Glory" and "Blessed are you YHWH, great God in might, who is like you in Heaven and on earth," because they echo a liturgy constantly performed and recited by an array of angelic devotees before God in heaven.⁴⁷ Thus, R. Akiva's 'hymn' or suggestion to R. Ishmael of the words to be spoken by the prospective ascendeer, would facilitate ascent by furnishing those who

⁴⁵ §560 in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, is particularly interesting in this regard, indeed from a dialogue between ascendant R. and aspirant pupil, we are presented with a statement from R. Ishmael about how his understanding of the 'mysteries of Torah', given to him by R. Nehuniah ben Haqanah, had facilitated his own vision of the 'Prince of the Presence' and instigated his own gradual journey towards gradually more comprehensive visions of the celestial realm, For the development of this motif within the narrative, see below.

⁴⁶ §544 in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, p.253

⁴⁷ Ibid, §544 and §548 respectively.

articulated them with the language of divine beings rather than just the terms of terrestrial endearment; with their recital not only satisfying angelic enquiries into the legitimacy of an ascender's presence but enabling him to become, almost by default, both a spectator of the heavenly cult and even a participant in its heavenly chorus. 'And what does RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel do? Hear what R. Akiba said to me. He revealed to me that for all flesh and blood who has in his heart this praise of RWZYY YHWH, God of Israel, this great mystery is revealed to him... when I prayed this prayer, I saw six hundred and forty thousand myriad angels of glory who stood facing the throne of Glory'.⁴⁸ This excerpt from *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, indeed like so many other Hekhalot narratives, purports to provide initiates like R. Ishmael with various instructions about different aspects of celestial ascent, though in so doing, it also offers a valuable opportunity to the scholar of ritual texts to investigate how ascent was assumed to have been realised, and more specifically, how the recitation of prescribed prayers and hymnic formulae were deemed to contribute to the efficacy of the rite.

The complete text of 'Ma'aseh Merkavah' as it currently stands, can perhaps be described as falling roughly into two unequal parts, the greater of which more or less surrounds the other. Its primary discourse, a detailed and inter-dimensional dialogue between the prospective ascende R. Ishmael and R. Akiba, would both begin and end this narrative; with its story relating how R. Ishmael asked about the means of attaining heavenly visions- 'How is it possible to catch sight of'- and R. Akiba's response, including reports of what he had seen in previous ascents and the words of praise which he had heard and subsequently recited, to placate a heavenly hierarchy. Yet, punctuating the core of these 'Ishmael- Akiba' dialogues is also the lengthier and perhaps more complex discourse between R. Ishmael and R. Nehunya, in which R. Ishmael is taught the language of the heavenly realm- prayers, names and powerful combinations of letters- and is instructed to recite thereafter what the angels of glory recite: 'in the hour that you pray, invoke three names that the angels of glory invoke...'⁴⁹ On the periphery of this complicated central dialogue, Nehunya is also reported as having taught Ishmael to summon an angel through the illocution of those words; instructing him to do so while other angels discuss the 'mysteries'.⁵⁰ Indeed, Naomi Janowitz was right to conclude that this and other similar narratives of the

⁴⁸ Ibid, §547-50

⁴⁹ § 564 in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, p.273

⁵⁰ This was the basis of Nehunya's instruction to R. Ismael concerning *Sar Torah Praxis*, an understanding which would imply that the ascende might not only ascend to learn the liturgy of the heavenly chorus but summon the 'Prince of Torah' to divulge and bestow an unceasing knowledge of the Lord and the mysteries of Torah. See § 560 in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, p.269. This is discussed in greater detail later on in this chapter.

Hekhalot corpus seem to consist almost entirely of reported speech. The entire cast of characters 'talk'. Indeed, not only is the text largely comprised of 'talk', but the subject of their dialogue is different modes of speech. They outline and discuss what has been heard uttered in heaven, for these utterances were both the proper way of speaking but the supposed vehicle of the rabbis' successful ascent. Indeed, the text is saturated with examples of the various indigenous ways in which the potential of language might be used. In outlining the ascent process, the text instructs prospective students not about the efficacy of deeds but various verbal actions: 'Akiba said: he prays a prayer', or 'he [Nehunya] said to me: When you pray recite the three names'. The understanding of ascent in *Ma'aseh Merkavah* and the hagiographical genre more generally, was evidently based on an array of special modes of language use- a use which would seem not only to relate and describe but to imply illocutionary potential and ritual efficacy. Quoting rabbis who recite hymns that in turn have quoted what was heard from their own experience of the divine chorus, would seem to have been integral to the rituals of those who sought to ascend, indeed the literary device of 'quoted speech' or in this case 'quoted praise, would' shift the potential of the heavenly speaker to an earthly one- literally embedding the heavenly praise in the human mouth and making the words iconic at another level. But what have scholars made of these startling suggestions and the wider Hekhalot genre to which they belong?

Scholarly discussion about the form and content of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* and other Hekhalot narratives like it, has to a large extent, been dominated by the Twentieth Century studies and critical agenda of Gershom Scholem. Scholem's interest in the texts, apart from the insight they offered into early Jewish mystical thought, would seem to have revolved around two concerns in particular; the first of which already hitherto briefly discussed, would relate to the dating of the texts which he would controversially attribute to the earliest centuries of the Late Antique period. But secondly, and perhaps more importantly, whether the literature represents mainly exegetical or experiential activity. Dating these texts is complicated by several factors which shall be further discussed shortly, but in assuming that these texts alluded to an early Jewish experiential practice, which only later degenerated into an exegetical procedure, Scholem raised a second and rather more important problem. How are we to understand these texts and indeed, precisely what kind of texts are they? To highlight the experiential nature of the texts, Scholem would compare them to ritual texts including those he defined as 'theurgical' and 'magical' rituals. For example, he discerned how elements of certain tractates of the Hekhalot- 'the Lesser Hekhalot',

resonated with the Greek magical papyri in terms of similar 'theurgical descriptions and prescriptions and the accompanying ever-increasing number of magical names and Ephesia grammata'.⁵¹ Are we to understand ascent as a ritual practice? Were these accounts of ascent experiential or merely fanciful? Actually, as a historian, I am not particularly concerned about whether these Late Antique people 'ascended' to experience God. Neither am I interested in joining the debate on whether ascent was a ritual practice. Neither I, nor anyone else, can possibly know this.⁵² It makes no difference whether or not we describe these narratives as experiential or exegetical activity, because this distinction misses the more important points to be discerned from this literature. The point which needs to be recognised from an enquiry of these texts, is that whether one likes it or not; indeed whether we believe it or not, Late Antique Jews who were reading these texts believed that the stories they told were reports not only of actual encounters with God, but of the practical procedures through which a number of rabbis had sought to do so. The images and descriptions in these texts deeply affected the way in which early Jews and the first Christians described and interpreted their own perceived experiences, and the way in which they framed their hopes and aspirations for future experiences.

The Hekhalot literature presents a rich combination of mystical, cosmological, and ritual elements which would relate God, the angels, and human beings to one another in complex and varied ways. Their underlying understanding and more evident descriptions, not only of one's ability to ascend but more precisely their

51 G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965), p.75

52 Many, including Halperin and Schafer, have since disagreed with his perspective, suggesting that the mystical texts of Late Antique Mesopotamian Judaism represented a mainly exegetical rather than experiential activity, with others including Gruenwald, Elior, Grozinger, Morray Jones and DeConick arguing that the need to dichotomise and precisely define the accounts of these texts, in fact serves to satisfy a modern need to deconstruct the supernatural, and anachronistically impose our own sense of demarcation between the natural world and the 'supernatural', onto those ancient people we are studying. Echoing the sentiment of April Deconick, as historians we should not be concerned with whether these ancient people 'actually' experienced God. 'Experience', as Bernard McGinn has aptly implied: 'is not a part of the historical record. The only thing directly available to the historian... is the evidence, largely in the form of written records', and those records would seem to point at least to a belief in the permeability of those boundaries between earth and heaven for those engaged in the prescribed set of activities and behaviours alluded to by these texts. For McGinn's comments, see B. McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), p.xiv. For DeConick's practical and sober approach to this scholastic bona contention, see her discussions in A. Deconick, 'What is Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism' in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2006). For further reading on scholastic insistence upon the Hekhalot literature alluding to an exegetical activity, see D. Halperin, *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980); Idem, *The Faces of the Chariot* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988); P. Schafer, 'Tradition and Redaction in Hekhalot Literature', *JSJ* 14 (1983), pp.172-81 and Idem, 'The aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism', in *Hekhalot Studien* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), pp.289-295. For further reading on scholastic consideration of Hekhalot practices as experiential and therefore instructive, see I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, (Leiden: Brill, 1980), R. Elior, 'The Concept of God in Hekhalot Mysticism' in *Binah, Studies in Jewish Thought* (ed. by) J. Dan (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp.97-120; Morray-Jones, 'Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkavah Tradition' in *JSJ*, 48 (1992), pp.1-31 and K. Grozinger, 'The Names of God and the Celestial Powers: Their Function and meaning in the Hekhalot Literature', *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 6 (1987), pp53-69.

instruction on how to do so, presents some particularly interesting questions about both the nature of these narratives, and perhaps more specifically, about the wider contexts within which they were written.⁵³ How indeed, are we begin to understand the complex and increasingly inseparable themes of heavenly ascent and ritual technique within the mystical narratives of these texts, and what clues might they offer about the nature and identity of Judaism in the periods to which these texts belong? It is these questions and their implications for our understanding of Jewish religiosity which will ultimately shape the enquiry of this chapter, but before we begin to unravel and unpack this rich and complex amalgam of Jewish literary tradition of heavenly ascents and interaction with the divine, it is essential to establish just what is meant when we refer to literature referred to as 'Hekhalot' and to recognise the complexities involved in analysing sources which at first glance, seem neatly packaged and precisely defined.

The Sources: Defining Hekhalot

Beyond the unusual and fantastical details of the heavenly ascent, articulating precisely what we mean by the 'Hekhalot Literature' proves more difficult than one might at first assume. Perhaps more than any other scholar of the Twentieth Century, it was Gershom Scholem who was responsible for setting the study of these texts on a more scientific basis, transcending the interpretations of earlier study of the Hekhalot

⁵³ Unlike the ascents of their biblical predecessors, the virtuosos of the Hekhalot texts were not called into heaven nor were they escorted and guarded by angels. Rather, they invited themselves, and as such were accordingly exposed to a variety of considerable dangers, of which the angels represent the greatest and deadliest one, since it is their intent not to escort the unexpected guest, but rather the thwart his intrusion. These texts would subsequently describe, as well as instruct, on an array of elaborate verbal and physical rituals with which to conceal their intrusion or at the very least, to assist in their passage through the angelic defences surrounding each successive celestial Hekhalot. Coming into play here was an array of elaborate rituals and magical tools including the recitation of hymns and prayers in imitation of the angelic utterance of the Qedushah, but also a knowledge of divine names and magical seals, which were to be presented according to a strict protocol and specific order. Alongside these practical methods of taming the divine and manipulating their systems, these tales of mystical ascent would also emphasise the importance of a familiarity with the Torah, the Prophets, the Writings, the Mishnah, the Midrashim, the Halakah, the Haggadah, their interpretations and their practical observation- for an ascent on high was not only fraught with danger but oral examinations, administered routinely at each stage of the journey through the Cosmos. It was this combination of magical and more conventional intellectual routes of accessing the divine, which presents the reader with a really rather interesting quandary-clearly Intellectual engagement and epistemological routes such as traditional reading and interpretation remained an important component in the pursuit of God, but evidently, it was seen to advance a person only so far. Torah knowledge was only part of the solution in facilitating a celestial intrusion; a familiarity with various forms of magical adjuration was clearly an essential part of it. For further discussion on the Hekhalot's description of seals, see M. D. Swartz, 'The Seal of the Merkavah' in *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, ed. R. Valantasis, p.322-329. In the ascent rituals, the term 'seal' may refer to amulets worn by the practitioner, as noted by Morton Smith and argued recently by Rebecca Lesses, see M. Smith, 'Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati', in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. A. Altmann, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp.142-160, and Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, p.319. Another possibility is that sealing refers to writing directly on the body, see Lesses, *Ritual Practices*, p. 318. For further discussion of angelic examination, the merits of Torah knowledge and its role alongside more magical tools including seals and other forms of adjuration, see P. Schafer, *Origins*, 268-282.

materials and substantially revising a generation's understanding of the material.⁵⁴ In his initial publications, Scholem set forth what he considered to be the principle texts by giving them titles such as 'Hekhalot Rabbati' (The Greater Palaces), 'Hekhalot Zutarti' (The Lesser Palaces) and 'Masse Merkavah' (The Work of the Chariot), based upon the citations given in other medieval literature,⁵⁵ but the research of scholars like Schafer have shown that the manuscripts allude to a far more complex picture, of how these textual traditions took shape.⁵⁶ Schafer's synoptic publication of the seven important manuscripts of the Hekhalot corpus illustrated in considerable detail, how each manuscript varied in the way that these literary traditions were distributed. Where certain paragraphs were presented in a particular order in one manuscript, they appeared in an entirely different order in another, whilst entire sections might be entirely absent from one manuscript where they were present in another. A close analysis of the manuscripts and their variations led Schafer to the conclusion that any assumption of a single textual tradition must ultimately be mistaken, whilst the concept of a Hekhalot 'work' or 'text', must ultimately carry with it a variety of difficulties.⁵⁷ With no uniform indication of where one document ends and the other begins, Schafer suggested that the Hekhalot literature is appropriately understood not as a universally uniform, codified text, but rather as a conglomeration of smaller textual units 'Microforms', which were combined by scribes in different ways and at different times within constantly shifting textual units-corresponding to what Scholem had identified as 'Hekhalot Rabbati', 'Hekhalot Zutarti' and so on.

Understanding precisely what is meant by 'Hekhalot', has in large part been defined by textual traditions which had passed through the editorial hands of the Hasidut Ashkenaz during the medieval ages, whose various forms were likely shaped by the materials available, and perhaps the particular interests of the scribe. All this

54 G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York Schocken Books, 1995). Earlier scholarship had tried to anchor the Hekhalot literature to a specific Jewish tradition and to set the historical and chronological date of its composition. The historian H. H. Graetz, attributed the textual traditions of the Hekhalot to the post-Talmudic and Midrashic periods, and were to be understood not as a product of rabbinic Judaism but rather of the influences of Islamic textual tradition. M. Gaster in contrast, saw the Hekhalot as authentic Jewish writings from the Second Temple period, whilst H. Odeberg considered the texts to be part of the ancient apocalyptic Enochian literature from the first Centuries B.C.E and the first century C.E. See, H. Graetz, 'Die Mystische Literatur in der Gaonischen Epoche', in *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 8, (1859), pp.72-73. M. Gaster, *The Sword of Moses, and an Ancient Book of Magic: From an Unique Manuscript. With Introduction, Translation, an Index of Mystical Names, and a Facsimile* (London: D. Nutt, 1896) & H. Odeberg, *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928).

55 The responsum of Hai ben Sherira HaGaon, the head of the Babylonian rabbinic academy, who describes the tradition of 'The Four that entered Pardes' as belonging to 'Hekhalot Zutarti'. See. B. M Lewin, *Otzar ha-Geonim: Thesaurus of the Geonic Responsa and Commentaries*, vol. 4: Tractate Jom-Tov, Chagiga and Maschkin (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press Association, 1931) 13-15.

56 See, for example, P. Schafer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981) and a wealth of subsequent discussion from Schafer, including, P. Schafer, *Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992).

57 P. Schäfer, 'Tradition and Redaction in Hekhalot Literature' in *Hekhalot Studien*, pp. 8-16.

changed in 1984 with a publication from Schafer, which would introduce us to another, earlier collection of Hekhalot Material, written upon fragments in Hebrew and Aramaic found amongst the treasure trove of written documents from the Cairo Genizah.⁵⁸ It is when we take into account these earlier Hekhalot materials-texts untouched by the editorial hands of European Jewry- that the overall picture of 'Hekhalot literature' becomes even murkier, and still more complex. The narratives which appear on its fragments appear again, in a radically different order from those of the already variable European manuscripts, whilst a number of fragments contain traditions entirely unknown to the Ashkenazi corpus, further advancing the suggestion that this literature was not only highly fluid, but that they did not derive from a single textual tradition. The implications of these variations mean that the literary traditions of those manuscripts which we have received from the hands of the Hasidic Ashkenaz should not be seen as a product of the Hasidic Ashkenaz alone. Their form may represent the influence of a final Hasidic redaction, but much like an onion, the Hekhalot are shown to be composed of multiple layers, which when peeled away, gradually reveal different moments of its growth through time and the process of its gradual maturity.⁵⁹

If we are to understand these Hekhalot texts as rich and complex compositions of literary tradition, as I believe the research presented by Peter Schafer proves we must, then part of the task of truly identifying what we mean by 'Hekhalot' must surely be dependent on identifying the social locations of those who wrote them. One might easily identify an understanding of precisely who was able to ascend to the Merkavah within these narratives of heavenly ascents and celestial tours, but identifying the origins of these beliefs and the authorship of these texts, continues to be hotly contested. Are we able to attribute these texts to central circles of the rabbinic Elite, and if not, what do these texts tell us about the practice of Judaism in the periods from which the various Microforms which define the Hekhalot, were assumed to have emerged? According to the early opinion of Scholem and several scholars since, much of what is found within the Hekhalot Literature points to a complex relationship with the literature of the rabbis, and thus were assumed naturally, therefore, to have been rabbinic.⁶⁰ Indeed the protagonists and virtuosos of the Hekhalot texts were all rabbis,

⁵⁸ Idem., *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984).

⁵⁹ Swartz suggests that because these smaller passages or 'microforms' are separable units that they offer the opportunity for anyone who wishes to explore their historical and cultural background, and that the prior history of the wider Macroforms can be uncovered. See, 'Mystical Texts' in Safrai, S., Safrai, Z., Swartz, J., & Tomson, P. J., (eds.), *The Literature of the Sages*, Vol.2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), p.402.

⁶⁰ See, G. Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp.41-47 & *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965), pp.7-8. Scholem's understanding that the theme of Heavenly ascents originated in Tannaitic Palestine has been defended by I. Gruenwald, 'New Passages from Hekhalot Literature' in *Tarbitz* 38 (1968-69), pp. 354-372 & C. R. A. Morray-Jones, 'Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah tradition', in *JJS* 43 (1992), pp. 1-31.

who then proceeded to tell all who were worthy the secrets they had acquired, whilst many of the Geddulah and Qedushah hymns, prescribed in Hekhalot Rabbati as being at least beneficial to the potential ascende, are consistent with the poetic forms of the early rabbinic period.⁶¹ Yet, there is much about the Hekhalot which would also seem to diverge from the main rabbinic canon.⁶² Whilst the concept of God sat enthroned upon the Merkavah is a prominent theme within the wider rabbinic corpus, the cosmology described by the notion of Hekhalot guarded by angels is not.⁶³ Rabbis may be the protagonists of these narratives, but many aspects of the literature would describe priestly concerns, including the description of purity rituals which would go beyond the halakha prescribed by the rabbis,⁶⁴ whilst the narrative surrounding Nehanya Ben Haqanah and his student R. Ishmael is anachronistically projected, upon the setting of the Second Temple.⁶⁵ These characteristics have led a number of scholars to look beyond the suggestion of rabbinic authorship, and instead, to ask whether its origins can be located in social groups outside the parameters of rabbinic Judaism.

David J. Halperin presented the first extended and detailed challenge to the framework established by Scholem, most notably in terms of his understanding of the social location of those who contributed to the Hekhalot corpus. Halperin would look to the traditions of the 'Sar-ha Torah' narrative, whose traditions would emphasise that an ascent into heaven and the adjuration of certain incantations, could grant even the challenged student, a mastery over difficult aspects of Torah study- those 'Am ha-aretz' or people of the land, whose dim wit and lack of education were held in contempt by the rabbis. Thus according to Halperin, it was from within the social contexts of those who were deemed 'Am ha-aretz' that the Hekhalot literature emerged in direct response to the elitism of the rabbinic class, a group, perhaps associated with the Synagogue, who made use of theurgy and the tradition of Moses ascent to receive the divine commandments so as to seize, rather than gradually acquire knowledge of the Torah. Their motive, and thus the motivation behind the traditions of the Hekhalot

61 See, §§81-93 and §§94-106 in 'Hekhalot Rabbati: The Greater Treatise Concerning the Palaces of Heaven', (trans. by) M. Smith.

62 The term 'canon' is used to denote rabbinic literature here with admitted imprecision; it refers principally to the those textual traditions belonging to the Mishnah, Tosefta, the Babylonian Talmud, the Midrashim and so on. On rabbinic ideas of what constituted the 'Canon', see D. Kraemer, 'The Formation of Rabbinic Canon: Authority and Boundaries', *JBL* 110 (1991), pp.613-630.

63The rabbinic al interpretations of the book of Genesis within the Midrash 'Genesis Rabbah' do discuss the seven layers of heaven, but without the terminology or literary convention of the Hekhalot narratives. For further discussion on rabbinic concepts of heaven, See, P. Schafer, 'In Heaven as it is in Hell: The Cosmology of *Seder Rabbah di-Bereshit*', in R. S. Boustani & A. Yoshiko Reed (ed.), *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 233-274

64 See, §278, in 'Hekhalot Rabbati: The Greater Treatise Concerning the Palaces of Heaven', (trans. by) M. Smith.

65 See, §202, *ibid*. The presence of such elements as reverence for the priesthood and interest in the Temple, have led Rachel Elior to argue that the Hekhalot literature might have originated amongst groups of priests going back to the Second Temple period, but as Schafer has argued, these texts may simply be evoking a mythic past, rather than historical realities. For further reading of her theory, see R. Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism*, (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005).

texts according to Halperin then, was less a matter of piety; defined by the desire of the pious to contemplate the glory of God enthroned on the Merkavah, but one of 'envy and a desire for the social status and power that the rabbis held in their society'.⁶⁶ Halperin has not been alone in calling into question the idea the Hekhalot traditions emerged within the parameters of a rabbinic Judaism, Swartz too would challenge Scholem's framework, by suggesting that a search for the origins of the Hekhalot texts should focus not upon a rabbinic elite or even a group uneducated popularisers, but rather to a group of semi-literate 'secondary elites'. Swartz accepts that the Hekhalot traditions probably have Palestinian roots, but he would also imply that much of its development was likely to have taken place in Amoraic and perhaps Geonic Babylon, amongst a group that stood outside learned rabbinic circles.⁶⁷ That is not to say that the authors of the Hekhalot came from an underclass, as assumed by Halperin, but rather from within the social contexts of a Judaism which lay beyond, yet seemingly in close proximity to the parameters of the rabbis- one which appropriated the benefits of rabbinic scholasticism through theurgical means.⁶⁸

The business of unwrapping this rich, multifaceted and complex corpus of texts has inspired a variety of possible theses; attempting to uncover their purpose, their historical contexts as well the social location of their authors, yet rather than adding to any sense of certainty, they perhaps add to growing sense of the complexity and hazards of oversimplifying, and unduly harmonizing what are distinct and often conflicting layers of tradition.⁶⁹ The practitioners of the ascent, or the exegetes who combined the concepts of ascent within their literary constructs, and the socio-historical grounding of their textual traditions, have as a rule eluded us. Only parts of the story will unfold, and even then those layers reveal only a tiny picture of a larger corpus, which have perhaps only served to distort our understanding. It is thus by

66 D. J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1988), pp.34-37, 362-63, 429-46. Schafer questions the logic of this argument, by asking if an oppressed lower class would underpin their rebellion against the ruling rabbinic class, by legitimizing themselves with the heroes of this hated caste of scholars. Indeed, whilst not unimaginable, it does seem highly unlikely. See P. Schafer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp.158-161.

67 M. D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1992), 211-23.

68 Swartz discusses the rather interesting paradox present within the literature of the Hekhalot, which at once confirms the values of the Rabbinic Elite, the significance of scholastic devotion to a better knowledge of Torah and the potential which might potentially arise for those conversant in its teachings, whilst undermining the authority of the rabbis by its suggestion of the ease of acquiring that knowledge through more practical means. The paradox raises some particularly interesting questions about the social location of the authors who wrote the Hekhalot, with Swartz implying that its location may lie in proximity to the Synagogue. See M. D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic, Ritual and Evolution in Early Jewish Mysticism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p.22.

69 As Schafer has recently concluded: 'either they impose on the multifarious and polymorphic body of the Hekhalot Literature a uniform concept that does little justice to its diversity (such as David Halperin's theory of the authors of the Hekhalot literature as the disenfranchised 'ammei ha-aretz, who rebelled against the rabbinic elite), or they apply only to certain segments of the Hekhalot literature (such as Michael Swartz's theory of the 'Secondary Elites' of scribes that address primarily the Sar ha-Torah traditions in the Hekhalot literature), or they use models of religious experience whose applicability to the Hekhalot literature is at the very least debatable...' See, P. Schafer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, p.346.

appreciating the complexities and the hazards involved in oversimplifying this literary corpus that I intend to approach the textual traditions of the Hekhalot. Here I wish to clarify, that I do not intend to present these textual traditions of the Hekhalot as the purview of any community at any historical moment, nor do I claim that its rituals, theology and scholastic values elucidate the origins of their authorship. On the contrary, what I wish to articulate is the opinion that we are dealing with here are literary traditions collected, shaped and added to at different historical moments, pointing not to the beliefs and practices of a single social group, but to a thread woven into the fabric of Late Antique Jewish religiosity. By avoiding the confusion posed by the philological exercise of questioning the specific historical origins and social location of these texts, might we interpret what really matters about the Hekhalot- the mystical experience, and its place in the imagination of those Late Antique Jewish authors, whoever they may be?

Our vision of the Merkavah mystics will likely always be blurred to some extent, refracted through the kaleidoscopic lens of a variety of literary forms and configurations, and it is with this in mind that I attempt to interpret their stories.⁷⁰ Perhaps the same reservations, however, need not be upheld when considering their geographical contexts. Where Scholem connected his early dating of the Hekhalot with a Palestinian origin, scholars seem content to argue that at least the formative shaping of this corpus, if not the origins of some of its parts; can be attributed to the religious environment of Babylonia.⁷¹ Schafer in particular would signify the Babylonian influence upon these literary traditions with some conviction, positing that even what

70 As H. Spurling recently points out, the individual traditions collected and redacted by an editor could have originated centuries earlier than the suggested date of redaction. Traditions can rarely be dated precisely, and as in Spurling's study, the methods of analysing specific literary features to date individual traditions are neither accepted nor utilised in this chapter. See, E. Grypeou & H. Spurling, 'Rabbinic Literature and Approach' in *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Brill, 2013), 15-21. For discussion on the difficulties of dating Hekhalot traditions as well the wider corpus of Rabbinic literature, see G. Stemberger, 'Dating Rabbinic Traditions', in R. Bieringer, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature*, pp.79-96, P. Schafer, 'Research in Rabbinic Literature: An attempt to Define the Status Quaestionis' *JJS* 37 (1986), pp.139-152 and Ch. Milikowsky, 'The Status Quaestionis of Research in Rabbinic Literature', *JJS* 39 (1988), pp.201-211. On the difficulties involved in using textual attributions as a means of dating Hekhalot and Rabbinic materials, see S. Stern, 'The Concept of Authorship in the Babylonian Talmud', *JJS* 41.1 (1994), 28-51.

71 Whereby Scholem connected his early dating of the Hekhalot Literature with its undisputed Palestinian origin an increasing number of scholars have started to suggest that at least the redaction, if not even the origins of parts of the Hekhalot literature, is to be found in Babylonia. Schafer suggests that direct indications of this Babylonian influence may be discerned from the difficult text in §305, in which the use of Torah magic practiced in Babylonia is legitimised by the authority of the Palestinian court of law; the use of the term 'Yeshiva' in §288 and the custom of the daily recital of the Qedushah. See, Schafer, *Hidden and Manifest God*, p.160. Arbel has recently contributed to the understanding of Babylonian (Mesopotamian) influence upon the Hekhalot, suggesting that many of the mythological images and specific themes so deeply rooted within the Hekhalot literature, would seem to have been remodelled and reapplied from more ancient, Mesopotamian textual traditions. See, V. D. Arbel, *Beholders of the Divine Secrets: Mysticism and Myth in the Hekhalot and Merkavah Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp.51-60 & 67-103. Rebecca Lesses has also contributed to this argument, suggesting that *Sefer Hekhalot* (3 Enoch) was likely redacted in Sassanian Babylonia. See R. Lesses, 'Eschatological Sorrow, Divine Weeping, and God's Right Arm,' in A. D. DeConick (ed.), *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), p.266. Also see, R. Meroz, 'The Middle Eastern Origins of Kabbalah' *Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry*, 1 (2007), pp.49-56.

he describes as the ‘predilection’ of scholars for a Palestinian origin of the Hekhalot literature, is unwarranted and not supported by the mention of Caesarea and the Valley of Kidron in Hekhalot Rabbati, as assumed by Scholem.⁷² In this chapter, I do not intend to venture as far as Schafer in assuming the Babylonian origins of the Hekhalot corpus, but to explore their traditions upon the accepted scholastic premise that these texts do convey something, if not of the religiosity of Babylonia’s rabbis, then at the very least, of the religiosity of the Babylonian Jewish authors who helped shape them.⁷³

Scope of Enquiry

The scope of the following chapter is delineated by the motifs of the texts of the Hekhalot on one hand, and the question of their implication upon our understanding of Mesopotamian Jewish religiosity in Late Antiquity, on the other. At much the same time as Talmudic responsa sought to negotiate more conventional questions for Late Antique Judaism, the Hekhalot literature would allude to an entirely different trajectory, one in proximity to and inspired by ideas discussed by the Talmud, but defined by a continuing perception of God as a deity constantly concerned with the lives of his people despite the destruction of his temple. A new cosmology was invented, one which reinterpreted and created the means and potential of approximating the divine and appropriating its power, to be made closer to God and closer to his commandments, but also for a variety of celestial and terrestrial concerns. Its motifs of adjuration, the power of divine names and the potential of possessing them, have all invited suggestions of an affinity between the visionary literature of the Hekhalot, and the religiosity of Mesopotamia’s other ritual specialists and incantation practitioners; but defining and comprehending the exact nature of their relationship, and the historical processes which generated them, has proven difficult to negotiate.⁷⁴ It is with

72 G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, (The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965), p.32.

73 Scholars have with increasing confidence, located the initial formation of Hekhalot literature in Sassanian or early Islamic Babylonia (ca. 500–900 C.E.), rather than at the time of the Mishnah, Tosefta, early Midrashim, or Palestinian Talmud (ca. 100–400 C.E.). This advance has primarily been achieved through Schafer’s contribution to our understanding of the highly flexible processes of composition, redaction, and transmission which have produced the textual traditions of the Hekhalot as we know them. Yet questions remain, specifically concerning the cultural contexts and institutional settings out of which the various strands of Hekhalot literature emerged. For further reading on the growing scholastic consensus of the Babylonian influence upon the Hekhalot, see R. Boustani, M. Himmelfarb & P. Schäfer (eds), *Hekhalot Literature in Context: Between Byzantium and Babylonia* (Mohr Siebeck, 2013). Also, see H. S. Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure and the Son of Man* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen Verlag, 1988).

74 For notable scholarship on this complex issue, see P. Schafer, *Hidden and Manifest God* (1993), R. Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power*, (1998), D. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot* (2001), & G. Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History*, (2008).

this in mind that that this chapter probes suggestions of resonance and questions the implications of their overlap for our understanding of Jewish religiosity in Late Antique Mesopotamia. Some of their parallels are perhaps circumstantial; concepts and beliefs which belonged to and were shared by a wider Jewish literary tradition, yet some significant conceptual parallels suggest that the affinity might indicate historical contact, and even a compelling case of indirect relationship.

The search to understand the theurgical motifs of the Hekhalot begins with a study of the literary traditions conventionally described as *Hekhalot Rabbati*, and those sections relating to the ‘Havurah Account’, where we learn not only of the potential of the individual to ascend on high but the means of its realisation.⁷⁵ Framed according to the fictitious dynamic of a rabbinic ascende and his prospective student, R. Nehanya b. Haqanah is reported to have alleviated the anxieties and concerns of the uninitiated ‘r. Ishmael b. Elisha’ by describing the apparent ease with which he or anyone else, might ascend to contemplate God enthroned upon the Merkavah. So long as they are free from the imperfections described in §199, anyone might ascend on high- like ‘unto a man who had a ladder in his house’. If not suggests Nehanya, then one might just as easily acquire and learn the Divine names and adjurations with which to bypass these celestial security checks. Here, one learns something new about the rules of ascending on high – to enter heaven depended as much upon an understanding of the necessary ritual techniques, as one’s spiritual virtues.

Part Two turns its attention to the textual units identified by Peter Schafer as ‘Hekhalot Zutarti’ (315-517), and to its treatment of perhaps one of the best-known traditions of the rabbinic corpus: ‘The Four who entered Pardes’.⁷⁶ Defined by a dramatic reinterpretation of the Torah tradition surrounding Moses’ encounter with the divine, the mystical microforms of Hekhalot Zutarti would describe how men like R. Akiba had sought to follow in the footsteps of Moses’ example, though not through an ascent of the terrestrial heights of Mount Sinai but through a mystical elevation into the

⁷⁵ The earliest attempts to define distinct sections in the corpus of this literature can be found in the Geonic responsa, where we find some of the first references to ‘Hekhalot Rabbati’ and other such Hekhalot works, yet these responsa would contain no indication of the extent of each text, nor would they fix the points of their beginning and end. Peter Schafer’s *Synopsis zur Hekhalot Literatur* has attempted to tackle these difficulties by presenting synoptically a major portion of the Hekhalot corpus- seven manuscripts of major importance- in their original form and sequence, disregarding previous editorial conventions. The manuscripts included are New York (Jewish Theological Seminary) 8128, Oxford 1531, Much (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek) 40, Munich 22, Dropsie 436, Vatican 228, and Budapest (Rabbinic al Seminary) 238. The Synoptic text composed from these manuscripts, have been divided into 985 sections, and artificial though useful separation, which has been widely utilised by a number of scholars when dealing with these materials. For practicality’s sake, Schafer’s methodology and partitioning of the Hekhalot’s various literary units, will also be adhered to in this chapter, unless otherwise stated. See, *Hekhalot Rabbati*, §§ 198-268.

⁷⁶ As well as the versions offered in *Hekhalot Zutarti*, other versions of the *Pardes* story can be found preserved in the Tosephta (tHagigah 2:3-4), the Jerusalem Talmud (yHagigah 2:1, 77b), the Babylonian Talmud (bHagigah 14b), the Midrash on the Song of Songs (Song 1:4) and in the mystical treatise of *Merkavah Rabbah* (Schafer, Synopse §§671-672).

celestial realm itself, and not simply to receive Torah but rather to learn the 'great' and 'holy names' which protect and maintain an understanding of its Law and teachings.⁷⁷ With no reference to what happens during his journey-clearly, this was evidently of little interest to its editor- the traditions of Hekhalot Zutarti describe how R. Akiba had received the 'great' and 'holy names' as the biblical patriarchs had done before him, only it would seem in these contexts that these names carried with them a superior potential beyond granting an in-depth understanding of Torah, and that being made familiar with that potential was in fact at the very heart of Akiba's enterprise.⁷⁸ Indeed, empowered with the names and vocabulary of angels, Akiba's ascent would culminate in a powerful demonstration of its potential, describing Akiba's request for all of the Lord's angels to be 'bound' to him and for the power and potential for all kinds of supernatural consequences to be, quite literally, at his beck and call. Adjurational techniques and ritualised theurgy are certainly deeply woven into the literary fabric of Hekhalot Rabbati; indeed Nehanya Ben Haqanah would describe the potential of words and knowledge of divine names in bypassing angelic obstacles to rabbinic ascent, yet those tales were a far cry from what is going on here. Acquiring the means to adjure would seem to have become the purpose and the climax, rather than merely the tools of Hekhalot Zutarti's account of ascent, and it is this magical-theurgical message which I hope to explore and better comprehend.

Where the discussions of Part One are dedicated to the notion of heavenly ascent by means of adjuration, and those of Part Two to traditions of ascent precisely so as to acquire the tools and means of adjuration, Part Three shall explore traditions of adjuration in action. Turning to perhaps one of the most interesting sections of Hekhalot Rabbati, the third and final section of this chapter explores a discourse dedicated to 'Sar ha-torah' or 'The Prince of the Torah- a tradition which supposed that virtuosos might receive the mystery and potential to master the Torah in both its fullest and most magical sense. Unlike the texts of Hekhalot Rabbati, where a deep and profound understanding of the Torah is assumed as a prerequisite of the 'Yored Merkavah's' successful adjuration heaven's angelic guardians, the 'Sar ha-torah' narrative would conversely describe how a knowledge of the correct adjurations might provide an essential tool in acquiring a profound knowledge of the Torah, and perhaps more importantly for the contexts of this study, the inevitable power which it was seen to embody. It was a literary tradition set against the backdrop of a selection of strange

⁷⁷ *Hekhalot Zutarti*, §336. The concerns of forgetting Torah can also be found in the Hekhalot Rabbati traditions of the Sar ha Torah, which will feature in the third part of this paper.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, §418.

tales which would describe how an adjuration of the ‘The Prince of the Torah’ had bestowed a number of ancient Tannaitic sages with the spectacular memory and skill for elucidating the Torah, for which they were renowned. Those secrets of the Torah, say the texts, are equally available to the reader, for the adjuration of the ‘Sar ha-Torah’ had not only endowed them with a knowledge of Torah, but the formula for giving those gifts to others. These texts and their description of the dynamics which shaped the relationship between man and the divine, offer a fascinating glimpse of the unfamiliar dimensions of the classical Judaic idea of Torah, but perhaps more importantly, of the Late Antique Jewish communities which shaped them. How are we to understand these ‘unfamiliar dimensions’ and what are their ramifications for our understanding of the religiosity of those Late Antique Jewish communities, of Mesopotamia?

As the analysis of a number of scholars have shown, the narratives of the Hekhalot literature negotiated the fundamental themes of heavenly ascent and adjuration- but what exactly is the relationship between the two of them, and what role does the magical element play in the heavenly journey? In this chapter, I confine myself primarily to the second part of the question; to explore the way in which concepts of mystical ascent were so intrinsically interlinked with a variety of elaborate, ritualised performances of adjuration, so that one might begin to approach, what is the far more difficult question posed by their undeniable relationship. From a quantifiable point of view, it is certainly true to say that the ascent on high with little reference to magic is an exception in a literature, otherwise replete with magical motives, but what are the wider implications which might be discerned from this inherent combination of themes? The Hekhalot literature does not stand alone in its concern for the heavenly ascent, nor would it stand alone in its methods of ritual action, embracing in its adjuration of the divine a performative character akin to a far larger complex of Late Antique ritual practices.⁷⁹ As Scholem would initially suggest, the revelation that was sought through the performance of the revelatory adjurations of Jewish Aramaic amulets and the countless incantations of Mesopotamia’s Magic Bowls, were ‘identical’ with that of the Merkavah vision, describing them as ‘theurgical doctrines’ and meeting places ‘for

79 The Hekhalot literature shares similarities with a variety of other adjuration materials from Late Antiquity, but which are nevertheless distinct enough to be traceable to Jewish tradition. The divine entities to which the adjuration is addressed are angels and not planetary deities, for example, and the appellations used to describe those angels, including ‘Ofannim’ and ‘Hayyot’ derive from biblical precedent, notably Ezekiel 1. Despite the tale-tale signs of their Jewish identity, the Hekhalot were quite unlike the rabbinic or apocalyptic literatures in that they contained instructions for summoning the divine to earth so as to reveal its secrets to humanity. For further reading on the suggestion of the resemblance of Hekhalot materials to the incantation texts of Late Antiquity, see R. Lesses, *Ritual practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1998). Lesses suggest that the Hekhalot not only resembled Late Antique incantations, but might in themselves have a performative character and purpose.

magic and ecstasism'.⁸⁰ It is with this in mind that the historian might begin to consider how the dynamics and rituals of the ascent of high might perhaps point to an indistinct relationship between the Hekhalot corpora and other adjuration materials of Late Antiquity- one that was defined less by the immediate contact of their authors than perhaps by the indirect association of a shared spiritual ecology and broader cultural milieu. The suggestion raises important questions of its own, both about the nature of these texts, but perhaps more importantly, about the religiosity of a community conventionally seen through the canon of a rabbinic elite.

The 'Magic' of Ascent

Ancient Judaism developed a profound sense of the boundaries dividing God from his favourite creation- the perfection of the celestial realms from the terrestrial imperfections which had surrounded mankind, almost from the moment of its inception. Indeed, it was a conviction which carried with it a profound understanding of the nature and limitations of their relationship, determined not by intimate and immediate encounter as was once intended, but by the revelation of the Law and its continuous explication by his chosen people. Thus, within the parameters of early and rabbinic Judaism, the only appropriate behaviour towards God in addition to prayer, was the study of Torah and the individual attempt to strive for its perfection- after all, biblical tradition had clearly elucidated and confounded the difficulties and limitations of any attempt to ascend on high for the sake of approximating the divine.⁸¹ Yet, it was within the Late Antique textual traditions of the Hekhalot that a significantly different spiritual understanding took shape; one which would articulate how a dialogue between God and mankind was by no means limited to divine revelations in Sinai, or to a diligent pursuit of its instruction. The authors of the Hekhalot would allude instead to the ability of the individual to bypass those primordial barriers which had hitherto

80 G. Scholem, *Major trends*, p.77. See also idem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 12-13. It is perhaps important at this stage to mention that a range of opinions have helped shape the wider scholastic debate concerning the magical qualities of the Hekhalot texts. Gruenwald would suggest that whilst what he referred to as 'popular magic' infiltrated into the various forms of Merkavah mysticism, this does not mean then that Merkavah mysticism was a form of magic in itself. Comparing the Hekhalot rituals with those from cognate literature, He would suggest that the former seemed quite innocent in comparison to the elaborate magical practices of those various incantation materials of Late Antiquity. See I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (AGAJU, 14; Leiden: Brill, 1980).

81 Early convictions of the difficulties and hazards of encountering the divine are easily discerned from Tanakh passages like Genesis 11:1-9, which would describe the divine restrictions imposed on those who sought to construct the tower of Babel, and more specifically in the book of Exodus 33:20, where God explains to Moses how he cannot see his face 'for no man can see me and live'. Of course various other examples of the contrast between the human and divine realms in the Tanakh can also be found, See Isaiah 14:12-20, Ezekiel 28:11-19, Proverbs 30:2-4, Job 38:1-42, Deuteronomy 29:29 and 30:11-14.

prevented an intimate relationship according to his own decisions, and perhaps rather more significantly in the contexts of this study, according to his own practical preparations. It is this dramatic shift in the potential of the relationship between God and Mankind; defined by an unorthodox sense of humanity's capacity for self-determination, which would form the basis of those Hekhalot traditions surrounding a certain r. Nehunya b. Haqanah and 'the Havurah account' [§§198-268]. First championed by Gershom Scholem and the subject of considerable scholarly interest ever since, this rich and fascinating conglomeration of loosely conjoined accounts would not only describe the historical precedent of Tannaitic rabbis ascending on high, but the particular circumstances of their ascent and the practical preparations through which it is achieved.⁸² In contrast to the endless struggle embodied in the toilsome study of Torah, the Havurah account and Hekhalot Rabbati more generally would seem to intentionally frustrate any understanding or expectation of the difficulty of ascending on high, emphasising the ease but also the universality of the channels, through which anyone might potentially encounter the divine. To ascend was like:

'Unto a man who hath a ladder in his house, who was going up and down on it and there is no creature that preventeth him'.⁸³

What had otherwise taken a lifetime of diligent Torah study to acquire was now seemingly rather effortless, perhaps as easy as choosing to ascend a ladder-and all from the comfort of one's own home. Indeed, these ladders were to be found not only in the homes of the astute and pious students of Torah as we might expect, but rather in the homes of all men with: 'one end resting upon the earth and the other end resting against the right foot of the throne of glory'.⁸⁴ One evidently need only choose to ascend in order to regain the privileged condition once enjoyed by humanity's primordial ancestors, yet suggestions of ease were somewhat disingenuous to the reality of an array of pre-requisites or 'middah', which articulated far-reaching expectations of all

⁸² See, G. Scholem, *Major Trends* (1954) and M. Smith, 'Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati' in *Biblical and Other Studies*, (ed.) A. Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp.142-60. For a masterful analysis and summary of the texts, see Schafer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* (1992), and for Angelology, see R. Elior, 'Mysticism, Magic and Angelology: The Perception of Angels in Hekhalot Literature', in *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1(1993), pp.3-53.

⁸³ *Hekhalot Rabbati*, §199

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* § 201.

who might choose to climb.⁸⁵ Indeed, anyone might potentially ascend- as long as they were 'clean and guiltless' of idolatry, of 'sexual sins and of murder' and so long as they 'keepeth every positive and negative commandment'- on second thoughts, perhaps a relationship with the divine was not so easy after all.⁸⁶

The revelation of man's potential to ascend on high, and the conditions he must meet before doing so, comes from a dialogue between a rabbi and his student; 'r. Nehunya b. Haqanah' and the well-known hero of the Hekhalot corpus 'r. Ishmael b. Elisha'. Their dialogue, born from the anxieties of R. Ishmael to fulfil his teacher's expectations of his ascent on high, leads R. Ishmael to legitimately question the feasibility that he, or indeed any human being, might meet the rigorous conditions imposed upon what was evidently a demanding programme of ascending on high. The requirements were not at all easy, and R. Ishmael, fearful of the repercussions of his imperfections, asks R. Nehunya to clarify who can undertake such a perilous journey, and indeed what was expected of him in his imperfect state. What follows is a typically unusual account in which R. Nehunya requests to convene 'the Havurah', a select group of distinguished individuals brought together from times passed and for their renowned ability to deal with matters of Torah. Anachronistically referred to as the Greater and Lesser Sanhedrin, and located in what the text refers to as 'the third large entrance that is in the house of the LORD' or the Second Temple; it was amongst this distinguished company that R. Nehunya explained the mysteries of the cosmos, the path of the ladder through the seven heavens, but also the potential of an as yet unexplained procedure and ritual- a solution which offered to negate the difficulties and concerns posed by the tarnish of imperfection.⁸⁷ Clearly, the celestial journey requested of his student was more complex, than Nehunya was at first willing to concede.

85 The specifics of precisely how one ascends are all described according to the term *middah*, meaning 'measure' or 'measurement' and perhaps describe something of the particular 'qualities', 'qualification' or conditions' one must have or one must meet in order to undertake an ascent. To ascend on high may have been like ascending a ladder in one's home, but as the narrative later begins to articulate, to successfully negotiate heaven, one must possess or meet the prerequisite terms and conditions. For further reading on the use and meaning of the noun 'middah', see, Schafer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, p.268 & J. Davila, *Hekhalot Literature in Translation: Major Texts of Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p.29.

86 §§200 and 201 describe quite clearly eight of the prerequisite conditions one must meet in order to undertake an ascent, many of which are closely associated with the minimal ethical demands of the Noachide laws. On the use of the Noachide laws in the Hekhalot Literature, see N. A. van Uchelen, 'Ethical Terminology in Hekhalot-Tests' in J. W. van Henten (ed.) *Tradition and Reinterpretation in Jewish and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honour of Jurgen C. H. Lebram* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), p.253.

87 This is a remarkable pseudohistorical setting, the main elements of which would describe the location in the Jerusalem temple as well as 'the greater' and 'lesser Sanhedrin' who are located at the third entrance of the 'the house of the LORD'. The allusion to the temple serves as a hint that the mystic's ascent to the seventh heaven is nothing less than an ascent to a heavenly counterpart. Historically dubious as these puzzling pieces of information are, there can be no doubt that it was precisely this connection, between a heavenly and earthly temple, which the Hekhalot editors sought to make. The composition of the Havurah fellowship is no less anachronistic than the setting of the scene in the Temple. It was a deliberately pseudohistorical scene-a fiction, and the editor is aware of it. Schafer offers some interesting discussion on this unusual construct, see Schafer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, pp.268-282.

‘Said R. Ishmael: straightaway I arose and assembled all the Sanhedrin, great and small, to the third entrance which was in the house of the LORD. And he was sitting upon a chair of pure marble which Elisha my father gave me...And R. Nehanya ben Hakkanah sitteth and setteth in order before them all the teachings covering the Merkabha, [the] descent and [the] ascent, how he descendeth who descendeth, and how he ascendeth who ascendeth’.⁸⁸

This remarkable pseudohistorical reconstruction of the Second Temple and its priesthood serves to remind the reader of the understanding that an ascent on high is nothing less than an ascent to the celestial temple which had once been mirrored on earth.⁸⁹ R. Ishmael sits upon a stone bench outside this temple setting awaiting instruction from R. Nehanya on how to ascend on high, in much the same way that the angel Dumiel is later shown to sit at the entrance to the sixth palace on a ‘bench of pure stone’, awaiting the arrival of the potential ascende.⁹⁰ Anachronistic and confusing as the details of these settings might be, they clearly allude to the desire to draw connections between earthly and celestial contexts, by projecting the blueprints of the Temple upon an understanding of the form structure of the highest heaven. Just as unusual as the fictional setting is the anachronistic grouping of the Havurah, whose names according to Schafer are both chronologically ill-fitting and strangely reminiscent of the names of the ‘Ten Martyrs’ which define the microform of another Hekhalot Rabbati textual tradition.⁹¹ As Schafer has suggested, the scene is a fiction and the editor is aware of it, yet the historicity of its setting is an irrelevance both to the editor and to our appreciation of its effective use, to convey an understanding of man’s ability to ascend on high. It is against this backdrop, that R. Nehanya begins to provide answers to a number of questions, namely *who* can ascend and *what* might one expect

⁸⁸ *Hekhalot Rabbati*, §202.

⁸⁹ For further reading on the celestial temple- the central motif of Jewish apocalyptic literature, see M. Himmelfarb, ‘Apocalyptic Ascent and the Heavenly Temple’, in *Society of Biblical Literature 1987 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), pp.210-217; idem., *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); A. J. McNicol, ‘The Heavenly Sanctuary in Judaism: A Model for Tracing the Origin of the Apocalypse’, in *JReLS* 13 (1987), pp.66-94; C. R. Koester, *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature and the New Testament* (Washington, D.C: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1989); R. Elior, ‘From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines: Prayer and Sacred Song in the Hekhalot Literature and its relation to Temple Traditions’, *JSQ* 4 (1997) & C. R. A. Morray-Jones, ‘The Temple Within’, in A. D. Deconick (ed.) *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2006), pp.145-177.

⁹⁰ *Hekhalot Rabbati*, §233.

⁹¹ Schäfer, *Origins*, p.271

to encounter having done so, but also precisely *how* this ascent was to take place; its conditions and the dire consequences should one fail to meet them.

‘and whenever a man wished to descend to the Merkabha he would call to Surya the Prince of the Presence and conjure him one hundred and twelve times by Totrosi’ai the LORD...And let him beware that he do not exceed a hundred and twelve times and do not diminish from them. And if he exceeds or diminishes, his blood is upon his own head. But his mouth must utter, and the fingers of his hands must count one hundred and twelve and forthwith he may go down and rule in the [world of the] Merkabha.⁹²

The first aspect of the answer to precisely *who* might ascend on high is confirmed as being a potential opportunity for all; an answer we might not expect given the careful consideration given to Nehanya’s esteemed company, and the albeit pseudo-geographical location in which that answer was delivered. Though what is most surprising about this answer, and perhaps to the great relief of men like R. Ishmael, is that R. Nehanya would describe how an ascent on high might rely as much upon a ritual practice of adjuration as the status of personal perfection. That is not to say that preparatory practice or ascetic renunciation was somehow unimportant, but rather that reciting the name of ‘Surya the Prince of the Presence’ One-Hundred and Twelve times as specified by Nehanya, the ascendeer might acquire a means of masking the imperfections which had formerly denied access to the celestial heights of God’s Merkavah, or at the very least, a means of bypassing the barriers which had formerly prevented his entrance because of them.⁹³ This manipulation of the celestial system through ritual and adjuration was a common feature of broader rabbinic literature, primarily serving as a means of forcing a variety of angels to act upon the will and desire of the individual adjuring, but we might not have expected it to play such an active and aggressive role in fulfilling what had been, such a righteous endeavour. Its importance is only further emphasised in the following paragraph [§205] where we are

⁹² *Hekhalot Rabbati*, §204.

⁹³ Schafer has argued that narratives such as these show the undeniable relationship of ascent and adjuration within the Hekhalot texts. The prominent place which adjuration takes at the very beginning of Hekhalot Rabbati ascent account makes it impossible to distinguish between ‘the ascent’ as one layer in the redaction of these texts and ‘the adjuration’ as another, suggesting instead that these themes were intrinsically interlinked. See, P. Schafer, ‘Merkavah Mysticism and Magic’ in P. Schafer & J. Dan (ed.), *Gershom Scholem’s Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism: 50 Years After. Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1993), pp.59-78.

told of the implications for those who fail to recite the specified angelic name according to the instructed number of times. If he recites the name even once more than is necessary, then 'his blood will be on his head', that is he will immediately die. Like all magic, the adjuration only works when executed properly, and when dealing with the divine, the ramifications of failing to abide by the rules were made only too apparent.⁹⁴

And describing something of the hostile angelic reception awaiting all those who deemed themselves eligible to ascend, Nehunya would go on to describe yet another theurgical component deemed crucial for the successful adjuration of the divine- the divine seal. At the entrance of each successive layer in the celestial temple, were bands of 'war-like, strong, harsh, fearful and terrific' door-keepers [§206], all 'taller than mountains', with their 'bows strung' and their 'swords sharpened'. Their horses were 'horses of blood', horses of 'hail' and 'iron' [§216], whose eyes produced lightening and who ate fiery coals- this was the angelic reception which awaited the ill-equipped mystic, but as Nehunya explains; to possess the relevant seals was to ascend in safety, to stand and bear witness to such terrific angelic aggression, rather than a victim of it. Nehunya, or rather the editor of this narrative, does not describe the kind of 'seal' he had in mind, but since the instruction was the need for two seals, each bearing a particular name of God or the Prince of the Countenance, it is safe to assume that they at least bore resemblance, to some sort of magical device. With seven heavens and seven angelic check-points to negotiate, a total then of fourteen of these magical devices were deemed necessary to successfully ascend and safely infiltrate the divine realm-two for each successive layer, and Nehunya leaves us in no doubt of that each must be presented according to a very specific order. According to Nehunya's instruction, the seal bearing God's name must be presented to the guardian angel to the right of the entrance gate, to his colleague a seal bearing the name of the Prince of the Countenance- to do so was to be offered passage on a tour of the cosmos. Nehunya does not tell us however about the implications of presenting the wrong seal at the wrong time- in cases such as these we may safely assume that such a calamity resulted not only in denied access for the unsuccessful mystic, but in the kind of terrifying angelic aggression unleashed upon all who attempt to infiltrate the celestial world surreptitiously.

⁹⁴ For further reading on angelic aggression towards the inept, see R. Eilior, 'Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology - The Perception of Angels in Hekhalot Literature', *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1 (1993), pp.3-53; J. Maier, 'Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelfahrt in der Jüdischen Apokalypstik und Gnosis', in *Kairos* 1(1963), pp.18-40 & P. Schafer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, pp.61-66.

Ritualised stratagem for negotiating the heavenly realm would seem to have been sufficient for bypassing the angelic defences of the first five Hekhalot, but then rather unexpectedly, the narrative would begin to describe the particular difficulties which are involved in negotiating passage through the sixth palace [§223].⁹⁵ Unlike the angelic guards which went before them, Nehanya would describe how the angels guarding the sixth heaven are both troublesome and disobliging in accommodating the passage of the ascende, describing their particular desire to destroy all who 'do and do not' descend the Merkavah, for despite the divine names they recite and the seals which they bring, these men were deliberate intruders into the celestial realm. The narrative would even describe the punishment meted to those defiant of the authority of the divine name utilised within the seal, suggesting how the 'superior powers' beat them and burned them and even set others in their place, but also how those that replaced them, continue to behave in the same fashion. They 'do not fear, nor do they consider', saying:

'Why should we be burned and what pleasure is it to us that we should destroy [all] those that do and do not descend to the Merkabha because they act without permission?' ⁹⁶

§§224-228 would describe how the Havurah attempted to recall Nehanya Ben Haqanah from a journey to the Merkavah, firstly so that he might explain the insubordination of these particular angelic sentries, but also to offer his solution to the dilemma of how to evade even these most-menacing of angelic opponents. To angels such as 'Kazpiel the Prince', whose 'sword is drawn' and who 'shaketh it against everyone who is not fit to behold the King and his throne', and Dumiel 'the just and humble prince' - three seals are to be shown, whose combined power would seem to stay the hand of even these powerful angelic adversaries.⁹⁷ Once seals with the names 'Zoharariel' and 'Pa'ali Pa'ali' have been shown to Kazpiel, and 'Beronyah' to Dumiel, the narrative describes how

⁹⁵ Schafer suggests that in all the manuscripts of the synopsis, the procedure of presenting magical seals breaks off here in mid-sentence, where it is replaced by the descriptions of the irrational behaviour of those angels of the sixth palace. See Schafer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur*, § 223. Schafer argues that this unexpected interruption in the procedure of presenting magical seals is the result of the editorial processes which shaped these Hekhalot texts. Rather interestingly, the unbroken sequence from the fifth to the sixth Hekhalot is preserved in a Genizah fragment that does not show any indication of the additional material. See, P. Schäfer, 'Ein neues *Hekhalot-Rabbati* Fragment' in idem, *Hekhalot-Studien*, pp.96-103.

⁹⁶ *Hekhalot Rabbati*, §224

⁹⁷ The reference to the angel Dumiel within this particular narrative of divine seals and more intimate contact with the Merkavah mystic is interesting, for the angel Dumiel would occupy a significant place not only within these Hekhalot traditions but within other Mesopotamian texts of ritualised power. See Incantation text 'Moriah 1' in C. Gordon, 'Bowls in the Moriah Collection', *Orientalia* 53, (1984) pp. 220-241, and 'Bowl 25' in J. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Museum Press, 1903), pp.207-208.

Kazpiel brings about a 'stormy wind' and has the ascende sit in a 'chariot of brilliance', reminiscent of the stormy wind and radiance which would manifest the four creatures carrying the throne of God, in the story of Ezekiel's vision.⁹⁸ The allusion is unmistakable, but the differences of these biblical and post-biblical accounts are also starkly apparent: where Ezekiel had seen a vision of this unusual celestial scene whilst standing on the earth, the mystic has been raptured within it. According to Nehanya, the once hostile Kazpiel places the mystic himself, into what is described as a 'chariot of brilliance' - the text being careful not to refer to the Merkavah here- that will convey him to the Merkavah, as seen by Ezekiel.

Despite this Peripeteia in the narrative of heavenly ascent, indeed despite the numerous challenges and the numerous theurgical solutions involved in successfully ascending on high, Nehanya tells us that even now, the mystic has still not reached the ultimate goal of his desire. On the final leg of this celestial journey through the cosmos, Dumiel 'seizes a gift' and steps out in front of the 'chariot of brilliance', bringing it to a halt- there is still one more thing yet to be done. The gift was neither silver nor was it a gift of gold, but rather the privilege of being able to ascend unchallenged through all levels of the cosmos; 'he will showeth them his seal and they will leave him [in peace] and he entereth' [§232]. Yet to attain this highly desired gift, was dependent upon the ability of the mystic to fulfil certain pre-requisites, or the 'Middah' encountered earlier in the narrative, only now Dumiel becomes much more specific in the requirements which he demands of the ascende. No longer is the ascende expected simply to fulfil the Noachide laws as initially outlined by Nehanya to the Havurah, but to have a knowledge of Torah in all its manifestations: including the three-fold canon of the Hebrew Bible, the Mishnah and Midrash, Halakhot and Aggadot- that is to say, the ticket into the Holy of Holies is nothing less than a masterful grasp and erudition of the entire rabbinic corpus [§235]. Only on successful completion of this most intense and extraordinary viva voce, might the ascende acquire the means of attaining his ultimate goal- the gift of unchallenged privilege, to move freely throughout the celestial world. Having convinced Dumiel of his competency, Gabriel is instructed to write a permit authorizing and informing all, that:

⁹⁸ *Ezekiel*, 1:4.

‘Thus and so is the knowledge of such a one in the Torah, thus and so are his actions, and he desireth to enter in before the throne of His glory’.⁹⁹

Written in red paint and with angelic sanction, Dumiel’s gift convinces all those who would oppose his entry to immediately yield to his authority and capitulate, covering their menacing faces, unstringing their bows and sheathing their swords as a gesture of reluctant compliance. Yet this is an unexpected development from a stratagem which has hitherto described the importance and potential of the proper seals which the adept must present, in order to negotiate the celestial world and its angelic defences. Erudition of the Torah in its fullest sense had taken care of the fearsome and most frightening obstacles in the final stages of the adept’s celestial journey- with no word on the requirement of seals or familiarity with the names of God and the Prince of the Countenance. The tension of this unexpected departure from an understanding of the requirement of adjuration, to the spiritual requirements of the ascende is addressed with an additional redaction layer, in which our editor describes how it was necessary to rely not only upon Dumiel’s gift, ‘but to let them feast their eyes on a great seal and a fearsome crown’ that is, he must show the angels a seal of ritual power.¹⁰⁰ These well-known ritual tools, described in greater detail in another of the microforms of *Hekhalot Rabbati* [§§318-321], would emphasise that whilst a familiarity with the Torah was important, it was by itself, an inadequate means of facilitating a successful ascent on high. A knowledge of the tools and means of adjuration was of equal importance, and in presenting both the *Great Seal* ‘ZBWG’ and the *Awful Crown* ‘SWRTQ’- the epitome of magical seals and adjuration -the mystic summons the powerful weapon at his disposal.

The following microforms in *Hekhalot Rabbati* are not of particular concern for the purpose of this section, consisting mainly of the somewhat disappointing consequences of the mystic’s successful ascent on high. After all the efforts and dangers the mystic takes upon himself to reach this goal, the ascent would climax not in a vision-certainly not in a vision of God- or an intimate encounter, but rather in a liturgical performance taking place around ‘the throne of Glory’ [§§251-257]. Yet perhaps most interesting of all are those microforms which point to another *Hekhalot* tradition; one which was based upon rabbinic and perhaps more significantly upon the Merkavah mystical trauma, of forgetting the Torah, and the magical tools one might utilise to mitigate against the possibility of such a disaster. These narratives are known

⁹⁹ *Hekhalot Rabbati*, §236.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

as the 'Sar ha-torah' narratives, and will be discussed later in the third section of this chapter, but first this paper's discussion of the mystical tradition of ascent in the Hekhalot turns to another, rather different tradition within the literary corpus- the tradition of 'Hekhalot Zutarti'- whose various microforms would describe adjuration not as a means of achieving an ascent on high, but rather as its very purpose.

Ascending to Adjure, Rather than Adjuring to Ascend

The textual traditions of those works conventionally compiled under the rubric of 'Hekhalot Zutarti', represent something altogether different to those that unfold through the narratives of Hekhalot Rabbati. Not only would these textual traditions contribute to a far looser composition of texts; lacking any sense of 'literary identity' or unified structure, but each would explicate the notion of an ascent on high according to a distinct mentality.¹⁰¹ To ascend on high and touch the divine had been the intent and soul purpose of the mystic in Hekhalot Rabbati, facilitated by a competent and generous use of the tools of adjuration, but in these narratives, an ascent on high was little more than a means of facilitating an altogether less spiritual, more theurgical end. That one might ascend on high and touch the divine, was articulated more as a given reality than as a dubious speculation; something to be taken for granted and which required no further explanation.¹⁰² With typically little more than a laconic description of the *Yored Merkavah* and his astonishing journey through the cosmos, the narratives of Hekhalot Zutarti sought to illustrate not so much the concept of intimate encounter with the divine, but rather an understanding of the divine names which one might expect to acquire from an ascent on high, and their true potential.¹⁰³ Indeed, for the editors of this truly remarkable selection of Hekhalot narratives, it would seem that the

101 There is even less of a unified structure holding the narratives of Hekhalot Zutarti together than in Hekhalot Rabbati, composed of a number of different themes and literary genres that has been characterised by scholars like Gershom Scholem, and Peter Schafer as something of a 'hodgepodge'. See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, p.83 and P. Schafer, *Origins*, p.282-306.

102 Himmelfarb has stressed that unlike the instructions of Hekhalot Rabbati, the instructions of Hekhalot Zutarti provide no information about how to undertake the ascent but assume that the ascent is already in progress. See, M. Himmelfarb, 'Tours of Paradise and Hell and the Hekhalot Texts', in *The Apocalypse: A Brief History* (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), pp.106-109.

103 Within the narratives of 'Hekhalot Zutarti', the names of the divine were seen as venerable bearers of power-the very substance of power and function. The name of God was identical to his essence, and therefore a knowledge of the names and the manner of articulating them is tantamount to a certain comprehension of their essence and potential. For further reading on the power of the Divine names and the role that they play within the literary traditions of Hekhalot Zutarti, see R. Elior, 'Mystical Language and Magical Language: 'Had I been using tongues of men and angels' in *Jewish Mysticism: The Infinite Expression of Freedom* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, 2009), pp. 205-234 and K. E. Grozinger, 'The names of God and the Celestial Powers: their Function and Meaning in the Hekhalot Literature' in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987), pp.53-69.

name was not just a simple appellation, nor merely a convention for the purpose of recognising persons, but that these longer or shorter successions of letters were in themselves venerable bearers of power and function. Faith in the specific function of power behind each name, has already been shown to be a crucial component within the narratives of Hekhalot Rabbati, both by the need to show the respective proper names at each level of the descent to the Merkavah to induce both a vision of the Merkavah, as well as an insight into the Torah. But it is when we begin to consider the narratives of Hekhalot Zutarti, that we realise how a faith in the power of the name would not only underlie its narratives, but in many ways, how it would define them. In a dramatic reinterpretation of the established motif of Moses' albeit terrestrial and distinctly human experience of the divine (Exodus, 19) the opening paragraphs to these extraordinary narratives would describe how Moses had ascended to God-but not only, as the tradition has it, to receive the Torah, but to learn of the 'great' and 'holy names' whose power might protect initiates from the absolute tragedy of forgetting its laws and teachings [§336]. It is possible to encounter the Merkavah mystic's concern with forgetting the Torah in a number of locations throughout both the Hekhalot and rabbinic corpus', but in these narratives, acquiring the divine names, which amongst other things, guard against forgetting the Torah, and would seem to have become *raison d'être* of the whole enterprise.

It was from within the context of this narrative describing the revelation of God's holy names to Moses, that the editors of this microform would introduce the story of perhaps one of the most revered of all Tannaitic rabbis: a certain R. Akiba, so well-known from the Tosefta, the Yerushalmi and Bavli. R. Akiba was not only one of four Tannaitic heroes who had successfully ascended on high, entered Pardes, and returned safely, but in the context of this narrative, one who had diligently followed the example of Moses- his biblical forebear-and the text leaves us in no doubt as to the outcome of his particular ascent. With little more than a hint of the perilous journey which, as the narratives of Hekhalot Rabbati report, confront all those who ascend on high; the excerpt describes somewhat succinctly how Akiba had received the great and holy name- presumably that of God, just as Moses had, and again we are by no means left in the dark concerning their purpose and potential. These names had a purpose and

function: they were supposed to be used, and their potential is made only to apparent from the need to handle them ‘with care’.¹⁰⁴

‘This is the name, which was revealed to R. Akiba, when he observed the working of the Merkavah. ‘Akiba descended and taught it to his students. He said to them: handle this name carefully, [for] it is a [great] name, it is a Holy name, it is a pure name. Because each one, who makes use of it in fright, in fear, in purity, in holiness, in humility, will multiply the seeds, be successful in all his endeavours, and his days shall be long.’¹⁰⁵

To exploit the names of God in this context ensured not only retention of Torah knowledge as described by the initial account of Moses’ mystical ascent, but numerous descendants, success in all endeavours and a guaranteed long life. These suggested benefits of possessing and orchestrating the Holy names of God were in themselves not entirely modest, and would differ considerably from their suggested purpose within the microforms of Hekhalot Rabbati, but it is within the following passages of this microform that the wider potential of these names and their theurgical potency, are rendered immediately and indubitably apparent.

Having successfully ascended on high, the narrative of this microform would go on to describe how Akiba had heard a voice speaking to him in Aramaic, from beneath the throne of glory. In a passage reminiscent of the dialogue between Ezekiel and the heavenly voice (Ezekiel 1:1), the message from God described how a means of facilitating a divine encounter on high, or more specifically, direct access to God’s *raqia*, had existed before he’d even began to create the Heavens and the earth, and that one might enter and exit it unharmed, as Akiba had with the Pardes.¹⁰⁶ Typically used to denote the seven heavens through which the Merkavah mystic ascends to the divine throne ‘Arevot Raqia’, here the term *raqia* is applied specifically to denote the divine name, informing us that God ‘established his firm name in order to shape with it the whole world’.¹⁰⁷ The name of God had been an essential tool then in the creation of the world, and thus presumably to know it was not only to know the mysteries of the

104 The Hebrew term used to describe these names was ‘le-hishtamshesh’ (לְהִשְׁתַּמֵּשֵׁשׁ rt. ש.מ.ש.) meaning ‘to use’. These names of God clearly had a practical and distinctly theurgical function. For further reading, see Schafer, *Hekhalot Studien*, p.260 and Schafer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, p.286.

105 *Hekhalot Zutarti*, §337.

106 רִקְיָא rt. רִקְיָא, ‘the heavenly Kingdom’.

107 *Hekhalot Zutarti*, §348.

world but to possess the power of its potential. It goes without saying that he who holds these names is able to ascend and descend unharmed, but what follows is striking both in its details and description of the potential of this 'bar nasha' and his repertoire of divine names. A hymnic description of the comic potency of the divine name would suggest:

'This is the oath and the seal, with which one binds the earth, and with which one binds the heavens. The Earth flees from it and the universe shudders in front of it. It opens the mouth of the sea and closes the hooks of the firmament; it opens the mouth of the sea and closes the books of the firmament; it opens the heavens and floods the universe. It uproots the earth and whirls the universe into confusion- QshT' RWM' QWSRYN' is its name, HWRB' MSMSYY' is its name'.¹⁰⁸

By ascending on high and exploring the universe, the adept- here referred to as 'bar nasha', the Aramaic version of the Hebrew name 'ben-Adam' used by God to address Ezekiel after his vision - had not only encountered the divine and witnessed his glory, but had been acquainted with the means of ceasing and seemingly limitless power. With it, men like Akiba and presumably those who he initiated, were able to orchestrate the mechanics of the universe in its fullest cosmological dimension, and in a way reminiscent of the fantastic feats witnessed and at times performed at the hands of the biblical prophets. Like Moses, this was a name which would allow the 'bar Nasha' to 'open the mouth of the sea',¹⁰⁹ to 'close the hooks of the firmament'¹¹⁰ and perhaps in reference to 'the Great flood' predicted by Noah, 'open the heavens and flood the universe'.¹¹¹ Of course the suggestion of the potential of the 'bar nasha' and its comparability to the fantastic feats of divine power performed for the biblical prophets was no accident. For the editor of these texts, the mystic was like a new Moses or a new Ezekiel, encountering the divine and witnessing his glory as a number of biblical

¹⁰⁸Ibid, §367

¹⁰⁹ Exodus 14

¹¹⁰ Exodus 9:13

¹¹¹ §367. Genesis 7:10-12

prophets had done before him, but who, unlike his predecessors, was able to ascend on high and there cease the names which had shaped the universe, for his own ends.¹¹²

What we encounter here in these initial theurgical narratives then, is not just another set of Hekhalot traditions, but something entirely different from the ascent accounts described by Hekhalot Rabbati. Where the mystic of Hekhalot Rabbati requires the seal, with the names of the divine engraved upon them, as an entirely necessary component in securing a successful ascent, in Hekhalot Zutarti, the mystic brought the ultimate and most potent of all seals back with him- one which granted power and potential over all aspects of the cosmos. There is no description of the mystic's participation in a heavenly liturgy- which would seem to have been the main function of the ascent in Hekhalot Rabbati- nor does a description of the divine Kavod play any significant role here. Indeed, these initial microforms of Hekhalot Zutarti would seem almost entirely oblivious if not opposed to Hekhalot Rabbati's major concerns and *raison d'être*. It comes as little surprise then, that the manuscripts conclude this first microform of Hekhalot Zutarti with a further bombardment of celestial names, including those of the rainbow, the sword, the four feet of the divine throne, the divine throne itself, and finally the fourteen letters that 'stand opposite the crown'- proof, it further proof was needed, to the true focus and theurgical interest of this microform and a hint to the wider theurgical character of Hekhalot Zutarti.

From the initial passages and microforms of Hekhalot Zutarti to one which would begin to bring this fascinating selection of Hekhalot narratives to a natural end, the third microform of the Zutarti narratives would in many ways lead us several steps back in the process of ascending on high. Having described Akiba's ascent on high and the implications of having done so, the editor plunges us once more into the details of the tests imposed upon the mystic, notably that which had led to the death of R. Ben Azzai at the hands of the angels, and the famous 'water trial', which had driven Ben Zoma into madness.¹¹³ Whatever the precise meaning of these tests might be and indeed whatever the true function of their inclusion at this point in this narrative, it seems that they do at least serve as a prelude to perhaps one of Hekhalot Zutarti's most peculiar versions of an ascent account. In many ways reminiscent of the themes and the form which would define the ascent in Hekhalot Rabbati, this account [§§413-417]

¹¹² On the relationship of Hekhalot Literature to interpretations of Ezekiel, see, D. J. Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988).

¹¹³ For further reading on the dangerous vision which had confronted the 'Four who entered Pardes', and its inclusion within the Hekhalot narratives, see, C. R. A. Morray-Jones, *A Transparent Illusion: The Dangerous Vision of Water in Hekhalot Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), esp. pp118-123.

would provide instruction to the adept on what to do, rather than describing his mystical experience, teaching him the names of the angelic guardians positioned at each of the Hekhalot and the appropriate seals to bypass their security. Here however, quite unlike the narratives of Hekhalot Rabbati, the mystic is instructed that one rather than two seals engraved with the names of God shall suffice, for now, each level of heaven is protected by a single angelic guardian. R. Akiba's somewhat belated instruction concerning the minutiae of an ascent on high, however, is neither the sole focus of this section or its particular point of interest. Rather, it is the suggestion of what happens next to the Merkavah mystic, which identifies this particular account of ascent as something quite extraordinary. Having passed all the necessary tests for ascent, we find ourselves once again with the mystic in the seventh heaven- the 'holies of holies', where suddenly a voice which must surely have been that of God, asks the successful mystic to 'make his request'. This dynamic between the divine and the mystic is in itself extraordinary, for perhaps nowhere else might we discern such an intimacy and willingness from God to satisfy his favoured creation, yet it is precisely how the mystic responds, which would reveal in a particularly acute way, the theurgical rather than spiritual tenor of this microform:

'May it be your will, LORD God Israel, our God and God of our fathers...,that I may find grace and mercy before the throne of your glory and in the eyes of all your servants, and bind all of your servants to me in order to do so and so'.¹¹⁴

Here, the ascent on high culminates not in a vision of the divine or with a descent to the Merkavah, but in an adjuration, uttered in the very lap of God, commanding him to bind his angels to the service of the human adjurer. The relationship between God and the adept is clearly one of love and absolute affection, for not only is the mystic able to make such a presumptuous and audacious request, it was a request which was cordially received, submitting the angels literally to his beck and call.¹¹⁵ We've read about the adjuration of angels as an active part of the description of descent and ascent to the Merkavah in Hekhalot Rabbati, where in §204 the mystic adjures Suriyah in order to undertake the ascent, but that account is by no means akin to what we identify here: the adjuration as the motive and climax of the ascent on high. This microform of

¹¹⁴ *Hekhalot Zutarti*, §§413-417

¹¹⁵ On the magical formula of binding the angels to human being and forcing them to do their will, see Schafer, *Hekhalot-Studien*, p.258.

Hekhalot Zutarti may bare similarities, both in its form and in its structure to the narratives of Hekhalot Rabbati, but there can be little doubt that its editor adapted and furnished it to his overall magical-theurgical interests. The ascent on high was a discipline of rigid routine and instruction, guaranteeing an experience of the divine and an encounter with his Merkavah, but perhaps more importantly for the editors of this and other Zutarti microforms, the ascent also guaranteed successful adjurations, and was clearly more favourably seen in that light.

It is within the final sections of this unusual and fascinating microform, that the suggestion of the relationship between ascent and adjuration is further emphasised and prominently brought to the fore [§§422-424]. In these sections, it is made apparent that not only Akiba, who explains the secrets of ascent and descent to the Merkavah, but potentially all who sought to undertake the ascent, might expect to receive the same sort of attention and benevolent benediction in heaven, and on earth. In a way which was once again similar to the pattern of instruction given by R. Nehunya b. Haqanah in the texts of Hekhalot Rabbati, R. Akiba would describe how all might potentially ascend on high and acquire the tools of adjuration, if only he abide by 'his Mishnah'. Stressing the preparatory rituals, Akiba suggests:

'Everyone who wishes to learn this Mishnah,¹¹⁶ and to explain the name, shall fast for 40 days. He shall rest his head between his knees, until the fast has taken complete hold of him. He shall whisper to the earth but not to heaven, so that the earth hears, but not heaven. If he is a youth, he should say it before he has an ejaculation. If he is a married man, he should be prepared for three days, as it is said: be prepared for the third day.¹¹⁷

To be sure, the motivation of the mystic in these concluding texts of Hekhalot Zutarti was the use of the divine name, for the potential of knowing it was limitless. For R. Akiba, this had meant ascending on high literally on a tour of the cosmos- and everyone, so it would seem, is called upon to follow his example- or are they? Previous sections

¹¹⁶ Literally, R. Akiva's instruction.

¹¹⁷ As suggested by R. Nehunya ben Haqanah in Hekhalot Rabbati [299], to make use of these adjurations required not only a knowledge of them but a spiritual worthiness, acquired through a process of ascetic preparatory practices which in this case, seems to have been limited to abstaining from sexual intercourse, fasting and the unusual process of whispering to the earth with one's head between ones knees. Scholem has suggested that this last, unusual pre-requisite for the Merkavah mystic, may perhaps describe something of the process of ascending on high- a combination of shamanistic repeating of hymns in combination with ascetic practices to reach a state of ecstasy. See Scholem, *Major trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p.49. A much longer list of preparations was described by Nehunya, which included washing one's clothes, ritualised immersion, seclusion for several days and consumption of only a simple diet of bread and water.

would describe the process of acquiring the divine name and the tools of adjuring the angels as one of ascent and divine benediction, but here the 'ascent' has been reduced to learning the correct recipe and abiding by the instruction of Akiba's preparatory rituals. For the mystic to acquire the names of God and the tools of adjuration was in fact, not about ascending on high, but a process of distinctly terrestrial preparations, both of the mind and body- all of which were deemed necessary for the proper learning, remembering and performance of adjuration. R. Akiba had certainly ascended on high for the sake of learning the necessary names with which to command the cosmos, but it would seem from these concluding sections of Hekhalot Zutarti that anyone else, who sought to do so, might just as easily follow the instructions of Akiba's Mishnah as undergo such a perilous and life-threatening journey himself. In many ways, this alternative mentality concerning man's capacity to adjure without ascending on high would come to define the narratives which will define the third and final part of this paper-the 'Sar ha-torah' narratives. Situated within the texts of Hekhalot Rabbati, these narratives would describe a similar approach to adjuring the divine through terrestrial ritual rather than celestial ascent, which, when accompanied by the correct preparation, provided the means to bind himself to the Prince of the Torah-that astute of all angelic students of God's instructions for man-kind, so as to learn properly and not forget its teachings and tenants. It is to these texts and to its mentality towards adjuring the divine, that I shall now devote my attention.

Commanding the Divine for the Sake of Torah Knowledge

The Macroform of Hekhalot Zutarti would represent a dramatic shift from those Hekhalot narratives in which the heavenly liturgy was the climax of the mystic's vision. The ascent accounts in these narratives were adapted to an over-arching message that an ascent to the Merkavah was a discipline which guaranteed not only a vision of God but perhaps, more importantly, the revelation of his names and an understanding of the potential of their proper use. From ascents on high facilitated by means of adjuration to ascents which are driven by the desire to learn of its potential, there can be little doubt of how this material was reworked in order to adapt it to an overall magical/theurgical message. In the latter microforms of Hekhalot Zutarti, that message proclaimed R. Akiba's successful ascent and acquisition of the powerful divine names of all, but perhaps more importantly, the distinctly terrestrial based means of learning,

remembering and utilising those divine names for the Merkavah mystic's own theurgical intent. By following the Mishnah and preparatory instructions described by R. Akiba, one might 'explain the name' and bind himself and his request to those celestial beings subservient to one whose powerful names, he holds in his possession. The secret knowledge revealed to R. Akiba contained all one needed to know in order to make use of it for a variety of undoubtedly mundane human concerns and magical purposes, and it is precisely within this adjurational framework that the traditions and remarkable procedure of binding oneself to the 'Prince of Torah, so as to learn properly and not forget Torah, both emerged and evolved.

Within the visionary literature of the Merkavah mystics, a number of texts can be identified as expressing an interest in the adjuration of an angel known as the Sar-Torah, or the 'Prince of the Torah'. This angel- a prince amongst all others in his understanding of Torah- was said to bestow upon those who sought him; an extraordinary memory, considerable skill in retaining knowledge which had been learned, but also a refined and heightened sense of hitherto hidden secrets, both of the nature and mechanics of the cosmos. Most of these texts would describe how a number of ancient worthies had themselves conjured the 'Sar ha-torah', who had accordingly transformed them into the great and powerful rabbis of their age, but remarkably, those same divine gifts and celestial secrets say the texts, were just as readily available to the reader, if only they followed the rabbis' prescribed set of ritual instructions.

Within this complex network of stories and ritual prescriptions for the theurgical acquisition of Torah knowledge, are two major narrative patterns; each occurring in several different places within the Hekhalot literature. The first set of stories commonly known as Pereq R. Nehunya ben ha-Qanah, would describe how R. Ishmael, familiar to us from the Hekhalot Rabbati narratives, received the secrets of a full and erudite understanding of Torah in all of its various manifestations, through the theurgical instructions of his master and instructor R. Nehunya. The second set of texts meanwhile, tell quite a different story, significant both for its narrative and for the ritual it describes. This story, attributed to R. Ishmael in the name of Eliezer the Great, would describe how the secret of Torah was revealed not only on account of the adjuration of an individual, but upon the request and adjuration of those sages of the second temple, disgruntled by the difficulty and distraction of rebuilding the temple whilst devoting oneself to the instruction of Torah. Their rebuke, would inspire God to reveal the full 'beauty', 'preciousness', 'glory' and 'greatness' of the Torah by offering them the 'seal' and the 'crown', those most theurgical and familiar of instruments

described by the Hekhalot, which if used in accordance with divine instruction, could be used to acquire an understanding of Torah to rival that of even the most diligent of angelic devotees. These narratives may have been different, but both would articulate a similar understanding of the power and potential of receiving God's names, and making good use of them. Manipulating the names of God through the ritual of adjuration was praxis with precedent, and it is by exploring these texts that we see it in action.

Pereq R. Nehunya ben ha-Qanah

'Said R. Ishmael: Three years did R. Nehunya ben Hakkanah behold me in affliction and in great sorrow and in great danger: That portion of the Bible which I would read one day, would I forget the next, and that Mishna which I would study one day, the next day would I forget. What did I do? When I saw that the Law did not remain in me, I laid hold upon myself and denied myself food and drink and washing and anointment, and deprived myself of conjugal intercourse, and I neither exulted nor rejoiced, nor did any music nor song go forth from my mouth'.¹¹⁸

It is within the opening sentences of *Pereq R. Nehunya ben ha-Qanah* that we read of the frustration and great anguish of R. Ishmael, though not the latter-day articulate and erudite sage of Torah with whom the Hekhalot narratives have made us familiar, but the thirteen-year-old struggling student he once was. His 'affliction' and even his 'great sorrow' so we're told, derived from an inability to retain and recall the section of Torah to which he had dedicated so much time and effort only the previous day, and so it perhaps comes as no surprise that he should respond in the familiar way to which all teenagers are accustomed. The young R. Ishmael, reflecting on his feelings of ineptitude and the difficulty of his goals, 'took himself in hand' and retired from the world, denying himself the basic nourishment and even the simplest forms of hygiene- a visible demonstration of his distress and contrition before God in the hope of exploiting the prickling of the divine conscience, or an understanding of the preparatory practices of total devotion and abstention, required before making a request of the divine? That the despondent Ishmael should not only have ceased devoting his time to study, but

¹¹⁸ *Hekhalot Rabbati*, §§278-279

failed to offer even the simplest forms of oblations to God is perhaps telling, and it is at this point that R. Nehunya, possibly concerned by the disenchantment of his young tutee, describes the potential of an alternative, more effective means of retaining and acquiring his knowledge. No longer would this well-intentioned but struggling student of Torah have to devote himself to the labour of Torah study, instead he might acquire a full and undiminishing comprehension of the Torah in its entirety, if only he should swear by the 'great seal' and the 'great oath' - those powerful of divine names.

In a way reminiscent of Hekhalot Rabbati's description of Nehunya's lecture on the technique of ascending and hence descending to the Merkavah, this lesson in the theurgical acquisition of Torah would take place in the anachronistic setting of the Temple in Jerusalem, where R. Nehunya takes his young colleague to 'the Chamber of Hewn Stone'. A reference taken from m. Mid. 5:4, this was the place in which the Sanhedrin were said to have convened, and it is here according to the text that R. Nehunya revealed to R. Ishmael the names of 'the Great Seal' and the 'Great Oath' which would transform this once absent-minded student, into one of the great sages of the Hekhalot. The location of the Jerusalem temple is an integral part of this narrative, as it is within a number of Sar Torah and other ascent narratives. R. Nehunya's journey, as discussed in the macroform of Hekhalot Rabbati, and the revelations which he received, all took place in the temple- perhaps indicating that part of R. Ismael's experience entailed an equally extraordinary vision, but perhaps its main purpose here is to validate and indeed emphasise the solemnity and orthodoxy of the indisputably theurgical rituals, with which R. Nehunya and R. Ishmael are clearly engaged. Having sworn by the names of these theurgical of instruments and having identified the angel Metatron here known also as 'Zebhoriel' as the subject of his adjurations, R. Ishmael would describe the very real and very powerful ramifications of having done so;

...at once my heart was {as} enlightened as the gates of the East and mine eyes beheld the depths and the ways of the Law and thenceforth I forgot nothing. All things which mine ears heard from the mouth of my master and from the mouth of scripture and from the ways of the Law which I had truly practiced, thenceforth I forgot none of them. [§280] Said R. Ishmael: Had I done nothing in the Law, yet would this method which I have fixed in Israel be more than sufficient for me, as against all the Law, [since I have revealed

it] in order that men may increase their knowledge of the Law without weariness.¹¹⁹

This was a praxis which had proved itself to be efficacious for the now articulate and erudite R. Ishmael, but it is in §280 that R. Ishmael also declares the value of this technology, which he has ‘established’- that is to say transmitted to successive generations- for us, the reader. His actions, and the foresight of R. Nehunya in teaching this theurgical of practices is described as having equivalent value to all former devotion and study, for not only had it allowed R. Ishmael to learn Torah effortlessly, but all of Israel too. This was not just a story of the transformation of a poor student into a great one, but a narrative which described a praxis and its precedent, and the potential efficacy of this unusual theurgical technology for the practitioner. In his discussion of this passage, Halperin likens the narrative to something like toothpaste advertisements that credit a young woman’s success in romance to her use of the advertised brand. Despite the considerable jump in both history and culture in this parallel, Halperin’s analysis does indeed make great sense of this material, especially when considered in light of other ancient and medieval, magical and esoteric literature. As Swartz suggests:

‘Magical texts, Jewish and other, abound in ‘historiolae’-literary patterns that commend their techniques or lore to the reader by attesting that particular historical figures performed the miracles or attained the powers for which they are now famous by means of magic or esoteric techniques contained in the very text the reader now holds’.¹²⁰

It was a distinct narrative formula which could take the form of a reference to a biblical or post-biblical hero, as we have seen from so many of the apocalyptic narratives discussed in the earlier parts of this chapter, or perhaps the literary pattern of a chain of transmission. In our story, as in the narratives of every Sar-Torah text, the need for validation would inspire a narrative genre in which a rabbi’s celebrated erudition is ascribed to the magic of the Sar Torah ritual, but it is within the following texts that we

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, p.75.

discern an altogether different story, one in which the instructions for adjuring the Sar Torah are ascribed to a far older, and reassuring familiar story of the Jewish tradition. Though still attributed to R. Ishmael in the name of R. Eliezer the Great, this text begins with a story that takes place not in the time of these early rabbis, but at the very beginning of the Second temple period- this was the celebrated and pivotal story of the Aliyah of Judah's exiles from Babylon, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple, though with a slight Sar Torah twist.

The *Hekhalot Rabbati* Sar Torah Text: Hints to the Wider Application of Hekhalot Adjuration

[§281] 'Said R. Ishmael: R. Akiba did indeed say in the name of R. Eliezer the Great: From the day when the Law was given to Israel until the last temple was built, the Law was given, its majesty was not given, and its preciousness, its glory and its greatness and its beauty, its terror, its reverence and its fear, its richness and its loftiness and its exaltation, its trembling and its splendour, its strength, its rule and its might were not given, until the last temple was built and the Shekinah did not dwell in it.[§282] Thereupon Israel began to pour forth complaint before their Father who is in heaven, saying: 'Thou hast laid many troublesome tasks upon us. Which shall we hold to and which shall we abandon? Thou hast thrown upon us great labour and great burden; Thou hast said to us, 'Build Me a house, and although ye build, yet study the Law.'" This is the plea of His children. [§283] And this is the answer of their Father who is in heaven. Ye had a long rest between captivities, and I longed [saying], 'When shall I hear the sound of the words of My Law from your mouths?' Ye have not done well, and I have not done well. Ye have not done well in that ye have differed from Me, and I was angry against you and arose and brought utter destruction on My city and My house and My children. And I did not do well in that I arose against you and sealed a decree of judgment against you. Indeed, shall that which endureth forever and ever, world without end, contend with that which hath no endurance but for a year, or two, or ten, or

thirty, and if at all for a hundred years, and then passeth away? But in that ye have rebuked me, ye did well. Already have I accepted your rebuke'.¹²¹

What on earth is going on here? This unusual and fascinating Sar Torah text begins with a paragraph attributed to R. Ishmael, citing R. Akiba in the name of R. Eliezer, alluding both to an understanding of the powerful potential of the words of the Torah, but perhaps more importantly, to the suggestion that their true capacity had not been revealed until the time of the Second temple. The suggestion comes not from ignorance of the God's revelation of the Torah to Moses, indeed as R. Akiba implies the Torah certainly had been given, but rather from a knowledge and interpretation of the dialogue between God and Israel at the site of the temple's construction. This dialogue, suggests R. Akiba, did not take the usual form of exaltation, music and prayer which one might expect from those recently repatriated exiles, punished according to God's wrath for the disobedience of their forefathers, but of rebuke and reproach for the inherent contradiction at the instructions for his chosen people. In their frustration at the seemingly on-going hardships imposed upon them by an ever-wrathful God, the narrative describes how Israel questions its burden, and criticises the toils and troubles of rebuilding the temple which distract them from study of Torah. "Which shall we hold to and which shall we abandon"? How was Israel to build a house for the divine, without diminishing their efforts to acquaint themselves with God's commandments for mankind?

Perhaps rather unexpectedly, the Dialogue continues not with God's admonition at Israel's daring reprimand, but in a confession of wrong-doing [§283], reiterating the reason for his wrath but also the injudicious consequences of his displeasure at Israel's abandonment. The punishment had been too severe, and had caused Israel to neglect the study of Torah. In compensation and as a reward for the reproach which is accepted and even deemed commendable, R. Akiba tells us how God revealed to them the secret of the 'seal' and the 'fearful crown', which will not only allow them to study productively but confer the fabulous power of the Torah upon them.

[§284] 'For the sigh of Israel is sweet to me, and the desire for the Law hath covered me, 'your words have found grace in my ears, and I accept the sayings of your mouths.' Ye have laboured in the house of my choice, and

¹²¹ *Hekhalot Rabbati*, §§281-283

the Law shall not move from your mouths, [285] 'For I am master of wonders, the transcendent LORD, I am He. 'Mighty works come to pass before me, miracles and marvels before my throne. 'Who hath come before me and I have not fulfilled his [prayer]? Who hath called upon me and I have not straightway answered him? 'State before me all your requests, and multiply upon me the desire of your hearts... [§287] 'I know what ye request, and my heart perceiveth what ye desire.' Ye request much [knowledge of] Law, and a multitude of Talmud and many halakhic traditions, 'Ye hope to ask questions on points of law, and ye covet a multitude of secrets. If ye be worthy [to employ] this seal, and to make use of the fearful crown, 'Neither vulgar nor ignorant shall be found in you, nor fool nor idiot shall be of your number... [§288] if ye be worthy [to employ] this seal, and to make use of the fearful crown, 'Neither vulgar nor ignorant shall be found in you, nor fool nor idiot shall be of your number...'122

It is at this point that the truly unexpected occurs. Having refused to put one more stone upon another until their supplication had been heard, Israel is confronted by the Holy spirit, its throne and servants, who all appear from the 'Great entrance' of the temple, which was yet to be built. It is here that the actual revelation of the mystery is described. In shock and perhaps in fear, Israel falls to its knees, placing their face firmly against the floor, but this vision of the Holy spirit has not come to punish them or to frighten them but to instruct them in the praxis of the Prince of Torah. Bemused by Israel's response, the Holy spirit commands the assembly to 'stand, and seat yourselves in the order you sit in the academy and take hold upon a crown and receive a seal and hear the order of this secret of the law'. In response to Israel's hardship and in response to its supplication and plea, R. Ishmael describes how the Holy spirit provided an explanation of the praxis of acquiring a divinely given understanding of the Torah, and how Zerubabel the son of Shealtiel, familiar to us from the Apocalyptic texts of *Sefer Zerubabel*, took it upon himself to mediate between Israel and the 'Princes of the Law' by stating the names of each in turn according to the name of a crown and the name of a seal [§298]. Here in the texts of the legend, we are not told about the rituals themselves, rather about the wonderful stories of those who had been. Yet it is within the sections that follow that we learn that the praxis of this mystery, of manipulating

122 Ibid. §§281-283

the divine for the sake of an erudite and socially rewarding knowledge of the Torah, was not just the stuff of stories, but rather the descriptions of actual procedures.

Beginning with an ascription to R. Ishmael in the name of R. Eliezer, this next part of the work [§§299-303] gives a complex and detailed description of the praxis of adjuring the Prince of Torah and his various minions. Instructions would include the washing of garments, ritual ablutions, social isolation, ritual fasting, abstinence, but it would also include the reading and recital of the Midrash of the Sar Torah every day of this preparatory period. This probably means that the practitioner is to recite, presumably from memory, the Sar Torah text itself, including its narratives and the names of those angels who bestowed such gifts.¹²³ The text instructs us in no uncertain terms, that this Midrash concerning the secret of the Law must be recited three times daily, immediately after the regular ‘*ammidah*’, that is, the prayers of petition known as *Teffilah*. When he has finished, he must stand on his feet, and having completed the ritual successfully will be able to proceed to any aspect of the Torah he wishes: whether to scriptures or *Mishnah*, and even so as to gaze upon the *Merkavah*.¹²⁴ But who was this potential practitioner? These ritualised instructions for the praxis of Sar Torah only refer once to its intended users the reference is ambiguous:

‘for it is a teaching known to us, an ordinance made by the first teachers, and a tradition of the men of old which they wrote down and left for coming generations, that the humble might practice it. And he who is worthy is answered thereby’ [§303].¹²⁵

‘The humble’ and ‘he who is worthy’ could potentially be taken to mean any Jew who chooses to follow the instructions and preparatory practices described in these texts. As if to emphasise this point, the praxis is followed in thirteen of the seventeen complete manuscripts of the Sar Torah by an episode in which the praxis of using the ‘crown’ and the ‘seal’ is tested by all three rabbis; R. Ishmael, R. Akiba and R. Eliezer [§§304-305]. All would indeed find these instruments to be efficacious upon themselves, but perhaps that was to be expected, for after all, were these men not rabbis? Indeed, it is only when the rabbis proceeded to test the praxis upon a multitude

¹²³ One *Hekhalot* in particular, 485 would describe how the practitioner is instructed to read the text from a book as part of the Sar Torah ritual.

¹²⁴ For Halperin, this is an indication of the close relationship between the Sar Torah and *Merkavah* traditions, See Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, p.434.

¹²⁵ *Hekhalot Zutarti*, §303.

of ‘dullards’, both in the land of Israel and in Babylonia, that we are made aware of the true power and full potential of the tools they wielded:

[§305] Said R. Ishmael: This was done by R. Eliezer and he was answered and did not believe, and it was done by me and I did not believe until I brought a fool and he was made like unto me. And again it was done by shepherds and they were made like unto us. By the authority of the court, they sent down R. Akiba outside the Land [of Israel] and he waited until it was done by many who neither read nor studied and they became equal [to] others and were made learned students. And he came and verified [the matter] and agreed in the evidence which he bore in the court of the Patriarch, saying: ‘This was done also outside the Land [of Israel] and succeeded.’ And thus said R. Eliezer the Great. And the Sages say, ‘Perhaps we possess it by virtue of the Land of Israel.’ And they did not believe until they sent R. Akiba down to Babylon and it was done [there] and succeeded. And thereafter we rejoiced.¹²⁶

The praxis was efficacious for the sages, for those they deemed to be ‘dullards’, for Shepherds and for other uneducated people in Palestine and even outside it- even in Babylon.¹²⁷ The author of these texts would depict an array of different people making use of the praxis, and would seem to confirm the assumption that any Jew could have used it. Thus references to the ‘Dullard’, ‘shepherds’ and other *Am ha'aretz* (עם הארץ) would seem to function as a kind of ‘Qal Vahomer’ argument of common sense.¹²⁸ If the ‘seal’ and the ‘crown’ can empower even the ignorant and half-witted with a competent command of Torah, how much more effective might they be for those more able and learned, in transforming their understanding of Torah. If it worked for these guys, then surely it can work for anyone.

¹²⁶ Ibid. §305.

¹²⁷ The reference to Babylon here is significant, not only in that perhaps hints at the Babylonian contexts in which some of these Hekhalot texts were redacted or even originated, but also in that it points to some of the important external and material evidence we have about the Descenders of the chariot: the Mesopotamian incantation bowls. This explicit reference to the use of this praxis in Babylonia by R. Akiba, in addition to the use of the word ‘Academy’ in 288 and 298 in the Babylonian sense of a session of Torah study, present some interesting points of reference when attempting to understand the possible relationship of these two literary traditions. This is discussed later on in this chapter.

¹²⁸ *Qal Vahomer*, just one of the hermeneutical principles expounded by Hillel ha Bavli, refers to a line of argument defined by the precedent of the ‘lesser’, and its relevance to the ‘greater’. If something applies in a less important point, “how much more” must it apply to the major? More specifically in this context, if Torah can be retained by those defined here as ‘dullards’, then how much more might it be retained by the rabbi? Indeed, with the necessary precautions and ritual practice, it would seem that anyone might retain and benefit from the lessons of Torah. For further comments, see J. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot*, p.275

For the authors of these Sar-Torah texts, the ritualised praxis of adjuration belonged not only in the lives of revered but distant rabbis, but in the lives of his readership. In a somewhat more elaborate version of the *Pereq R. Nehunya ben ha-Qanah* [§§307-314], placed immediately after the ‘Sar Torah’ of Hekhalot Rabbati, we are offered a far more detailed picture than those offered before, of precisely how these rituals of Sar Torah are to be carried out, and perhaps rather interestingly what the ‘student’- and potentially us the reader, might expect to get out of them. For it is here that we learn that for those who adjure by the ‘Great Seal’ and by the ‘Great Oath’ in the name of ‘Metatron’, should expect not only to acquire an erudite understanding of Torah, but a variety of additional, desirable attributes. Following a variant of the same basic narrative we find in the introduction of [§§278-280], the text goes on to reveal the means but also the precise instruction received by R. Ishmael from both R. Nehunya and the Sar Torah, but perhaps more importantly, clear explanation of how anyone might equally use his incantation [§310]:

‘and now, any student whose study is not sustained in him should stand and bless and rise and adjure in the name of MDGWBY’L GYWTY’L ZYWT’L TNRV’L HWZHYH SYN SGN SWBYR’WHW- they are all Metatron...and because of the love b which they love him on high, they say to him, ZYWTY’L, servant, Zevudiel YH Akhatriel YWY God of Israel, YWY, YWY ‘God compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness and faithfulness’.¹²⁹ R. Ishmael said: How should someone use this incantation? His mouth should utter names and his fingers should count one hundred and eleven times. He may not add or subtract, and if he adds to them and his harmed, his blood is on his head. And he who adjures must stand and uphold, in the name of Mergobiel’.¹³⁰

These far more precise instructions of precisely how one is to use the divine instruments of the ‘seal’ and the ‘crown’, and to whom these magical devices were to be directed, offers a striking parallel to the beginning of R. Nehunya’s instructions for how one was to ascend to Merkavah, alluded to in Hekhalot Rabbati [§204]. There, Nehunya describes his listeners that they should call upon ‘Surya, the Prince of the Presence’,

¹²⁹ Exodus, 34:6.

¹³⁰ Hekhalot Zutarti, §310

and adjure him a total of One Hundred and twelve times. The number was specific, for to adjure him one time more than that, or even one time less, was to bring upon oneself the divine wrath for all those who desired to trespass the divine order and were found wanting. To ensure that he makes no mistakes, Nehunya advises that he should count on his fingers as he speaks each of the instructed names- an instruction well received by R. Ishmael, for he too would also recommend this pragmatic approach and safeguard against antagonising the divine. Through it would that R. Ishmael's memory had begun to fail him, when he recommends in no uncertain terms that the adjuration must be repeated a total of one hundred and eleven times, as opposed to Hekhalot Rabbati's one hundred and twelve.¹³¹ The parallel of the instruction and the way it is expressed however, perhaps imply that the 'ascent to the Merkavah' and the 'Sar Torah' texts, no matter how different their purpose might seem, are in some way related and perhaps best understood in that way.¹³²

It is clear that the author of these Sar Torah texts thinks of us, his readership, as a struggling student of Torah, describing the precedent of a technology which had helped the most eloquent of rabbis comprehend the Torah, and the instructions for how we might equally seek to benefit from its praxis. Follow the instructions diligently, and we too might become as knowledgeable and eloquent as those revered rabbis of the distant past, though as the author in §311 sought to demonstrate, engaging with this technology could also result some unexpected, but not entirely unwelcome side effects for the savvy and enterprising student of Torah:

'R. Ishmael said: any student who recites this great mystery, his stature will be pleasing, his speech will be accepted and fear of him will rest on [fellow] creatures, and his dreams will be calm, and he will be saved from all kinds of tribulations and witchcraft, and from the judgement of Gehinnom'.¹³³

Here we identify a well-attested understanding of the full power of the magical practice and divine name, efficacious it would seem, not only in facilitating the acquisition of Torah, but in improving one's physical appearance, one's diction and how one is

¹³¹ This instruction to repeat the adjuration one hundred and eleven times also appears in *Merkavah Rabbah* 681 and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* 590, where the beings that attend the Merkavah speak God's name, using the name 'Totrosiai Yahweh', one hundred and eleven times.

¹³² See, Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, p.379.

¹³³ *Hekhalot Zutarti*, §311

received and respected by those around him. In this case, the unintended benefits of popularity and protection from witchcraft are by no means essential to the Sar-Torah practice R. Ishmael describes and the author prescribes for his readership- they were interested in learning Torah. Nevertheless, R. Ishmael was clearly understood to have profited in an array of unexpected ways by engaging in this theurgical of technologies, and the same was to be expected, whether it was sought after or not, by its readers. The suggestion that whoever masters the secret lore provided by these texts will, like R. Ishmael, acquire a variety of great and tangible rewards is not without significance, both for our understanding of the literature as a whole and its place in the wider world of Late Antiquity.

For the various authors of the Hekhalot texts- a knowledge of secrets was power, yet to know the secret mysteries of the upper world was to be acquainted with the means of ritually exercising a power of truly cosmological proportions. Harnessing divine language-including the various epithets of each supreme angel and other divine letter-sounds- and appropriating and rehearsing the various angelic gestures and cultic activities witnessed from an ascent on high, was assumed to have furnished those initiated few with a cosmological influence and authority with far-reaching implications over an entire cast of angelic actors upon both the celestial and terrestrial stage. With flair and adroit dexterity, rabbis like Nehunya b. Haqanah and R. Akiba employed the mysteries of divine language to ease and expedite the transcendental journey of a spiritual ascent on high, and to coerce angelic favours according to his bidding, but what's interesting about these rabbinic exploits, is that an understanding of the potential power of knowing and employing divine secrets, was by no means uniquely harboured in the Jewish imaginations of those who penned the Hekhalot. On the contrary, it is within those rich and fascinating textual traditions describing the ascetic lives of their Christian counterparts, that we can begin to discern how being close to the divine through spiritual endeavour, was equally assumed in the imagination of the Christian hagiographer, to have bought a familiarity with the means of exploiting its power. Through the labours and trials of an ascetic way of life, rather than moments of preparatory practice, the Christian Holy man not only came to know the divine but ensured the grace and favour of the divine; which he mediated on behalf of mankind and its miseries to produce the occasional but often spectacular coup de 'theatre. With his unparalleled position of esteem, and more importantly, with his knowledge and ritual invocation of certain esoteric elements, the Christian Holy man

sought to command the divine in ways not entirely dissimilar to the initiates of the Hekhalot, nor far removed from both the mentality and ritual techniques of the incantation practitioner. These comparisons are complex and certainly difficult to comprehend, but it is by drawing together the many nuggets and pixels of comparison, that we begin to form a fascinating insight into the rich cultural environment which Mesopotamian Judaism and Christianity would seem to have both taken and contributed in equal measure.

Concluding Thoughts

The texts which have been analysed in this chapter would contain descriptions of, and instructions for, approaching and accomplishing the seemingly impossible. In a way reminiscent of those biblical forebears who had experienced the divine through exceptionally close encounter, these texts would describe the possibility of ascending to the divine, and more interestingly, the means through which to do so. Theirs was a journey literally out of this world, to the celestial Hekhalot in which God sat enthroned, inundated by the adoration of a myriad of strange and sometimes frightening heavenly beings, but to participate in this celestial wonder, as indeed was the intent of many ascendees, one must have achieved a state of spiritual perfection. Angelic wrath and ultimate annihilation awaited all who dared to trespass against the cosmic order and were found wanting, though remarkably, and much to the relief of R. Ishmael, these Hekhalot narratives would describe a great profusion of techniques and technologies, including seals and adjurations, with which to bypass and at times, even command the spiritual powers of the cosmos.

Consisting of an array of intricate incantations and prayer formulas, biblical verses and divine names, the instructions of the Hekhalot and the proscribed technology of their recital, would transform the process of celestial encounter into little more than a recipe- a mechanical step-by-step guide of what to do, what to say and at what time. Though as we have seen, not every ascendees described by the Hekhalot intended simply to touch the divine. Some indeed, had ascended so as to learn to adjure and hence command the divine, for a variety of concerns and purposes. In this chapter, I have analysed narratives which describe adjurations for receiving a perfect knowledge of Torah (Sar ha-Torah), for bringing angels down from heaven, for various

revelations and indeed in the case of the R. Akiba, to command God to bind angels to his will. But what does all of this mean? How are we to understand both the belief that one might ascend into the heavens, and the descriptions and prescription of a ritualised, mechanical and forceful approach to the divine, and indeed, what are the wider implications of these narratives upon our understanding of the religiosity and imagination of Judaism, within these Late Antique Mesopotamian contexts?

The ritualised instruction of adjuration described in the texts of the Hekhalot, by no means emerged or evolved in isolation. To truly understand their comprehension of the cosmos, and their articulation of the power of adjuration to command and control it, one must open up the lens of enquiry beyond the texts of the Jewish Hekhalot and explore the possibility of their participation within a far larger complex of ritual practices widespread in Late Antiquity. Ritual techniques similar in form and comparable in purpose to those described in the visionary literature of the Hekhalot exist in a variety of Mesopotamian texts for ritual power, including a variety of Jewish Aramaic amulets, inscribed on metal strips, gemstones and an ever-increasing number of earthenware bowls- all defined by the single premise that human beings, with the correct invocations and *nomina-barbara*, could persuade or compel the divine to satisfy their every conceivable desire. In addition to erotic and malevolent adjurations, these amulet texts contained the hopes and demands of those who sought divine compliance, in facilitating the success of one's business, the protection of children or the expulsion of demons, to name just some of the mundane problems and concerns of everyday life. The goals of these adjurational texts and those of the Hekhalot may differ somewhat, the Hekhalot appearing somewhat innocent in their request and command of the divine for the sake of perfect knowledge of the Torah, but the mechanics which defined these tales of ascent on high and the mentality which underlie them clearly overlap, and may perhaps even be related.¹³⁴

Alexander, Shaked, Lesses and Davila have all noted and described to varying extents the apparent similarities and parallels which might be drawn between the adjurations of the Hekhalot literature and the corpus of Mesopotamian incantations of Late Antiquity, with Lesses going so far as to situate and understand the Hekhalot, not

¹³⁴ Underlying both of these texts was a common mentality, which assumed that a knowledge of secrets was power, and a knowledge of the secrets of the supernatural must inevitably grant the individual with that knowledge, a power and influence over them. One who knows the names of specific celestial beings, including angels, demons and at times even God himself, can utilise that knowledge in order to command a certain mastery over them, and when recited through incantation, to force them to do his will. In many ways then, the technology represented by the adjurational texts of Late Antiquity constitute the practical counterpart to kinds of ritual practice which are described by the Hekhalot literature, and are perhaps best understood in that light. For further discussion, see J. Dan, *Ancient Jewish Mysticism* (Tel Aviv: MOD Books, 1993), p.18 and D. Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls* (London: Kegan Paul, 2003), pp. 14-17.

merely as theoretical or imaginative books but as reflections of prescribed practice.¹³⁵ The suggestion of relationship between these two types of text, and perhaps even between those who wrote them, is founded upon parallels of greater and lesser significance, with Davila pointing to the danger of overemphasising the circumstantial evidence of those parallels attested not only in texts of ritual power but also in Jewish literature overall. Here we might consider the celestial cosmography of seven heavens, multitudes of angels, and speculation about the divine throne room, but Davila has also warned against overemphasising those aspects of the Hekhalot, which I have found to be so convincing in alluding to the relationship of these texts, with the far larger adjurational world of Late Antiquity. These include adjurations and seals of power to control angels, which whilst clearly significant, are 'so widely attested in the other texts of ritual power that they offer little focus to our analyses and put us in danger of circular reasoning if over-emphasised'.¹³⁶ Such may be the case, but how then to explain the undeniably significant presence of Hekhalot passages, phrases and portions of adjurations, embedded within the texts of Mesopotamia's incantation Bowls.¹³⁷ In light of the dangers of over-emphasising the meaning and suggestion of the Hekhalot description of adjuration, these Hekhalot extracts point to some of the earliest depictions of how the texts of the Hekhalot were understood by Mesopotamia's practitioners, and indeed how the material was used within his theurgical technology, and so must be taken seriously.

Clearly, the texts of the Hekhalot were not merely objects of study for the spiritual enrichment of those who read them, rather their inclusion within Mesopotamia's incantations hints at the potential practical nature and relevance of this branch of knowledge in shaping the magic of the incantation. As Shaul Shaked suggests in a recent article, 'there were some Jewish sorcerers who were versed in the mysteries of the Hekhalot, and could make use of the soaring language of the Hekhalot texts when they composed a spell'. Indeed, though we should not necessarily assume therefore that all those who wrote amulets or bowls were especially acquainted with the Hekhalot corpora. Those incantations which do make use of its narratives do not

135 See P.S. Alexander, 'Sefer ha-Razim and the Problem of Black Magic in Early Judaism, in *Magic in the Biblical World: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, (ed.) T. E. Klutz (London: T&T Clark International, 2003) pp.170-190; Idem., 'Incantations and Books of Magic', in in E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ: A New English Version, revised and edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Goodman* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1986): vol. 3, part 1; S. Shaked, 'Peace be upon you, Exalted Angels, *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 2:3 (1995), pp.197-219; J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formula* (Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 1993), pp.17-22; R. Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* (1998) & D. Davila, *Descenders* (2001).

136 D. Davila, *Descenders*, p.215

137 Shaked has suggested that those magician scribes of the bowl texts who had knowledge of Hekhalot material borrowed various formulae and divine names which they incorporated unto their incantations, see S. Shaked, (1995). For further comments on the redaction of Hekhalot texts, see P. Schafer, 'Tradition and Redaction in Hekhalot Literature', in *Journal of the Study of Judaism* 14 (1983), pp.172-181.

reproduce long, involved Hekhalot texts, but instead adopt just small phrases or even simply a name or terminology, central to the concerns of the Hekhalot. One such example, uncovered by Joseph Montgomery and subsequently studied in significant detail by a number of scholars including Lesses, Epstein, Davila and, is the Mesopotamian incantation text entitled 'Bowl 25'.¹³⁸

'Healing from heaven for Guroi b. Tati, son of Tati and for Ahat b. Duda, his wife. May there depart from them all de[ws and may] they [be healed] by the mercies of heaven from children who die to them, so that they may have children and they l[ive]. May those who] have died find themselves in the presence of the god and goddesses, and the gods and goddesses. You are a pr[ince over pr]inces, and your chariot is over all the Ophannim. Send to them LHRDRBDWBR [...] I, the LORD of all, who's [Toa]ah of mercy is placed in my mouth and all of [his] w[ays] are law. Blessed are You, YHWH, on account of the words of the name. In the name of YWPY'L- your name is YHW'L, they call you SSNG'YL YH YH-and all the re[st of] their names. [R]MSH Metatron YH. In the name of TGYN 'TRYGYS BLBYS SNGS SDRPS. These are the angels who bring healing of the people of [his] household and of his cattle and of his wife and of [his] so[n] and of his daughter and all the people in his household, for this GWRYW, son of T'TY, from this day and for eternal ages. Amen, Amen. Selah. Hallelujah.¹³⁹

This revealing insight into the mind-sets of the Late Antique practitioner and those who employed them, describes an incantation for the mundane and very human concerns of the married couple Guroi b. Tati and Ahat b. Duda, for their health and well-being, for their fertility and for a recurrent theme throughout the corpus of Mesopotamian incantation bowls- the protection of their future offspring. 'Dews', or rather the demonic supernatural and its inclination to cause harm are the source of this couple's concern, and it is within the practitioners suggestion of an equally powerful and supernatural remedy, that this incantation shows remarkable parallels, both to those 'Sar ha-Torah' texts from the Cairo Genizah and to those Hekhalot manuscripts

138 J. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Museum Press, 1903), pp.207-208; J. Epstein, 'Gloses babylo-arameenes,' *REJ* 74 (1922), pp. 53-54; R. Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power*, pp.354-359. See also S. Shaked, 'Peace be upon you, Exalted Angels, pp.197-219.

139 Translation taken from Montgomery's reading, see J. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Museum Press, 1903), pp.207-208

which employ the names of 'Metatron' in an adjurational context.¹⁴⁰ Rebecca Lesses, in particular, has pointed to numerous connections between this bowl and the Hekhalot literature, noting and discussing in some detail how references to adjurational use of the name Metatron are closely related to a passage found in various recensions of the *Shi'ur Qomah* and in Genizah fragments of Sar Torah material, but perhaps the interesting aspect of the incantation for our purposes, is the request of the practitioner to have Torah placed in his mouth.¹⁴¹ As Lesses suggests, 'this seems to be the earliest evidence for the use of Sar ha-Torah incantations to gain Torah knowledge', and provides an interesting parallel between the Jewish, Mesopotamian incantation and the *Sar-ha Torah* adjurations of the Hekhalot.¹⁴²

This particular incantation would point not only the kind of parallels which Davila and others have considered circumstantial, but to significant and rather fascinating sites of inter-textuality. It was composed by someone who believed not only in a particular cosmology and the power of incantation to command it for the sake of his customer's concerns, but perhaps more significantly in the relevance of Hekhalot literature to his trade. Indeed, like the incantation texts which he wrote, the Hekhalot texts gave instructions for and encouragement to all those who sought to adjure the divine, which if followed without deviation, were guaranteed to coerce and obligate a plethora of celestial figures to cooperate with the various requests of the human adjurer. Whether or not we think of the Hekhalot texts, its adjurations and request for safe passage on heavenly ascents, knowledge of Torah and command over the angels as practical devices, it is clear that to the author this particular incantation certainly did, making no distinction between the Hekhalot traditions and his own particular brand of text for ritualised power. Nor was he by any means alone in coming to such conclusions.

Invocations of the name of the *Prince of Torah* and descriptions of the heavenly ascents of practitioner are inscribed by the hand of a number of Mesopotamia's Bowl practitioner's, but Lesses has drawn attention and emphasised the significance of the contents of one bowl in particular. Published by Gordon in 1984, the incantation of Bowl 'Moriah 1' adjures typically for the protection of MH'NWS, son of 'ZRMWDWK, his wife Eve and their offspring against the malicious attacks of demons.¹⁴³ His house, his residence, bed and family are all 'sealed' by the 'seven charms', 'seven fetters,' and

140 P. Schafer, *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot Literatur*, G-4, and Idem., *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur*, §395 and §732 respectively.

141 The *Shi'ur Qomah* passages are in *Sepher Razi'el*, 13-22 and *Sepher HaQomah*, 6-9 in M. S. Cohen, *Shiur Qomah: Texts and Recensions: Texte Und Studien Zum Antiken Judentum*, 9 (London: Coronet Books, 1985). The Sar Torah text is G4, 1A, 9-14.

142 R. Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power*, p.354.

143 C. Gordon, 'Bowls in the Moriah Collection', *Orientalia* 53, (1984) pp. 220-241.

'seven seals', through which numerous kinds of 'dews', 'satans' and 'Liliths' are all neutralised, but what's interesting about this text is how it would also go on to describe 'a great seal', the 'sealing of the throne', and the wheels and living creatures- all traditions and motifs recognisable from the Hekhalot literature. Following further adjurations against the devious and cunning stratagems of the demonic, we read how the suggested concerns of MH'NWS, son of 'ZRMWDWK are 'sealed and resealed in the name of Anaphi'el, the angel who is different after them, whose name is MRGWG'- perhaps one of the most striking references reminiscent of the Hekhalot literature. Lesses notes three parallels in particular between this incantation texts description of Anaphi'el and the complex of traditions which can be discerned from the Hekhalot, first of which is the nomina-barbara 'MRGWG', a nomenclature similar to those names used to describe Metatron in the narratives surrounding Nehanya ben Haqanah in *Hekhalot Rabbati* and in *Merkavah Rabba*.¹⁴⁴ In contrast, the second parallel alludes to much more than the parallel of common nomenclature. Line 23 reads 'by this mystery, and by this great name, and by this seal of rulership, by which 'Anafi'el the angel sealed', bringing to mind the tradition in Hekhalot Rabbati in which Anafi'el is the keeper of the divine signet ring: 'the ring of the seal of heaven and earth is given into his hand'.¹⁴⁵ There is a suggestion here of the understanding of this incantations author, of the power and special status ascribed to Anafi'el in the Hekhalot, where he is described not only as one of the guardians of the Seventh Hekhalot but as the angel who first plucks Enoch from amongst mankind and punishes him with severe celestial punishment when Elisha b. Abuya confuses him for a rival celestial power to God.¹⁴⁶ The third and most important parallel lies of course in the suggestion that if Anaphi'el is properly invoked then he might be adjured to the will of the practitioner. In Hekhalot Zutarti, we are told how anyone might adjure Anaphi'el to protect and avenge themselves of any slander.

'Everyone who wishes to pray this prayer and to mediate PMN the
WRPL of his creator should pronounce one letter from these letters.
Again, I will not turn to the right of the left, until I turn and I do his will,
and everyone who speaks slander about him, I will immediately strike

144 P. Schafer, *Synopse*, §310 and §682.

145 Ibid, §241.

146 Ibid, §241-242

him and destroy him, other than the angel who is the messenger of the king of Glory'.¹⁴⁷

This incantation provides a fascinating example of Anaphi'el doing just that: abiding by the instruction of an incantation for the purpose of protecting and releasing MH'NWS, son of 'ZRMWDWK, his wife Eve from the attention and harassment of Demonic malice.

The incantation of 'Moriah 1' is a second of many possible examples of Mesopotamian Bowl incantations which drew upon a whole range of Hekhalot traditions.¹⁴⁸ While this bowl in particular may not contain or therefore exhibit the practitioners knowledge/lack of, of specific Hekhalot text, his use of its ideas and motifs certainly do encourage us to consider how knowledge of Hekhalot traditions had permeated the larger framework of Jewish ritual texts and practices in Late Antique Mesopotamia, and to assess more clearly who might have written, practiced, or even known the former. The cumulative force of this anthropological and historical data has led historians such as Davila to conclude that the religious functionaries described in the Hekhalot, those that ascended on high to touch the divine through ritualised practice were indeed real people, and that the rituals described were a genuine practice. To Davila, their parallel to the ritual techniques of the incantation texts of Mesopotamia also alluded to another reality- that the authors of these texts made use of other forms of ritual power, only hinted at in the Hekhalot themselves. Where the Hekhalot only hints at the potential of this technology to compel angels to grant supernatural knowledge of Torah, other Mesopotamian examples of ritual texts fill out this picture, and allude to its full potential to heal, to protect, exorcise demons and enlist the help of angels for a variety of purposes. The ascenders to the chariot may only have adjured so as to touch the divine and acquire the fullest knowledge of Torah, but as Davila implies, this emphasis on the individual practitioner and his seemingly limited motivations should not deceive us into thinking that the goals of the Hekhalot literature revolve around the individual practitioner. In rabbinic thought, the words of Torah were in themselves imbued with a power all of their own, a power upon which the sage can draw, and it is in those incantations which invoke the name of the Prince

¹⁴⁷ *Hekhalot Zutarti*, §421

¹⁴⁸ Shaul Shaked has also published an inscribed bowl 'Moussaieff 1', which although doesn't contain any specific passages or mention any crucially significant motifs, does nevertheless contain numerous general connections to the Hekhalot literature. The practitioner would make a request and refer in lines 12-13 to 'he who is enthroned upon four Cherubim who have sixty-four faces'. The writer was clearly familiar with liturgical traditions associated with these texts and connects them to the notion that angels may indeed be called upon to heal victims of demonic possession within the format of incantation bowl incantations. See S. Shaked, 'Peace be upon You, Exalted Angels', pp.198-200.

of Torah, to protect individuals, to ensure prosperity or for whatever mundane concern for which these incantations were commissioned, that we see that power in practice.¹⁴⁹

In this chapter, I have attempted to engross myself within the minds and spirituality of communities living within both historically and geographically distant contexts, relying only upon the textual traditions which they've left behind or handed down to succeeding generations. As such, any consideration of the mentalities which we might discern from the quagmire of Hekhalot literature can be considered to be educated guesses at best. Whether the Hekhalot and incantation texts of Late Antiquity bared any meaningful relationship, not to mention the authors who wrote them, is difficult to say. However, what we might suggest with some confidence is that whilst the praxis are certainly not identical, powerful words of adjuration recited for the purpose of commanding the divine, whether to touch the divine or command it for one's own uses, do indeed form the heart of both types of ritual. Both types of adjuration describe the same practical and forceful use of language in addition to describing similar processes of purification, offerings and prayer. Some aspects of this comparison are perhaps circumstantial or of little consequence; mere hints and pixels of what is a far more complex and unfocused picture. But it is when we begin to consider all these comparisons of little consequence together, and perhaps even alongside those with greater repercussions, that the larger picture of the religiosity of the Hekhalot and its relationship to the Incantation literature of Late Antique Mesopotamia comes into focus. Perhaps those who wrote these texts were not one and the same person, but if not, then both were certainly products of the very same Mesopotamian framework, feeding from it and contributing to it in a way which would infuse each of the texts with undeniably similar and almost indistinguishable flavour.

In the texts of the Hekhalot and in the wider economy of Mesopotamian Judaism, the Rabbi was widely considered to be a holy man, though not only in terms of his immeasurable spirituality, but rather in terms of the divinely conferred powers and talents with which he was imbued.¹⁵⁰ What was extraordinary about him was his

149 For Mesopotamia's incantation bowls as the practical counterpart to the ritual techniques and concepts alluded to within the visionary literature of the Hekhalot, see D. Levine, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls*, pp.14-17.

150 The image of the rabbi as a 'Holy man' has been explored by several scholars, see especially J. Neusner, 'Rabbi and Magus in Third-Century Sassanian Babylonia' in *History of Religions* 6:2 (1966), pp.169-178; R. Kirschner, 'The Vocation of Holiness in Late Antiquity', *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984), pp.105-124; R. Kalmin, 'Holy Men, Rabbis and Demonic Sages in Late Antiquity', in *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire* (Leuven: Peters, 2003); D. Levine, 'Holy Men and Rabbis in Talmudic Antiquity' in *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp.45-57; C. Safrai and Z. Safrai, 'Rabbinic Holy Men' in *ibid.*, pp.59-78 and J. Levinson, 'Enchanting Rabbis: Contest Narratives between Rabbis and Magicians in Late Antiquity', in *JQR* 100 (2010), pp.54-94. The rabbinic materials considered vary in their descriptions of the potential of the rabbi and his knowledge of the secret words of 'Torah', from those describing the rabbi's potential to bring rain and drought (mTa'anit 3.8; bTa'anit, 24b) to those which describe rabbis as famed healers (bShabbat 110b), fortune tellers and as having the ability to outwit

mastery over a theurgical body of learning which, as can be seen from the texts of the Hekhalot, furnished him with an unprecedented power both in heaven and on earth. This potentially powerful form of learning was referred to as ‘Torah’, and embraced much more than the law of God as revealed to Moses in the accounts of the Pentateuch, and the oral traditions which subsequently evolved alongside them. More than words of simple worldly semantic meaning, these cosmological sounds and divine utterances were in themselves seen to imbue a divine power as physical and tangible representations of divinity on earth, with powerful repercussions for those rabbinic Holy Men with a true understanding of their potential. Their wisdom was such that they could decipher and unravel both natural and supernatural phenomena, from negotiating an ascent on high to more terrestrial, though divinely inspired happenings. Indeed no phenomenon whether above or below proved to be beyond the remit of their understanding, as is perhaps implied within the Hekhalot accounts of R. Akiba, whose knowledge of angelic names and cosmic secrets facilitated not only an ascent on high but the request that all angelic beings be bound to him and his instruction. The substance and effect of this gnosis, both in the Hekhalot and perhaps even more noticeably in the rabbinic corpus more generally, impressed upon the Rabbi the status of an extraordinary man by virtue of what he knew—a holy man, whose understanding of secret mysteries brought not only a proximity to the divine, but evidently, a proximity to its power.

It is this literary dynamic between knowing and employing divine secrets, which I intend to explore in the following discourse of this thesis; looking beyond the Jewish imaginations of those who penned the traditions of the Hekhalot, and instead, to the rich and fascinating textual traditions describing the ascetic lives of their Christian counterparts. It is within these narratives that we discern how being close to the divine through spiritual endeavour was equally assumed by Christian hagiographers, to have bought a similar familiarity with the means and modes of exploiting its power. Labours of an ascetic way of life rather than moments of preparatory practice, ensured the Christian Holy man not only came to know the divine but that he received the grace and favour of divine benevolence, which he mediated on mankind’s behalf. With his unparalleled position of esteem, but perhaps more importantly, with his knowledge and ritual invocation of certain esoteric elements, the Christian Holy man sought to command the divine in ways not entirely dissimilar to the initiates of the Hekhalot, nor

the angel of death (bMoed Katan 28a; bMegilla 29a). Some could control heat and fire (bTa’anit 21b), whilst others were deemed able to counter demonic attack through various practices (bBerakot 50b; tShabbat 7.16).

indeed far removed from both the mentality and ritual techniques of the incantation practitioner. These resonances are complex and their meaning is certainly difficult to comprehend, but it is by drawing together the many nuggets and pixels of comparison that we might perhaps begin to form a fascinating insight into something of the rich cultural environment in which all of these textual traditions were produced.

3

Approaching the Divine and Appropriating its Power: Thoughts of Apotheosis in the textual traditions of the Syriac Orient in Late Antiquity

'We must seek the truth, for, as our LORD said, the truth will set us free. That implies, however, that we must humble ourselves and break our minds'.¹⁵¹ modern readers would presumably recognise and identify with the inclination to seek out the truth and a knowledge of the actuality of things, but perhaps even the studiously inclined would question the efficacy of 'breaking one's mind' (ܩܠܒܐ ܕܡܢ) in order to do so.¹⁵² The fascinating reasoning of what ostensibly seems to be such an illogical and inadvisable suggestion becomes notably more coherent, when we perceive that for the Christian author who penned these words, the human mind in its present form was indeed already broken-defeated and torn from its intended state before god in heaven. To 'break one's mind' related not to its irreversible destruction as we might at first have assumed, but on the contrary, to its reconfiguration and to the process of its deliverance and emancipation, through the assiduous rejection of earthly entanglements and a painstaking dedication to those unfamiliar traits of humility and modest diffidence.¹⁵³ For the anonymous Christian author of the fifth Century treatises referred to as 'the Book of Steps' (ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ), 'breaking' or perhaps 're-breaking' the mind was necessary, not only for excellent living in the eyes of God, but for the proper functioning of the cognitive processes.¹⁵⁴ Those who do not 'break their minds'

151 *Book of Steps*, 1.2. Unless otherwise stated, all readings are taken from, *The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum* (trans.) R. A Kitchen and M. F. G. Parmentier (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2004).

152 Both Kitchen and Parmentier translate 'subdue' rather than 'break' the mind, since the phrase is basically parallel to humbling oneself, but a literal translation of the term 'ܩܠܒܐ' alludes to the richly evocative image of breaking, pounding and wearing away. This was the kind of grinding pulverisation that occurs when the material nature of something has been ground down by a constant abrasive action or sudden impact. See R. A Kitchen and M. F. G. Parmentier, (2004). Unless otherwise stated, all translations of Syriac terminology addressed in this chapter are taken from R. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary: Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1902).

153 On the prominent role of the notion of virtue upon epistemological assumptions, see J. W. Childers, 'We Must Seek the Truth: Theological Scholarship in the Early Syriac Tradition', *Restoration Quarterly*, 49 (2007), pp.193-216 and Idem. 'Humility Begets Wisdom and Discernment: Character and True Knowledge in Aphrahat' in *Studia Patristica* (ed.) F. Young (Leuven: Peeters, 2006).

154 The Mid-to-late- fourth century Syriac *Book of Steps* is a collection of 30 Memra or discourses which depict a rare and fascinating insight into the minds of a Christian community over a significant, though undetermined length of time. Written in the Adiabene region (modern Northeast Iraq) in the time of the Sassanian Empire, its authors would describe the biblical record and its characters according to a unique and insightful hermeneutic, in their endeavour to instruct and exhort its readers to a vibrant, ascetical way of life. This was the optimum spiritual way of life- a steep road of gruelling and potentially dangerous steps which one must climb in order to reach the city of the king our LORD. For an English translation and introduction, see *The Book of Steps: The Syriac Liber Graduum*, (trans.) R. A. Kitchen and M. F. G. Parmentier, Cistercian Studies 196

Epistemological assumptions of the correlation between sound cognitive processes and praiseworthy dispositions perhaps seems strange to modern conceptions of how to acquire and ascertain truth and knowledge. Modern epistemology tends to be preoccupied with the problems of negotiating proposed truths, rationalising and defending established truths and responding to scepticism, rather than contemplating the value of moral qualities to the analysis of knowledge and critical reflection. Though for the Syriac Christian writers of Late Antiquity, an assumption of the correlation and interconnection between concepts of 'knowledge' and 'virtue' would seem to have had a profound impact in shaping the kinds of mentality and subsequent practices which underlie a great many of their textual traditions.¹⁵⁶ For the authors of texts like 'the Book of Steps', a proficient understanding of truth was as dependent on the properties of persons as their analysis of beliefs, so that, for instance, an acquisition of knowledge might be explained in terms of that person's relation to prescribed virtues. Knowledge had always had a moral dimension- it was never neutral: the closer one was to embracing the virtues of humility, the closer one was to an erudite and comprehensive understanding of the kinds of celestial truths which, according to our author, 'closed' and morally 'corrupted' minds were simply unable to ascertain and comprehend. Addressing oneself to the principles and truth values of a propositional object like the biblical texts, and to conventional channels of acquiring its teaching, would not suffice. Apprehending and envisaging the kinds of truths which had been envisaged by the 'Yored Merkavah', required that one become attuned to the life and mind of him whom was its source- and according to our author, that meant a life of 'breaking the mind' and correcting the falsehoods, which had so effectively diverted its cognition.

156 When the Syriac writer wrote, his words were those of the bible and, at least in the 5th-6th centuries, those biblical words possessed an undeniable flavour of asceticism. From its beginning, therefore, Syriac Christianity was an ascetically- motivated faith and it is in this mode that it is frequently perceived and remembered. See, S. A. Harvey, 'Creation and Asceticism: Syriac Christian Thought' in *Christian Thought: A Brief History*, (ed.) A. Hastings, A. Mason and H. Pyper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). p.34

In this chapter, I hope to explore how the corrective process of ascetically realigning the mind towards the pursuit of moral excellence, articulated here by the Fourth Century 'Book of Steps' as 'breaking the mind', was also an intrinsic component in the narratives of a number of the Late Antique and early Medieval Hagiographical texts of the Syriac Orient (c.400-900 CE). Though the specific motif of 'breaking one's mind' seems to have been uniquely conceived and adapted by the imagination behind the 'Book of Steps', it's fundamental premise; that the mind was in need of dramatic reorientation, was deemed equally crucial, not only in securing the individual's salvation but also rather more interestingly, for the individual's renewed cognition of otherwise hidden, and potentially powerful celestial gnosis. My intention here is not only to explore hagiographical accounts of individual pursuits of ascetic piety, though this is undoubtedly a justifiable subject of research in its own right, but rather to determine something of the hagiographer's understanding of the potential ramifications for those who had been so inclined to do so: to discern how reorienting the mind away from the entanglements of its earthly existence towards the moral qualities of spiritual perfection was seen, not only to have facilitated an increasing proximity to the Divine but also an increasing familiarity with the perception, and thereby with the power and status, of heaven's celestial beings.¹⁵⁷ Through their preparatory practices of asceticism, their subsequent ascent towards an understanding of the esoteric, and its transformation into more earthly forms of prayer ritual, we saw in Chapter Two how the Yored Merkavah sought to adjure the Sar-Torah to acquire a perfect memory of Torah, to be saved from all kinds of tribulations and 'witchcraft', and even to be exempted 'from the judgement of Gehinnom'. Here, in the following two parts of this chapter's discourse, we discern how a large number of Late Antiquity's Christian hagiographers would echo these sentiments and attribute a similar potential to the ascetic practice, mystical experience and discernment of their Christian contemporaries: how the Christian mystic's experience of celestial ascent would serve to transform the capacity and qualities of his cognition, but also how the content of his subsequent gnosis of the celestial realm and its secrets, would serve to facilitate the signs of his new and perhaps even semi-divine status. It is to these Christian conceptualisations of religious experience; to their tripartite narratives of ascetic piety, mystical apotheosis and the power of acquired gnosis, in addition to its seemingly

¹⁵⁷ Issac of Nineveh would articulate this Syriac Christian paradigm particularly effectively with the suggestion: 'What Scripture was not permitted was not permitted to reveal, the pure mind is authorised to know- something that goes beyond what was entrusted to scripture.' For further reading, see S. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, (Kalamazoo, MI. Cistercian Publications, 1987), p.285

explicit resonance to significant conceptual and phenomenological aspects of contemporary Hekhalot speculation, to which this thesis shall now devote its attention.

Framing the Question

According to Christian theology, the human mind had not always been so ignorant of the truth, nor had it always required such drastic and comprehensive realignment. Like a number of contemporary Syriac texts, the 'Book of Steps' would describe how the human mind had once been situated in the immediate presence of God, with Adam and Eve leading a kind of multi-dimensional existence.¹⁵⁸ As their minds 'stood before God in heaven', their bodies had dwelt within the paradisiacal setting of Eden; apparently destined for eventual exaltation and a fuller experience of integration in heaven.¹⁵⁹ In its primitive condition, the immature minds of Adam and Eve had been entirely orientated towards heavenly realities and to a discernment belonging to heavenly beings, as opposed to the rather more earthly inclinations which would eventually dull the perceptions of their celestial cognition, and lead to the eventual predicament of their damnation. This was the state which God had intended for mankind: a situation in which the human mind negotiated the same celestial space and understanding as the angels, though as the author of the Book of Steps reminds us, Adam and Eve were by no means content with simply being the diligent students of divine instruction.¹⁶⁰ On the contrary; both 'naive' and 'conceited', these primordial students had sought to become 'great like their creator', to usurp God's place as the divine pedagogue through a prideful attempt to seize understanding, and with it, a

158 Aphrahat's *Demonstration* 17:7, describes a similar though distinctive teaching, suggesting that humanity was first 'conceived and dwelt in the mind of God' prior to its full birth. For further discussion see J. W. Childers, 'humility begets wisdom and Discernment: Character and True Knowledge in Aphrahat', in *Studia Patristica* 15, (ed.) F. Young (Leuven: Peeters, 2006).

159 The story of the Early Syriac Church was not the Exodus or the Sinai covenant, which had played such a crucial role within the textual traditions of their Jewish contemporaries, but the events of the Garden of Eden. Even the Gospel narratives about Jesus simply complete or restore the original story in Eden. See, P. Alexander, 'The Fall into Knowledge: The Garden of Eden/Paradise in Gnostic Literature', in *A Walk in the Garden* (ed.) P. Morris and D. Sawyer (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992) pp.92-105; G. Anderson, 'The Cosmic Mountain: Eden and Its Early Interpreters in Syriac Christianity', in *Genesis 1-3 in the History of Exegesis: Intrigue in the Garden* (ed.) G. A. Robbins, (Lewiston: Mellen, 1988) pp. 187-224 and R. A. Kitchen, *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Syriac Book of Steps* (Oxford: SLG Press, 2013) p.33.

160 *BoS* 21:10 would describe how God had created Adam from dust, and mingled him with the heavenly angels. The notion that the ascetic existence imitated the original perfect incarnation of mankind, and thus anticipated an angelic existence was prominent theme throughout Syriac Literature of the Late Antique period. For further reading on the perceived relationship between Adam's initial state, its resemblance to the angels and mankind's imitation through asceticism, see S. Brock, 'Early Syrian Asceticism' in *Numen*, 20:1 (1973) pp.5-6.

power to control his creation.¹⁶¹ To borrow a phrase from Kitchen, their aspiration was: 'nothing but the end result of a non-humility' - a corruption of the distinguishing qualities that had rendered man's primitive mind worthy of its esteemed position alongside God, and its celestial discernment. Their motive had been the alluring temptation of knowledge and the tantalising assumption of the power it would bring; indeed having indulged in the pleasures of its forbidden fruit both Adam and Eve were assumed to have at least momentarily acquired a simultaneous, if somewhat fleeting insight, into both celestial and more ephemeral truths. Yet it would seem, far from empowering the mind, such a toxic concoction had served only to poison and impair its cognition; distancing them and successive future generations, from the purity and privileged status formerly afforded to humanity within the celestial realm.¹⁶² At the moment when primal humanity stood on the brink of divinization, its destiny had been forfeit by arrogant wilfulness and child-like naivety: pride and a desire for elevated status had got in the way, and a discernment of 'true' knowledge became ever more elusive, as humanity slipped into an existence defined by the ill-advised ambitions upon which it had acted.¹⁶³

By diverting their minds from heavenly bliss to earthly temptations, Adam and Eve had enslaved themselves but also all of mankind to the entanglements of an earthly and mortal existence, defined by the exertions of anxiety and labour; marriage and childbirth, but perhaps most definitively of all- to the predicament of death. Time, would seem to have served only to further entrench those inclinations which had once so devastatingly captivated their primordial forefathers; with each successive generation becoming entangled in the same snares and struggling against the same temptations. Indeed, desiring equally to be like God, they ate 'the same fruit' and 'loved the earth and all that was in it'.¹⁶⁴ The disaster of man's initial fall and the continued demise of successive generations had separated the human mind from God and its original condition, but according to the author of the 'Book of Steps', its subsequent

161 In common with other Syriac Christian exegetes, the author of these texts does not understand the tragedy which was to befall mankind in the Garden of Eden to be based in sexuality, but rather in the lust for the kind of knowledge which they hoped would allow them to become, and act like their creator, see Kitchen, *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Syriac Book of Steps* (Oxford: SLG Press, 2013).

162 The author suggests that 'because God had only taught what is good to Adam and Eve when he created them, they did not know evil until they had obeyed Satan and he taught them evil. Because of this, Satan is called the "Tree", through which Adam and Eve knew evil and good...They became knowers of good and evil'. See *BoS* 21:1

163 For the author of this text, 'knowing truth' had been and continued to be as much a state of being and a way of acting, as an experience of cognitive awareness and understanding. The elevated status and celestial Gnosis which Adam and Eve had craved would have been granted to them, if only they had been humble enough to receive these things spiritually and through humility, according to divine arrangements. By defiantly attempting to obtain these things in an earthly fashion, mankind fell from its known state of perfection and understanding to taste death and ignorance alongside the Evil One, whose flawed reasoning had proved so effective in bringing about his downfall. See R. A. Ratcliff, 'Steps Along the Way of Perfection: The Liber Graduum and Early Syrian Monasticism' (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1988), pp.138-139.

164 *BoS* 21:10.

surrender to materialism had equally resulted in an inability: 'to live in that kind of loving and accepting relationship with other human beings which had been God's intent for humanity'.¹⁶⁵ The corruption of the mind which had derived from its new found entanglement, would produce patterns of greed and jealousy, lust and violence, and other unfamiliar character traits which the 'Evil One' continued to manipulate so as to further perpetuate humanity's demise into ever lower levels of moral corruption, and spiritual degeneracy. Yet, it would seem that damnation by default was by no means the destiny pre-determined for all of mankind. On the contrary, as the narrative of the 'Book of Steps' and other similar ascetic discourses sought to primarily emphasise; Adam and Eve had not fallen into 'a pit of damnation' but rather into a state described as earthly 'uprightness' (ܐܪܥܐ)¹⁶⁶-a divine concession and opportunity for all humans to potentially enjoy a somewhat limited salvation, by adhering to a lower code of God's Law. To pursue a similar 'path' of earthly uprightness therefore was to attain to a spiritual state inferior to that which God had initially intended for his creation, but one which nevertheless anticipated an eventual heavenly salvation: 'since God desired that all should live'.¹⁶⁷

The 'path' towards earthly 'uprightness' (ܐܪܥܐ) however was just one of the possible set of steps our author and other Syriac Christian writers would prescribe for the genuinely repentant. Indeed, building upon the primordial precedent of those foundations established by the path of 'uprightness', the *Book of Steps* describes how the advent of Jesus Christ had not only established a new path but an entirely new eschatological potential for mankind- one which hinted at the opportunity for those more inclined towards spiritual salvation, to regain paradise and a long-lost state of 'perfection' by participating in the mind of Jesus and his radical ethic (ܐܡܪܝܬܐܝܢܐ).¹⁶⁸

165 Ratcliff, 'Steps', p.72.

166 'ܐܪܥܐ', ܐܪܥܐ 'The upright', or 'the Just and righteous ones', defined according to an obedience to 'the Law' rather than according to the expectations of God. It was an existence lived according to the Law of God in a worldly existence, which had existed prior to the possibility of monastic asceticism, and would continue to offer a righteous but inferior way of life to those lacking the necessary discipline, to become one of Late Antiquity's 'spiritual athletes'.

167 *BoS*, 7:21

168 'ܐܡܪܝܬܐܝܢܐ', from the Syriac root 'ܐܡܪ' denoting individual 'perfection' and 'completeness', can be found in the texts of the Syriac Peshita a total of fifty-five times, distributed across fifteen of the canonical texts. It's frequent usage is in the 'letter to the Hebrews' where it was written fifteen times and in the 'Letter to the Romans' where it would appear nine times. It was Mathew's two uses of the word 'ܐܡܪܝܬܐܝܢܐ' both in Mathew 19:21 and Mathew 5:48, which would leave an indelible mark both Syriac and Christian asceticism more generally. Here, it had been written 'if you would be perfect (ܐܡܪܝܬܐܝܢܐ), go and sell all that you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me'. These words had been taken to heart by the early desert fathers, though no less important was Mathew's suggestion that 'You therefore must be perfect (ܐܡܪܝܬܐܝܢܐ) just as your heavenly Father is perfect (ܐܡܪܝܬܐܝܢܐ)'. Christ's command for mankind to attain perfection would empower to word (ܐܡܪܝܬܐܝܢܐ) throughout the history of Syriac Monastic asceticism. 'Memra Seventeen: On the sufferings of our LORD who became through them an Example for Us', in *The Book of Steps*, provides the significant ideas for this aspect. See R. Roux, 'The Doctrine of the Imitation of Christ in the Liber Graduum: Between Exegetical Theory and Soteriology', *Studia Patristica* 30 (1997) pp.259-264.

Jesus had been the ‘perfecter of perfection’:¹⁶⁹ a remedy to the toxic fruit of good and evil to which all by default have been subjected.¹⁷⁰ Whilst on earth, his mind had dwelt on heavenly things despite the temptations of his earthly surroundings; humbling himself and exhibiting a moral excellence specifically so that the descendants of Adam could see the condition from which the human mind had fallen, and the principles by which one might recover the mind’s initial orientation, the faculties of its celestial cognisance, and the potential state of ‘perfection’.¹⁷¹ He had neither married nor possessed property; he had avoided violence and loved his enemies- though perhaps more importantly, he had also chosen to refrain from exercising the full potential of his power over things and persons. These were the central tenants of the Christian way of life - a life of renunciation, and a rejection of the promises of possession and control with which Satan had seduced primordial man and his descendants. A fascination with material things and earthly obsessions had left mankind incapable of discerning ‘the truth’, dulling the senses and blocking the inner faculties with which the mind had been blessed.¹⁷² Recovering their inherent ability to recognize and ascertain its teachings meant consuming the spiritual sustenance and medicinal remedy which could be found by imitating the ways and living in the mind of Christ-gorge sufficiently upon its bounty, and one might just succeed in ‘breaking the mind’ and illuminating it with the kind of celestial discernment which God had initially intended for his creation.¹⁷³

From the moderately ascetic practices of the ‘Upright’ to the extreme behaviours which characterised the lives of the ‘Perfect’, the offerings of all ascetic sacrifice was honoured by God not only with eschatological salvation, but with the offer of corresponding insight and understanding into celestial realities. In contrast to those whose materialistic obsessions exposed them as being of an ‘external mind’- those who ‘fast to the world’ rehabilitate the mind to its original heavenly disposition, restoring and fine-tuning its capacity to discern the voice of God from that of Satan: truth from falsehood. Increasing one’s proficiency in the renunciatory practices of asceticism, therefore, furnished its practitioner with not only a proportional increase in spiritual

169 *BoS*, 20:8

170 Memra Twenty-Six, ‘On the Second Law that the LORD Established for Adam’, points out that the Gospel of Jesus is the same as the law that Adam transgressed, so there is still hope for the Upright to be able to reach perfection, should they choose to. See *BoS*, 26:5

171 *BoS*, 21:5-7 On the Christological theme of imitating Christ, which underlies large swathes of the Book of Steps text, see R. Roux, ‘The Doctrine of the Imitation of Christ in the Liber Graduum: Between Exegetical Theory and Soteriology’ in *Studia Patristica: Biblica Et Apocrypha, Ascetica Liturgica* 30 (1997), pp.259-262.

172 *BoS*, 28:6. Succumb to the temptation of non-stop work for the sake of making money, suggests the author, and ‘you will be prevented from gaining knowledge’. *BoS*, 7:19.

173 For the author of the Book of Steps, those who choose to imitate Christ by not taking a wife, by refusing to work on the land or acquire any kind of possessions, were engaged in the process of reversing the catastrophic indictment of ‘the Fall’ by humbly refusing to usurp God’s place and returning to the teachings which God had initially deemed fit for our consumption. *BoS*, 21:3, 23:1, 26:1.

maturity but accordingly with a consummate cognition of the deeper mysteries and enigmas of divine truths: for as our author implies, 'as he humbles himself, so he will be glorified'.¹⁷⁴ Truth in this postlapsarian economy was not a free commodity- it came at a cost and was in no way guaranteed by deciding to commit oneself to the path of 'breaking the mind' alone. Celestial truths and an understanding of the divine were awarded according to one's ability to fulfil the satisfactory payment.¹⁷⁵ Those who loved God and sought salvation may yet pursue the way of 'uprightness', but the discipline and extreme behaviours of denunciation which characterised the paths of the 'Perfect', enabled an unprecedented opportunity to experience mental functioning and understanding of God according to its original design and purpose. Indeed, breaking the mind had been only part of the story. The currency of this spiritual economy came in denominations of ascending degrees of ascetic commitment, and the wealthiest were those most avid to pursue its correction-those willing to 'break the mind' but also 'lower themselves' as a model of Christ through various expressions of ascetic sacrifice and humility.¹⁷⁶ To illustrate God's favour towards those who reach a state of lowliness, the *Book of Steps* rehearses several biblical archetypes whom, for their state of lowliness, had been handsomely rewarded with God's favour. Moses, it suggests, 'was chosen by God because he was the 'lowest of all people''.¹⁷⁷ 'Lowliness was compared with everything, and it weighed heavy [in God's mind]'.¹⁷⁸ God had also appointed Mary as the mother of his son on account of her lowliness, suggesting: 'if there had been another woman more lowly than Mary, Christ, who is the lowliest of all and who is the friend of lowliness, would have been given birth by her'.¹⁷⁹ These examples would describe the value of 'lowliness' as an attribute affiliated with the divine condition- a crucial pre-requisite for interaction between the human and the divine. Though, what is perhaps most striking about these texts, is what they reveal about our author's expectations of a life dedicated to emulating its principles. To

174 BOS 14:4

175 Vincent Deroche and Daniel Caner would describe this exchange of individual devotion and supernatural resources as the 'Miraculous Economy' of Late Antique Hagiography, suggesting how each demonstration of ascetic piety was rewarded according to ascending denominations of celestial capital, to be spent upon those in need of celestial salvation. For further reading, see V. Deroche, *Études sur Léontios de Néapolis*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 3 (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1995), 238-54, and D. Caner, 'Towards a Miraculous Economy: Christian Gifts and Material Blessings in Late Antiquity' in *The Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 14:3 (2006), pp.329-377

176 The significance of 'lowliness' to the assessment of an individual's spiritual wealth and understanding would seem to have derived at least in part from our authors reading of Isaiah 66:2, a biblical text which speculates on 'lowliness' being the valuable of all spiritual assets. God will look only to those who are 'peaceful and lowly in spirit', so suggests the teachings of this Old Testament text, though our author's understanding of the value of 'lowliness' was one which was also quite clearly derived, from the precedent and example established by Christ. Christ, according to our author, consciously 'lowered' himself for the sake of man-kind's salvation but also as a model for us to emulate; indeed in Memra 21 he states, 'the whole reason Christ came and lowed himself is so that he might teach us how to lower ourselves'.

177 BoS, 21:12

178 Ibid. Perhaps the biblical description in Numbers 12:3 influenced this suggestion of Moses' lowliness, which is here described as 'meekness'.

179 BoS, 21:16

orientate one's life towards the pursuit of 'lowliness' was to have laid the foundations for a virtuous way of life, but also for an understanding of the divine hitherto enjoyed only by those most esteemed of spiritual forebears, and it is by digging further into these texts that we discern something of the consequences of doing so.

As the fall of Adam consisted primarily with his forsaking a state of lowliness for pride at the suggestion and recommendation of Satan, the ascetic pursuit of its virtues were assumed to be the means by which one might reverse this demise, and remedy this inherited predicament.¹⁸⁰ The abstinence and suffering of a life of ascetic 'Lowliness' would allow the human mind to return to a celestial existence, either in the 'spiritual Eden' or the 'heavenly Jerusalem', where it could openly with God as Adam and Eve had done in the original Garden of Eden.¹⁸¹ This remarkable demonstration of Syriac Christian belief assumed that Christ had lowered himself so that human beings who did likewise could not only imitate his example through a life of diligent and austere asceticism, but also ascend through his sacrifice so as to unite with the Godhead.¹⁸² It was a process of spiritual maturity and transformation which the 'Book of Steps', but also within a wide array of Syriac Christian texts, would imagine in terms of 'a way', 'a journey' and a perilous distance to be travelled.¹⁸³ Several paths and their quite different journeys towards spiritual refinement are open to those who choose the

180 The authors understanding of lowliness as a characteristic definitive of the original human condition, Adam's rejection of it as the cause of his damnation and its embrace by the ascetic as the means of reversing the fall, is one which is echoed throughout the textual traditions of Syriac Christianity. The medico-mystical work by the East Syrian writer Simon of Taibutheh would equally describe how asceticism led to a consciousness of the truth, and how that exercise led one to ascend to the condition from which we fell. See, 'Works of Simon of Taibutheh, 169b' in *Early Christian Mystics* (trans.) A. Mingana, (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Limited, 1934).

181 Another Syriac Christian text, 'The treatise of Joseph Hazzaya' expresses a similar idea of ascent towards a celestial existence with the suggestion that the Path of Perfection 'causes us to enter into that city which is love, and which built in the height of heaven'. See, Treatise by Joseph of Hazzaya, 88a' in *Early Christian Mystics* (trans.) A. Mingana, (1934).

182 *BoS*, 21:15. See J. Scully, 'The Ascetical System', in *Breaking the Mind: New Studies in the Syriac Book of Steps*, p.312 The idea of eschatological union with God in heaven through a life of perfect ascetic devotion is one which has deep roots in the Syriac Christian tradition and appears notably in the *Acts of Judas Thomas*, where the union is depicted in terms of a celestial marriage between Christ the 'true bridegroom' and the believer. The imagery is also used by Aphrahat and Ephrem, see, A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Also see, Aphrahat, 'Demonstration VI' and Ephrem, 'Hymns on Virginity', 33:3 in *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (ed.) K. E. Mcvey, (Mahwah: N.J., Paulest Press, 1989). The treatise of Abraham Bar Dashandad however, would describe the Christian ascetic as a guest, rather than a participant, at the wedding of the Only Begotten. See 'Treatise of Abraham bar Dashandad, 67b' in *Early Christian Mystics* (trans.) A. Mingana, (1934).

183 Like the author of the Book of Steps, the authors of Christian mystical texts such as 'the Book of Steps', 'the works of Simon of Taibutheh', 'the Treatises by Abraham bar Dashandad' and 'the Treatises of Abdisho Hazzaya, would all imagine a life dedicated to rigorous asceticism and gradual perfection according to the imagery of a journey and ascent on high. This journey was like climbing a ladder, with each step corresponding to the various stages one needed to successfully overcome in order to reach the dizzying heights of its final rungs, which rested against the edge of heaven itself. The first of these steps was the struggle of obedience, the second related to change and in particular the change of our habits and conduct. The third is that of the fight against the passions through the fulfilment of the commandments, whilst the fifth consists in the mind thinking about the high and incorporeal beings. The final two stages consist of contemplating the mystery of the adorable Godhead and becoming worthy of the grace in a mysterious way 'that is above words and engulfed in the divine love'. Having reached the summit of this ascent, one finds oneself in the 'harbour of peace and security', the 'bosom of Abraham', 'the sphere of serenity' and 'the glorious city', and all in 'sight of paradise and Christ our LORD'. In this way, the human mind is taught to contemplate and imitate the incorporeal beings who are above, their hierarchies, their ranks, but importantly their faculties, which with the help of God, are imitated in the measure of their power [*Simon of Taibutheh*, 166a]. See Mingana, *Early Christian Mystics: Dadisho Katraya, Abraham bar Dashandad, Joseph Hazzaya, Abdisho Hazzaya, Simon of Taibutheh* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Limited, 1934).

ascetic's way of life; some were steeper and pursued only those most proficient of all spiritual athletes, while others weaved along a more gradual ascent, chosen by those less spiritually motivated or inexperienced travellers. Whatever their choice, our author warns travellers of the snares and pitfalls one was likely to face along the trail of this life-long journey, placed strategically by the 'Evil One' so as to hamper, delay or even halt their ascent and emancipation.¹⁸⁴ It was 'a journey through fire and water'-fall away from the righteous path to one side and be consumed by fire, stumble over one of Satan's obstacles towards the other, and one would be drowned.¹⁸⁵ Every one of the steps taken along this long and perilous path to use the words of Luke 22:30, was 'a covenant with Christ', and brought refreshment from the Kingdoms table.¹⁸⁶ Turn your back on the covenant because of the difficulties you encounter, and you will fall down to Sheol. Transgress the commandment through temptation, and you will go to Gehenna. Renounce the way of Christ as Adam and Eve had done, and you will be drowned in the waters that are the teachings of the evil One.¹⁸⁷ To approach the Divine was evidently a perilous journey indeed, a point similarly emphasised by the authors of those Jewish mystical texts examined in the first part of this thesis; though just like in the 'Hekhalot' texts', the rewards for those who bypassed its many obstacles would be just as spectacular.

A great many Syriac mystical treatises would relate the steps one undertakes in a life of spiritual asceticism to the ascending rungs of a celestial ladder; a motif which hinted at the exertions demanded of those who sought to engage in its pursuit, but also and perhaps more importantly, to the immediate understanding of asceticism as a way which led to the edge of the celestial realm and to an eventual sense of the immediate presence of the Lord and an entire celestial hierarchy.¹⁸⁸ To ascend was thus both arduous and gruelling, with the weak and spiritually immature requiring aid and at times even drastic treatment for spiritual injuries acquired,¹⁸⁹ though aside from

184 An interesting insight into the perils of mystical ascent can be discerned from Kitchen's study on the Liber Graduum, especially R. A. Kitchen, 'Conflict on the Stairway to Heaven: The Anonymity of Perfection in the Syriac Liber Graduum' in *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 256:1 (1998), pp.211-220

185 *BoS*, 19:2

186 For further reading on the common Christian motif of celestial feats, see A. Lieber, 'Jewish and Christian Heavenly Meal Traditions', in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, (ed.) A. D. DeConick (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), pp.313-341

187 *BoS*, 19:2

188 'Treatises by Abdiso Hazzaya, 152b', in *Early Christian Mystics* (trans.) A. Mingana, (1934). The motif of ladders is used frequently within the Syriac literature to denote the exercise of spiritual asceticism. For Simon of Taibutheh, 'the foundation of monarchism is the endurance of difficulties, as this endurance causes the exercise to grow and reach the state of perfection, and sets before it the ladder that leads up to heaven'. See, 'Works of Simon of Taibutheh, 172b', 'Treatises by Abdiso Hazzaya, 152b', 'idem. 157a', and 'Treatises of Joseph Hazzaya, 90a'.

189 To draw upon the words of the Book of Steps, the ascent of these final rungs demanded that: 'One must kill it [sin], lest it should kill you'. Conquer it, by engaging in battle with evil thoughts and if necessary, with bloodshed and murder and one might uproot the death suffered by Adam and his descendants ever since. See, *BoS*, 20:4

suggestions of its obvious dangers, perhaps what is most striking about the ascetic's journey, towards ascending and sensing the divine, was by no means an eschatological reality. A union with God and a participation in the heavenly life was also available to 'perfect ones' in this world.¹⁹⁰ Indeed in Memra 15 of the Book of Steps, we read 'if he significantly lowers himself, the LORD will be revealed to him in this world and he will hear the voice of God'.¹⁹¹ It was an understanding which transformed the ascetic into a person who was not only capable of approaching the divine and of attaining spiritual perfection, but one who was also worthy of celestial discernment and divine status.¹⁹² The treatises of Abdiso Hazzaya would allude to this aspect of Christian piety particularly eloquently, describing how the ecstasy of spiritual union provided 'a flow of spiritual speech and the knowledge of both worlds: of the one that has passed and the one that shall pass, and also a consciousness of the mysteries of future things, together with a holy smell and taste; the fine sounds of spiritual intelligences; communion with the spiritual hierarchies and sights of Paradise, together with other ineffable things'.¹⁹³ The treatises of Dadisho on 'solitude', alongside a variety of mystical treatises from the Syriac Orient of Late Antiquity, would equally make reference to the assumption of those spiritual treasures which are bestowed on the solitaries who live in seclusion.¹⁹⁴ But it's when we turn to another kind of Syriac Christian literature; those hagiographical texts describing the ascetic extremes and the unprecedented powers of the faith's devoted sons that we begin to discern something of the full potential attributed to approximating the divine and knowing the secrets contained in its Gnosis.¹⁹⁵

190 'ܕܢܗܝܪܐ', 'in this world'. See A. Golitzin, 'Recovering the Glory of Adam: Divine Light Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Ascetical Literature of Fourth Century Syro-Mesopotamia', in *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity: Papers from an International Conference at St. Andrews in 2001*, (ed.) J. Davila, (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

191 *BoS*, 15:16

192 Within the mystical tradition of Syriac Christianity, a life in Christ consists in a dynamic union with God. This union is presented as being with Christ as with God's divine self-expression, or with God (the Father) in and through Christ. God's spirit seals the union and initiates an ever-growing participation in the intimacy of the divine life. The presence of the Holy Spirit endows the Christian with a 'sense' of the divine and if properly developed enables the believer to 'taste' the divine. Out of this 'inner instinct', this mysterious resonance to a divine inhabitation, Christians developed various theologies of experienced grace, including the assumed potential of the pious to orchestrate the power of the divine through the occasional though often spectacular coup de theatre. See L. Dupris, 'Unio Mystica: The state and the Experience' in *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (ed.) M. Idel and B. McGinn (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1999), pp.3-27.

193 'The treatises by Abdiso Hazzaya, Folio 157a' in *Early Christian Mystics* (trans.) A. Mingana, (1934).

194 'Dadisho on Solitude, Folio 11b' in *Early Christian Mystics* (trans.) A. Mingana, (1934).

195 According to B. McGinn, all ideals of Christian perfection, and mysticism is certainly one of these, are forms of response to the presence of God, a presence which is not always open, evident, or easily accessible but one that is always in some way mysterious or hidden. When that presence becomes the subject of some form of immediate experience, he implies that we can begin to speak of mysticism in the proper sense of the term. The notion of experiencing the divine presence have been discussed theologically in a variety of ways according to many different models and paradigms, such as contemplation or vision of God, rapture, and in the case of Syriac Hagiography, living in Christ and union with God. All of these responses, which according to McGinn have rarely been mutually exclusive, can be called mystical in that they are ways of expressing the experience of divine presence. The experiences of the divine presence described by the Syriac hagiographies then, were just one species of a wider and more diverse genus of Christian text, negotiating the boundaries and potential of human relationships with the divine. See B. McGinn, 'Love,

The Christian ascetic, like his rabbinic contemporaries the 'Yored Merkavah', aspired to an intimate knowledge of God, his heavenly kingdom and the hierarchies of his angelic cohorts, whose constant paeans were the crowns of his glory. Approach this celestial scene through the diligent pursuit of ascetic piety, and one might truly experience the privileged relationship and understanding which had been fostered between man and mankind before the fall; yet the textual traditions which evolved around these spiritual journeys would equally marvel at the great power seemingly unleashed upon those who sought to do so.¹⁹⁶ Consciousness of 'the fine sounds of spiritual intelligences' and 'communion with the spiritual hierarchies', to use the phrases of one Christian mystical text, furnished the Christian mystic like the 'Yored Merkavah' with a celestial vocabulary which, if remembered and enunciated correctly, enabled the initiate to adjure and orchestrate the power of an entire celestial hierarchy. With this knowledge of heavenly gnosis and its transformation into more earthly forms of prayer ritual, the 'Yored Merkavah' sought to adjure the Sar-Torah to acquire a perfect memory of Torah, to be saved from all kinds of tribulations and witchcraft, and even to be exempted 'from the judgement of Gehinnom'; whilst the Christian hagiographer would similarly attribute a whole variety of possibilities to the assumed power, wielded by Christian contemporaries. On his ascetic journey through life, the Christian Holy man would ritually adjure with his knowledge of divine epithets and other symbols of the esoteric; so as to exorcise the demon and thereby bless the necessitous with deliverance from demonic machinations, but he would also command angelic aggression to condemn the damned and punish the insolent. It's this association between piety, mystical encounter, knowledge of the esoteric and its practical consequences which I hope to explore in the two parts of this chapter, to examine how the ascetic diligence of the Christian Holy man, like the preparatory practices pursued by the Yored Merkavah, was understood to have facilitated not only an intimate familiarity with the divine, but a capability to ritually manifest, and even precisely orchestrate its potential on earth. By exploring the themes of the holy man's initial piety, how it facilitated a mystical encounter with the Divine and was subsequently rewarded with celestial gnosis, this chapter considers the value of the Late Antique Hagiography for what possible insight it might offer, into wider Christian preconceptions of both the power of piety and a knowledge of esoteric in Late Antique

Knowledge and Unio Mystica in Christian Tradition' in *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, pp.59-87. Also see Jason Scully's comments on the value of The Book of Steps, in allowing the scholar to discern a far larger trajectory of ascetical ideas and motifs being used within Late Antique Mesopotamian Christianity, J. Scully, 'The Ascetical System' in K. S. Heal and R. A. Kitchen (eds.) *Breaking the Mind*, p.310-311.

196 See F. D. Aquino, 'The Healing of Cognition in Deification: Towards a Patristic Virtue Epistemology' in *Immersed in the Life of God: The Healing Resources of the Christian Faith*, (ed.) P. Gavriluk, D. M. Koskela and J. E. Vickers, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), pp.123-142.

Mesopotamia. Might its resonance with the Hekhalot qualify similar assumptions about the place of the Christian hagiographical genre, within a broader framework of Late Antique religious ecology?

Encountering the Divine through Spiritual Asceticism

‘The fiery impulse of which I speak is, therefore, a spiritual key which opens before the mind the inner door to the heart, and makes manifest to it the spiritual abode in which dwells Christ our LORD within us and in the inwardness of our heart, according to the words of the divine Paul, who said, in exhorting us to the knowledge of this sublime gift: ‘Examine yourselves, whether ye in the Faith: prove your own selves. Know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you...’¹⁹⁷

It had been intended for the human mind to be situated in the immediate presence of God, where it might have acquired an understanding and discernment similar to that enjoyed by the divine. Indeed, early Christians, much like their Jewish co-religionists, had believed in their eventual restoration to the prelapsarian glory and understanding of their primordial ancestors: with a life in perfect obedience to the commandments of God, Jesus or both, assumed to have been rewarded with ecstatic transcendence of the soul at the moment of death and resurrection.¹⁹⁸ But it appears that some Late Antique Christian writers felt that the ‘lost image’ and ‘celestial status’ of mankind could be restored, at least provisionally, before death: that a vision of God and the fruits of paradise were not merely an eschatological reality, but in fact an immediate possibility.¹⁹⁹ That this biblical paradigm of apocalyptic ascendancy should have transcended beyond the parameters of its literary context, is apparent for instance when we examine the first-hand testimony of Paul’s epistles. Indeed in this literature, we are given accounts of early Christian communities involved in religious activities to achieve mystical transformation of the body in the here and now, and accounts of

¹⁹⁷ ‘Treatises by Abdiso Hazzaya’, p.149

¹⁹⁸ See, A. Segal, *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

¹⁹⁹ As Alexander Golitzin suggests, a reunion with God and a participation in the heavenly life was assumed by Late Antiquity’s Christians to be potentially available ‘in this world’, in the here and now. See A. Golitzin, ‘Recovering the ‘Glory of Adam’: ‘Divine Light’ Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian ascetical Literature of Fourth-Century Syro-Mesopotamia’, in *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity: Papers from an International Conference at St. Andrews in 2001*, (ed. by) J. R. Davila, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003).

individual transcendence, both in the form of celestially ordained rapture events and individual invasions of the celestial realm.²⁰⁰ In the context of this latter discourse, Paul had inferred that he knew of other Christian Jews, perhaps associated with the mission of the Jerusalem church, who had boasted of their mystical encounters with Christ, whilst elsewhere, the Apostle would describe how he and the disciples had enjoyed reassuring visions from Christ following the crucifixion.²⁰¹ Of course, in addition to Paul's first-hand witness, the evidence for an early Christian belief in mystical experience is staggering, ranging from descriptions of Christ's transfiguration to accounts of premortem flights into heaven, and full transformation in the present as a result.²⁰² Though perhaps what is interesting about this biblical paradigm alluding to mankind's potential to regain the fruits of paradise through ecstatic self-transcendence, is how it eventually evolved to become religiously operable beyond these early, scriptural contexts. Beyond the confines of their biblical parameters, the images and descriptions portrayed in these early stories of the Christian pious would deeply affect the way in which so many of Late Antiquity's hagiographers would imagine the piety of the devout in their own age; framing their activities and behaviours according to the same expectations of piety's potential. Their reading and exegesis of the mystical encounters of their primordial ancestors and biblical heroes had proven that the sacred had once been, and perhaps therefore, still could-even should-be experienced by the sufficiently devout; that the boundaries between heaven and earth could just as easily be crossed, by engaging in the same religious activities and behaviours pursued by those renowned of biblical devotees.²⁰³

As Biblical ideas of piety's mystical potential had translated and in large part helped to define Late Antique expectations of the pious in their own age, it is when we examine our hagiographer's exegesis of that mystical potential, that we discern how

200 See, Galatians 1:12; 1 Corinthians 15:8; 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

201 1 Corinthians 15:5-7

202 See, Mk 9:2-8; Matt 17:1-8; Lk 9:28-36; Mk 16; Matt 28; Lk 24; Jn 20; Pet. 12-14; Acts 7:55-56 and Gos Thom 15, 19, 37, 50, 59, 83, 84, 108, respectively.

203 Deconick, p.8. A number of historians have struggled with the inadequacies of the notion of 'mysticism' when articulating this particular aspect of Syriac Christian theology. The descriptive studies and psychological analyses of 'ecstasy' include the 20th Century classics; W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: New York American Library, 1902) and E. Underhill, *Mysticism* (New Jersey: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1977) where 'mysticism' is defined as the 'science of union with the absolute'. The philosophical questioning of the term's limitations are articulated and discussed by W. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1960), as well as in Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) and Idem, *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). For further discussion also see, N. B. Kvalstad, *Problems of Mysticism* (Oslo: Scintilla Press, 1980) and R. Jones, *Mysticism Examined: Philosophical Inquiries into Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). Though perhaps the fruitful discussion of the term and its relevance to the ecstatic experiences of the Syriac Christian hagiographies of Late Antiquity, comes from S. Seppala, *'In Speechless Ecstasy': Expression and Interpretation of Mystical Experience in Classical Syriac and Sufi Literature* (Helsinki: Publications of the Institute for Asian and African Studies, 2002); where Seppala replaces the word 'mysticism' with 'metatheology'; articulating the concept of ecstatic encounter as an integral and natural development within the framework of Orthodox, rather than occult patterns of theology.

the influence of a specifically Late Antique hermeneutic, would ultimately shape his understanding of what had formerly constituted as sufficiently pious, and efficacious patterns of behaviour.²⁰⁴ According to the Late Antique hagiographers examined in this chapter, the apostles like all those who had boasted of ecstatic experiences and celestial encounters, had not only devoted themselves and their minds to the worship and spiritual contemplation of the LORD. They had also devoted themselves to a gruelling way of life in direct imitation of his radical ethic; choosing to renounce the corrupting entanglements of property, procreation and pride, which had originally enticed and unfortunately ensnared their primordial parents.²⁰⁵ Christ, in his earthly incarnation, had conducted himself in a way which had been congruent not with his human form but with his mind's heavenly orientation; he did not marry or possess property, he did not exercise control over people or seek to procreate, and he avoided violence and retribution. He was 'the good tree', an ascetic and a definitive remedy for those who have partaken of the toxic fruit of the tree of knowledge. By emulating his renunciatory habits and focusing on the heavenly, the biblical pious were assumed to have initiated the process of reversing the damnable decisions which had resulted in the experience of the 'fall', once again reorienting their minds back towards the heavenly realities which Adam and Eve had so decisively abandoned. Though, aside from remedying a toxic preoccupation with earthly inclinations of control and possession, these habits of renunciation were assumed also, and perhaps somewhat more importantly, to have negotiated the rehabilitation of the ascetic mind back to its original and heavenly disposition.²⁰⁶ Doing so was of course neither a means of

204 Christian life and faith were based on a profound desire to seek and find God by following Jesus' teachings and his 'way', as alluded to in the Gospels. Indeed as Mathew 5:48 suggests: 'be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect', though precisely how this was to be done, was understood quite differently according to influences of quite different social and historical contexts. In the hagiographical 'Lives' of Mesopotamia's Late Antique holy men, becoming perfect like Christ was articulated by their Syriac authors according to a distinctly mystical theology, one which had drawn inspiration from a variety of diverse sources, and assumed an eventual union with Christ. See U. King, *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies Throughout the ages*, p.25. Also see Sergey Minov's comments in S. Minov, 'Marriage and Sexuality' in *Breaking the Mind* (ed.) by K. S. Heal and R. A. Kitchen, p.223

205 The ascetic ideal of perfection through humility was often extended to include an array of outstanding figures from the whole range of pre-monastic sacred history, which was thereby relativized so as to prepare the ground for the patterns of behaviour of contemporary ascetics. For further reading on the anachronistic projections of Late Antique hermeneutics of holiness, see N. Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness: Ancient Jewish and Christian Notions of Sexuality and Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). On the adoption of Noah by Syriac Christian exegetes as a role model for Christian asceticism, see Naomi Koltun-Fromm, *Aphrahat and the rabbis on Noah's Righteousness in Light of the Jewish-Christian Polemic* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997); E. Grypeou and H. Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp.185-199; and 'Seth and the Sethites in Early Syriac Literature', in G. P. Luttikhuisen, *Eve's Children: The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp.203-217. For a more general oversight, see E. A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), and S. H. Griffith, *Asceticism in the Early Church of Syria: The Hermeneutics of Early Syrian Monasticism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

206 Understanding this speculation requires that we understand one of the fundamental tenets of Late Antique Christian spirituality, namely that a comprehension of the mind at an intellectual level was superseded by the superior comprehension acquired through experience or feeling; and indeed, one of the effective ways of learning to experience was through imitation. Much as one might attempt to imitate the techniques and mannerisms of the famous in the search for their own experience of celebrity, so many of the New Testaments holy men were assumed to have set out to imitate the qualities of he who had redeemed them of their sins, and who had subsequently invited them to partake in their own experiences

negating or of transcending corporeality, indeed it would seem that the logic of Paul's epistles remained largely definitive in shaping Late Antique assumptions of man's physical transformation, as a distinctly eschatological expectation. Though it is nevertheless apparent, both from our hagiographer's exegesis of the relevant scriptures, and the way in which that biblical exegesis would eventually shape the hagiographical narratives of the pious in their own age, that the ascetic sacrifice of a life in imitation of Christ's radical ethic, was assumed to restore both the mind and body to the kind of bifurcated existence, once enjoyed by mankind's primordial ancestors.²⁰⁷

Touching the divine according to these Late Antique expressions of Christian spirituality, was no longer just a historical footnote in the history of humanity's story; nor indeed was it simply the promise of an external apocalyptic event. Rather, encountering the Divine had become an internal and potentially immediate experience; one which would furnish the sufficiently pious not only with a cognitive propinquity to the Divine, but with the kind of celestial rewards reserved for those deemed worthy on the last day.²⁰⁸ In the following hagiographical excerpts explored by this chapter, we read how having reached beyond the boundaries of ordinary human cognisance through a life of in imitation of Christ's suffering, and having thus acquired a consciousness of the sublime, the minds of Late Antiquity's Holy men had been transformed, both by the endless flow of celestial mysteries and with the image of the glory of goodness. What was revealed was eternal; all that the soul previously thought it knew and all embodied means of knowing were transcended and replaced with a knowing of the unknowable; a gnosis of celestial secrets encountered and bestowed in ecstasy. Though, what has struck me as a historian of Late Antique religiosity and ritual practice, is not only the hagiographers' assumptions of man's potential for visionary apotheosis, but their suggestions of the subsequent, and divinely bestowed tools given to the saint as a consequence. The process of the saint's loving devotion would help to realise what had only ever existed as potential, transforming an initially given and ontological union between himself and the Divine into a new and supra-essential reality, though by doing so, it would seem that the saint

of divinity. For further reading on the prominent role played by concepts of virtue in shaping epistemological assumption amongst early Syriac Christianity, see J. W. Childers, "Humility begets wisdom and discernment: Character and True Knowledge in Aphrahat", in *Studia Patristica* 41 (2006), pp. 13-22; and Childers, "We Must Seek the Truth: Theological Scholarship in the Early Syriac Tradition", *Restoration Quarterly* 49 (2007), pp.193-216.

207 The theme of the ascetic life as an anticipation of an angelic existence was prominent in Syrian asceticism, see Brock 'Early Syrian Asceticism', pp.5-6; AbouZayd, *Ihidaya*, pp.269-277.

208 See A. Golitzen, "Earthly Angels and Heavenly Men: The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Niketas Stehatos, and the Tradition of 'Interiorized Apocalyptic' in Eastern Christian Ascetical and Mystical Literature", in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001), pp.125-153

had acquired not only a proximity to the Divine presence but a proximity to the privilege of celestial power. It's to these ascetico-mystical tales of spiritual apotheosis, celestially acquired tools and celestially acquired potential, that this chapter shall now turn its attention.

Spiritual Apotheosis in the 'Lives' of Holy Men: Visions of the Celestial Realm

‘And our Lord saw his labour, and his love, and his affection for Him, and his watchfulness and strenuousness in the keeping of His life-giving commandments, and that he had adorned himself with all qualities of ascetic excellence, and especially with the whole adornment of humility, which is the garb of Christ, Who giveth grace unto the humble, and, as it is said, ‘now unto the humble mysteries are revealed’’.²⁰⁹

For a worldview that connected the suffering Jesus with the way and the work of the glorified Christ, participating in the events surrounding Jesus' suffering, and thereby learning to feel and experience as he himself had felt and experienced, was to partake in the salvific power of Christ. By imitating his radical ethic, believers were provided with a way to change their own spiritual demeanour, gradually learning to act in the world as Christ had done before them; though perhaps rather more importantly for the individuals glorified in these hagiographical extracts, imitating Jesus also meant understanding something of who Christ was as both human and as a divinity.²¹⁰ I take this Late Antique hermeneutic to be at the heart of the pervasive references made to Christ's passion throughout the Late Antique hagiographical literature of the Syriac Orient: identification with the suffering of Christ's humanity inevitably leads to an understanding of Christ's divinity. But the question remains as to precisely how an understanding of the suffering of Jesus, was assumed to lead to a more complete relationship with the Divine, and indeed, precisely how that keen and newly refined discernment, might potentially be made manifest in the mortal hands of the pious. The

²⁰⁹ *The Histories of Rabban Hormizd*, Folio 11b

²¹⁰ In the Pauline as well as in the Johanne writings of the New Testament, a life in Christ consists in a dynamic union with God. Depending on the (never exclusive) emphasis, this union is presented as being with Christ as with God's divine self-expression, or with God the Father in and through Christ. God's spirit seals the union and initiates an ever-growing participation in the intimacy of the divine life. The presence of the Holy Spirit endows the Christian with a 'sense' of the divine that if properly developed allows the believer to 'taste' God and all that relates to him. Out of this 'inner instinct', this mysterious resonance to a divine inhabitation, a number of Late Antique hagiographers would develop various theologies of experienced grace.

following discourse intends to explore how the image of the suffering Christ and the Christian identification with Christ's suffering functioned in these expressions of Late Antique Christian spirituality, and to ascertain something of what these insights might offer about the imaginations of those Late Antique authors who wrote them. Looking beyond hagiographical suggestions of in-utero discourse and adolescent spiritual aptitude, this enquiry turns its attention to the dialectic which would seem to underlie the hagiographers' articulation of almost every subsequent episode: that is to say his understanding of the correlation between the saint's gradual ascetic communion and his eventual heavenly union.²¹¹ Rabban Hormisd, Mar Narsai and Simeon Stylites, indeed like so many of the 'holy men' described within the hagiographical narratives of Late Antiquity, may well have been reported as having enjoyed an ontological and decidedly terrestrial union with the Divine almost from the moment of their inception, though according to their hagiographers, it was specifically as a consequence of their pursuit of the 'contemplative life'; of their gradual ascent of the steps leading to a celestial state, that this mere 'awareness' of the Divine was transformed into a new and superessential reality. Knowledge, that is to say a 'true discernment' of God and a

211 To explore and examine the main features which characterise the earliest phases of a holy man's life, is more often than not to be presented with a glimpse of the saint's profile, almost in its entirety. That is to say, by unfurling the complex tapestry of the saint's early life; one is often provided with a portrait of adolescent piety barely distinguishable from that of the saint that he was destined to become. The suggestion seems unusual, if not entirely paradoxical: expecting biographical narrative to reflect the natural course of individual development as it progresses not only physically, but psychologically, through stages marking the passage from youth and adolescence, on into maturity. But the hagiographical literature explored in this chapter however, shows little correspondence to our conventional schemes, or even to our experience of human development. Instead, what we are offered is an idealized portrait of 'piety personified': a near-perfect specimen, whose qualities and subsequent relationship to the Divine were seemingly present from the moment of inception. Characterisations of childhood echoed elsewhere in Late Antique Christian thought and literary tradition; had all but been replaced by exceptional ideas and incredible motifs of adolescent superiority, emotional precocity and premature rationality. The individuality of personality traits as well as those conventional processes of their development were both absorbed and nullified by the endeavour of presenting a type of Christian hero who, from the outset, had not only held the potential to become one of Mesopotamia's 'Holy Men', but had embodied the ideals and heroic virtues of Christian perfection. From the perspective of a great many of Mesopotamia's Late Antique hagiographers therefore, the 'truly pious' were predestined as much as individually motivated by inclinations towards the pursuit of sanctity. Sanctity was in nearly every case a gift given: an inherent quality and privileged status sown into the fabric of the individual's character from inception, but it was also evidently a gift hard-earned, and according to the textual traditions of Mesopotamian hagiographers, a gift well nurtured by the saint's occasionally inadvertent but increasingly conscious commitment to practices of ascetic devotion. These holy youths may have been predestined for piety from the moment of their inception, sanctified by God and blessed with the privilege of his divine consideration, but it would take an exceptional journey- a prolonged period of gradual self-enlightenment, before the potential of their inherited condition was fully realised. Just as the extraordinary relationship between God and the rabbis of the Hekhalot had been dependent upon their understanding and precursory pursuit of certain ascetic practices; including ritual ablutions, social isolation and ritual fasting, so the saint's early inclination towards ascetic diligence and exceptional piety, was deemed equally fundamental in facilitating his own propinquity to the divinity of Christ, and to a subsequent revelation of celestial 'mysteries'. For further reading on the ascetic prerequisites of mystical encounter in the Hekhalot texts, see R. Akiba's account of the ascetical demands of *Sar Torah Praxis*, §§299-301. For further Hekhalot discussion of the association between purity and divine pursuits, see §12; §27; §378; §513 and §971 where moral and ritual impurity are assumed not only to represent the antithesis of heavenly sanctity, but to incur the wrath of heaven's angelic guardians. As an additional side note, it's perhaps interesting to draw attention to the Hekhalot assumption, that earthly visitors to heaven were not alone in their need for purity. Ministering angels contract impurity through their close contact with man during their daily descents into our world. They are sullied by the odour emitted by human beings, who are born of women and may contract impurity through emissions and dirt. When they return to heaven for the angelic liturgy, the ministering angels immerse themselves seven times in rivers of fire. After immersion, they check themselves for any remaining traces of impurity. They will participate in the heavenly liturgy only when certain of their sanctity. See Synopses §180; §181; §265; §531; §810; §790; §791.

subsequent familiarity with Divine things, had a moral dimension- it had never been neutral. Discernment was as dependent upon the disposition and inclination of the seer to see, as it was upon the Divine inclination to be seen, and it is within the few following excerpts that we are granted our own insight, not only into the ways in which each hagiographer had imagined such a revelation of celestial gnosis, but how they would imagine and articulate its consequences.²¹²

The discourse of this chapter has hitherto sought to illuminate the hagiographical suggestion of the adolescent saint's focus upon the suffering of Jesus Christ, both through his intellectual endeavour and physical duress, and how it was assumed to have nurtured the inherent potential of a predestined and ontological union between himself, and the Divine. But, it is by taking a closer look at how the thread of 'ontological union' was steadily woven into the narrative fabric of these texts; how it would become ever more intrinsic to the structural integrity of their form, that the historian is offered some of the most revealing insights into Late Antique expectations of how such a union was transformed and even surpassed, by the apprehension of higher and potentially powerful forms of mystical consciousness. From tales of in-utero discourse with the Divine and adolescent aptitude for spiritual doctrine, to suggestions of ascetic inclinations, contemplative love and subsequent spiritual transcendence; the 'lives' of the Holy men would relate how an unfaltering desire to understand the LORD and therefore live in accordance with his instruction, had manifested into a consciousness of the Divine otherwise incompatible with the ordinary function of the human mind, and hitherto attributed to only those revered amongst the biblical pious. Despite their immediate common ground, it goes without saying, I hope, that the narratives examined here represents a literature which was both vast and variable: alluding to the opinions, interpretations and literary efforts of hagiographers with no immediate historical connection or direct influence upon the other. As such, what we discern within their excerpts is not a monolithic or by any means static approach to depicting mystical experience- quite the contrary. From waking visions to dreams, trances and ascent journeys; what is immediately evident upon reading these tales of individual theophany, is in fact the apparent dynamism of this dialectic, as it erupted within the various social and historical contexts of each hagiographical narrative.²¹³ Taking inspiration from the scriptural traditions of

²¹²For similar remarks from Deconick, see A. Deconick, *Paradise Now*, p.8

²¹³ Indeed, the hagiographer's behind each of the excerpts explored here would seem to have articulated what was essentially a common motif; defined by the biblical precedents of celestial ascent, according to a rich variety of imagined contextures. In the 'Life of Hormizd', Rabban Sergius would weave the motif of celestial vision into a narrative defined by dreams and slumber, whilst the 'Life' of Narsai would imagine apotheosis

according to involuntary states of trance. The 'Life' of Simeon Stylites meanwhile would describe the saint's ascent of a celestial ladder; one which had descended from the heavens, so as to invite Simeon to partake in a vision of the celestial realm akin to that experienced by the Yored Merkavah. For further discussion of the various literary methods of articulating celestial ascent and theophany within the mystical literature of Late Antique Christian and Jewish texts, see A. DeConick, *Paradise Now*, p.2

215 Drawing upon one of the great theophanies of the Old Testament, this excerpt would masterfully recreate two aspects of the account surrounding Isaiah's vision of the apocalypse, including his vision of the celestial temple described in *Isaiah* 33:14-17 and rather more importantly, the motif of celestial burning which Isaiah reports is in store for the sinners of Israel: 'The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the goddess; 'who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?' Taken slightly beyond their intended context, our extract would appear to echo these scriptural motifs of apocalyptic fire and everlasting burning, but also to have transformed them into a more immediate and internalised experience. With the same thought and fear of God, Rabban Sergius describes how Hormizd had burned with the same celestial fires both by night and by day, though rather than representing a celestially imposed punishment or even a sense of his eschatological destiny, the fires endured by Hormizd had served as a means of achieving the intended goal of spiritual excellence, of purging his heart of all the inherent and inherited aspects of human impurity. 'Those who walk righteously and speak what is right, who reject gain from extortion and keep their hands from accepting bribes, who stop their ears against plots of murder and shut their eyes against contemplating evil- they are the ones who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress'. To walk according to the principles of a righteous life, to dwell by faith in the LORD and to divert one's mind to the contemplation of heavenly things was to be offered salvation, and indeed, much the same hermeneutic can be found underlying the narrative of our chosen extract. In *Isaiah* 33:17, just as it is in the final lines of our chosen extract, the path to salvation would appear to have struck the specific note of theophany, suggesting that such a vision will extend not only to seeing 'the king in all his beauty' but to a 'view a land that stretches afar'. A suggestion, one which a number of patristic writers, from Justin Martyr and the second century authors of the 'Epistle of Barnabas', to Eusebius of Caesarea and Aphrahat, had all routinely linked to the eschatological vision promised to the righteous. Though Rabban Sergius, just like the authors of the Jewish Hekhalot, would seem to have interpreted this scriptural concept of 'righteousness' according to an entirely different hermeneutic, indeed righteousness would seem to have been defined not only by the rather specific pursuit of Late Antique ascetic disciplines, but perhaps rather more remarkably, according to a subsequent and rather more immediate discernment of the *Visio Dei*. See, Folio 6b-7a in Budge, *Histories*, pp.14-15. For further reading on early Christian interpretations of the verse, see, M. Dods and G. Reith, (trans) 'Dialogue with Trypho' in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v.1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), p. 70; Eusebius of Caesarea, 'Commentarius in Isaiam Prophetam' in Eusebius Werke, *Band 9: Jesajakommentar*, (ed.) by J. Ziegler (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1975), pp.18-21; and Aphrahat, *Demonstration*, 6:1, Lines 7-9 in A. Letho, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage* (Piscataway, NJ., Gorgias Press, 2010): *ܕܢܚܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܕܠܚܕ ܕܡܨܒܝܬܐ ܕܡܨܒܝܬܐ ܕܡܨܒܝܬܐ*. For further remarks on the apocalyptic ascent tradition in Aphrahat's Demonstrations, see J. Rausch, 'The Monastic Concept of Purity of Heart and Its Sources', in *Studia Monastica* 11:2, (1969) and M. J. Pierre, *Aphraate le sage person: Les Exposes*, (Paris: Les Cerf, 1988).

equivalent.²¹⁶ An excerpt of theophany taken from the 'Life' of Simeon Stylites meanwhile would relate how Simeon's devotion had been rewarded with various 'dream-like visions'; defined by a common cluster of scriptural precedents and seemingly reimagined according to the demands of a contemporary Christian gloss. His hagiographer would relate how at the martyrdom of Mar Timotheus, Simeon's mind had been subjected both to the divine will and to the divine vision of the celestial temple (*Isaiah* 6:1-10); becoming conscious of those destined for eventual martyrdom, but also of those fearsome celestial creatures described by Ezekiel in his inaugural vision (*Ezekiel* 1:4-24).²¹⁷ Later his hagiographer relates an unusually rich array of additional mystical encounters, including visions of Elijah's chariot,²¹⁸ an ascent of heavenly ladders²¹⁹ and celestial converse with the prophets.²²⁰ Though for all the

216 See, *Book of Governors*, pp.540-548. Thomas Marga recalls what he claims to be the understanding of his ecclesiastical forebears when he suggests that every human heart contained the intellectual capacity to reflect and thereby discern all that had been formerly made invisible to it, as a consequence of sin and mankind's fall. Cleansing the heart from the impurities of its passions through a life of ascetic devotion, was not only to renew the heart and thereby establish it in the original condition of its creation, but to restore its reflective properties, clarifying the image which had always been projected upon its surface- namely of the LORD in the celestial realm, and of mankind's original potential. By the rays of its glorious reflection, the human heart would acquire a renewed consciousness of 'all spiritual things which belong to natures and to things of creation which are afar off and which are near', and with the secret power of the Holy Spirit, it might perceive even the finite detail: 'as if they [all spiritual things] were arranged in order, without any covering whatever before his eyes'. Having already articulated the lengths of Mar Narsai's devotion to the quiet contemplation and absolute isolation of the eremitic life; how he had 'cut off from himself all memories and all remembrances' of his former life and avoided the 'promptings of evil oppressors', Thomas of Marga articulates what might be described as a fascinating process of literary creation; combining the existing traditions and scriptural heritage of divine encounter and celestial theophany as described in *Isaiah* 6:1-10, with subsequent re-imaginings of its contemporary relevance to Christian conceptions of piety and its potential. For further reading on his use of the motif the heart and his understanding of its intellectual capacity to reflect and thereby discern the Divine image, see *Book of Governors*, p.540. For further reading on its use in a number of Late Antique Christian mystical treatises, including those of Isaac of Nineveh; Aphrahat and Ephrem, see A. J. Winsinck, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh: Translated from Bedjan's Syriac Text with an Introduction and Registers* (Amsterdam: verhandeligen der koninklijke akademie van wetenschappen, 1923) p.136; Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 6:1 and 'Hymn 3:2' in S. Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit: Poems of Saint Ephrem the Syrian: 1 Publications of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, Cambridge* (Cambridge: Aquila Books, 2013).

217 Like a long line of biblical heroes before him, this excerpt in the Syriac 'Life' of Simeon Stylites relates how Simeon had suddenly become conscious of a celestial apparition, first in the form of a man, whose appearance is described as having been 'like lightening', his face 'like rays of fire' and his garments 'shining like the sun'. Carrying a golden shepherd's staff, reminiscent of a number of early apostolic descriptions of Jesus as a 'shepherd of men' (*John* 10:1-21, *Luke* 15), we read how the glorious vision took hold of the Holy Simeon, and how it preceded to bring him back to the fold; guiding him and tending to him on this new journey towards the Divine. In the dotting embrace of this celestial chaperone, Simeon was assumed to have been offered a vision which would not only circumvent the ordinary conventions of time, but also to traverse the boundaries of the terrestrial and celestial worlds. Within those very earthly confines of the martyrdom, Simeon's hagiographer relates how the saint's vision had been transported, at least towards a partial discernment, of the celestial realm and the celestial temple. Articulated through the physical surroundings of the martyrdom, Simeon was offered an illusory insight, much like *Isaiah* before him, into those things which had been and those which were yet to pass, including a vision of all those yet to be brought to Christ through his efforts (*Isaiah* 6:6-10). Though, in a way which was reminiscent of the visions of Ezekiel, Simeon was also offered a vision of those celestial creatures described as having carried the enthroned 'glory' of God (*Ezekiel* 1:4-24), how he was invited to partake in a celestial discourse with the enthroned LORD, and how the potential of his piety had been transformed as a consequence. Taking Simeon by the hand, the apparition is reported to have brought Simeon towards the Kavod, where the LORD placed in his mouth something white like snow and round like a pearl; 'such a taste and such sweetness cannot be found in the world'. Simeon; like so many of the holy men of Late Antique Mesopotamia, had received the precious pearl of mystical understanding. See Lent, pp.112-114, Syriac pp.509-512. For further reading on both the mystical motif of the 'Pearl', and the hagiographical articulation of the pious as 'mystic pearl divers' or 'pearl merchants', plunging naked into the sea in search of the mystical treasures of spiritual pearls, see B. E. Colless, *The Wisdom of the Pearlers: An Anthology of Syriac Christian Mysticism* (Kalamazoo, MI., Cistercian Publications, 2008).

218 Lent, p.153; Syriac, p. 574

219 Lent, p.152; Syriac, p. 572

various avenues assumed to have led to the experience of immediate revelation, perhaps what immediately strikes the historian about these extraordinary tales of theophany is the relatively conventional approach, and relatively common currency of motifs and ideas adopted within these narratives, to articulate the cosmology of those visions with which the pious were assumed to have been bestowed.

Drawing upon the scriptural heritage of *Genesis* 1-3; *Exodus* 24:33; *Ezekiel* 1, 8, 10; *Daniel* 7; *Isaiah* 6 and *Isaiah* 33, each of these tales of celestial discernment would represent a rich and complex tapestry of various scriptural elements and emphases, woven together by the expert hands of their hagiographers to create a variety of exuberant and mainly distinct narrative patterns. Yet upon closer inspection, we might discern and even unravel several colourful threads from the literary fabric of these texts, which would seem to have been universally prominent and indeed tend to cluster in regard to each hagiographer's articulation of cosmology. These mystical threads, including the hagiographer's articulation of the 'Glory' of God, the celestial temple, the throne or Merkavah and the gifts bestowed by apotheosis, had all been woven into distinctive patterns before, collectively contributing to the literary fabric of a number of canonical and non-canonical Jewish and Christian apocalyptic texts from the second temple period, and later finding their way into the mystical discussions of the Hekhalot corpus. Of course, it is not the intention or inclination of this thesis to imply some sense of linear progression of thought from old to new, as some scholars are wont to do, but rather to stress the emergence and application of these various themes within literary traditions from across many centuries and communities of believers. The presence of these threads, their unchanged form and continued application within the various fabrics of early and Late Antique Jewish, but also Christian mystical discourse, raises a number of interesting questions and further avenues for discussion, though for the moment, let us simply unpick and slowly unravel some of these threads, and understand how they would contribute to the narratives of our representative samples.

The 'Glory' of God

'There existeth in the heart a glorious intellectual mirror which the Creator formed as a means for discovering His invisibility... Now the fathers call it 'the beauty of our person', and by Saint Paul it is called the 'house of love', and by others 'the house of joy' in which dwelleth the spirit of adoption which we have received from holy baptism, and upon it shineth the light of grace. Whosoever hath cleansed this mirror of beautiful things from the impurity of the passions, and hath renewed it and established it in the original condition of the nature of its creation, can see by the light of its glorious rays all spiritual things which belong to the natures and to things of creation which are afar off and which are near. And he is able to by the secret power of the Holy Spirit to look into them closely as if they were all arranged in order...' ²²¹

Lying at the heart of this cosmological vision, and indeed one of the more prominent of those mystical threads woven into the fabric of the hagiographer's narratives, was the belief that God had a physical incarnation; referred to as both the 'Divine Glory' and 'Kavod of YHWH'. ²²² It was a thread derived from a complex process of scriptural exegesis, drawing primarily upon those excerpts from the book of Ezekiel which had described visions of an enthroned 'likeness of the appearance of man', as a man glowing from the waist up 'as if full of fire' and 'surrounded by brilliant light'. ²²³ This, according to the scripture, 'was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD'; indeed this burning anthropomorphic figure was the very manifestation of the

²²¹ 'Chapter XV' in *The Book of Governors by Thomas, Bishop of Marga*, ed. by E. A. Wallis-Budge, p.540.

²²² The term 'Kavod' appears in the Mishnah Torah some Two-Hundred times, whilst appearing One-Hundred and Sixty-Six times in the New Testament. The standard translation of the term covers a broad range of potential meaning within both of these texts, including the basic Hebrew concept of 'weightiness'. Genesis 13:2 describes how Abraham became 'weighty' in livestock and silver, indeed long life and children were also assumed in Proverbs 3:16 and Hosea 2:11 to have had the same effect. The word 'Kavod' was also used to describe the contentment inspired by divine blessings, as 1 Kings 3:13 implies: 'God gave Solomon both riches and *Kavod*'. 'He who possesses righteousness and love, finds life, prosperity and *Kavod*' (Proverbs 21:12). God's 'Kavod' or 'glory' can be discerned in his creation (Numbers 14:21-22; Psalms 8:5, Isaiah 6:3). In the age to come, it will be revealed so that all might see it (Isaiah 40:5). Elsewhere, the glory is associated with the Pillar of Cloud and fire which had encompassed YHWH leading Israel through the desert and indicated the Divine presence at the tabernacle: 'the glory of YHWH appeared in the cloud (Exodus 16:10); 'the cloud covered it [the tabernacle], and the Glory of YHWH appeared (Numbers 17:7). In Exodus 33:18-34:8, God arranges for Moses to see his 'glory', though the scripture articulates how he saw God himself, albeit his back. The picture which emerges from this particular scripture is the emerging indistinguishability of the divine 'glory' or 'Kavod' and an anthropomorphic form, and precisely this amalgam of definition which we find underlying the visions of Ezekiel 1.

²²³ Ezekiel 1:27

'hidden YHWH'-all fire and light.²²⁴ He presided over a celestial order, often enthroned upon a celestial throne-chariot or *Merkavah*, composed of the bodies of four 'living creatures'; each with the complex and amalgamated appearance of 'Man', a 'Lion', an 'Ox' and an 'Eagle'.²²⁵ Though, turn to the latter account of Ezekiel 8:2 and we discern a different account of Ezekiel's vision of God's glory; described as a 'likeness of the appearance of man', only this time decisively lacking the immediate accompaniment of the chariot-throne. In this, the second appearance of the *Merkavah*, the 'glory' of the Lord is described as having appeared to Ezekiel in the Temple, where it moved from above the Divine Chariot so as to take up a position in another part of the sanctuary.²²⁶ In this alternative vision of theophany, the 'glory' was by no means bound to the confines of the throne. Indeed, in this excerpt, the Lord's 'glory' had returned to a form familiar to us from those earlier scriptural accounts of theophany, relating how the glory of the Lord had risen above the cherubim, how 'the cloud [of smoke/ or the Kavod] had filled the temple', and how the court had become 'full of the radiance of the glory of the Lord' (Exodus 16:10; Numbers 17:7; Exodus 24:43-44; 1 Kings 8:10).²²⁷ Despite the apparent variance of these early scriptural depictions of the Lord's 'glory', it is nevertheless evident from the mystical discourse of a number of early Jewish and Christian period texts, that Ezekiel's initial association of the 'Divine glory' and celestial throne-chariot, would serve as both the foundation and primary vehicle of a subsequent and shared tradition; one which would continue to imagine both the potential, but also the particulars of immediate theophany.

Within these rich and complex tapestries of Jewish and Christian mystical discourse, we read descriptions of the 'hidden' God derived from the individual's own discernment; captured from the devised and intentional, or from unexpected and rather more involuntary journey towards glimpsing the Lord enthroned. Their various tales of apotheosis point to a common cluster of images reminiscent of its scriptural base, including the 'luminosity' of the Lord's glory; its anthropomorphic form and its mystical enthronement.²²⁸ Indeed, sat upon what Rabban Sergius would refer to as

224 Ezekiel 8:2; Isaiah 6:1-4

225 Ezekiel 1:10

226 Ezekiel 10:4

227 In those texts belonging to the priestly document, one of the sources of the Pentateuch, the glory is frequently articulated in terms of cloud and fire, which according to older sources, encompassed YHWH when leading Israel out of Egypt and indicated his presence at the Tabernacle: 'the glory of YHWH appeared in the cloud' (Exodus 16:10); 'the glory of the YHWH rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it' (Exodus 24:16); the cloud covered it [the tabernacle], and the glory of YHWH appeared (Numbers 17:7). When the cloud covered the Tent, the Glory filled it (Exodus 40:34-35). The Glory 'filled' the Temple (1 Kings 8:10-11).

228 The 'Life' of Simeon Stylites would imply how the saint saw 'a throne of majesty' set upon the top of a ladder leaning against the very edge of heaven, and how 'our Lord Jesus Christ himself sat there while the hosts of heaven stood on his right and on his left'. Lent, p.151; Syriac, p.571. For equivalent references to the Lord's throne in the 'Life' of Mar Narsai, see p.541 where the throne is assumed to have been represented by the

the 'glory of the throne of his honour' and surrounded by heavenly hosts ascribing holiness to the majesty of his appearance (Rabban Hormizd 7a), the 'Lives' of Simeon Stylites, Rabban Hormizd and Mar Narsai would all recall something of the 'unparalleled wonder' of what they had seen of his 'countenance', defined by the principle assumption of its anthropomorphic form, but also by an intrinsic luminosity. The 'Life' of Simeon Stylites would refer to it as having been 'like lightening' (*Simeon Stylites* 509), a perpetual glare which emanated from and thereby engulfed his entire essential being, whilst the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd would elaborate equally upon how this almost overwhelming glow had radiated through the features of its face like 'rays of fire, shining forth like beams from the sun' (*Rabban Hormizd* 7a). Its light filled all who perceive it, instilling not only a sense of Divine splendour, but 'a knowledge divine in all things', by which 'all the companies of spiritual beings' were assumed to have sparkled and shined' (*The Life of Mar Narsai*).²²⁹ God was undoubtedly 'beautiful' to behold, indeed Simeon's hagiographer would reaffirm on several occasions how his 'glory' had 'a pleasant mien' and 'was more comely than the sun', how 'His beauty was beyond compare', his face 'glad' and his countenance 'exceedingly cheerful'.²³⁰ Yet, to catch a glimpse of the Kavod through the glare of his splendour would seem to have also been a decidedly terrifying experience: a verdict shared by the various narratives of their scriptural predecessors, but also one which we find underlying the contemporaneous tales of theophany described by the Jewish Hekhalot. We are told how Rabban Hormizd had pleaded for his life through fear of the repercussions of his discernment of the celestial realm, proclaiming how 'a power over which I had no control took me from my own country and set me down here... do no harm unto me I beseech thee' (*Rabban Hormizd* 7a), whilst Simeon Stylites had reportedly fallen upon his face in terror of the vision which his mind had beheld (*Simeon Stylites*, 509). The luminosity of the Lords glory, and indeed the luminosity which had sparkled and

Church alter. This association of church alters and the celestial throne harks back to the traditions of theophany and visions underlying Isaiah 6:1, where Isaiah saw the Jerusalem temple transformed into its heavenly equivalent, and the Lord adopt a similar position within 'the holies of holies'. The same scriptural echo and association of the alter with the Merkavah throne, can also be found in the 'Life of Simeon Stylites', Lent, p.114; Syriac p. 512

²²⁹ *Rabban Hormizd*, 7a; *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, Lent p.112, Syriac p.509; *The Life of Mar Narsai*, p.545. The appearance of 'mighty men' in the biblical texts often accompanied great events in the history of the 'chosen people'; the frightening vision of man with a face like lightening and 'eyes like flaming torches' had shown itself to the biblical prophet Daniel in Daniel, 10:6, whilst Mathew 28:2 would describe less ambiguously, how an 'angel' whose appearance was like lightning, and whose clothes as white as snow, had come down from heaven to guard the entrance of Christ's tomb. Mathew 17:2 would also refer to Christ as having similar qualities when he became transfigured before the apostles Peter, James and John, describing how his face 'shone like the sun' and how 'his clothes became white as the light'. Our hagiographer had used similar biblical motifs and descriptions to describe the unusual apparition which had appeared to Simeon, Narsai and Hormizd, emphasising its celestial origins, but also their place in a much longer narrative of chosen individuals, including Christ and Daniel before him, whose piety brought special consideration from the divine and with the potential for rather profound consequences.

²³⁰ A. D. DeConick would suggest that the motif of the Lord's beauty played such an important role within the contemporary literature of the Jewish Hekhalot, that the expression of how the devotee wishes 'to behold the King in his beauty', became formulaic. See DeConick, *Paradise Now*, p.12

shined amongst his celestial servants, was glorious but also potentially dangerous and even deadly; as the scriptural traditions surrounding Moses' theophany would imply, no one is able to see YHWH's face and live (Exodus 33:20). It was for this reason that the Lord had arranged for Moses to see his 'glory' from the relative protection offered by a cleft in the rock, initially covering it with his hand until he had passed, so as to limit the potential danger of his revelation. Indeed, it was for this reason that we read of their immediate fear at having been invited to discern such a vision, yet in these tales of immediate theophany, the Lord's luminosity was often, and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, interpreted according to an interesting and slightly different hermeneutic. Indeed, and keeping YHWH hidden from the direct gaze of his creatures, the luminosity of the Lord's *Kavod* was also assumed to reveal God indirectly, acting as a mask or a screen through which to discern the immediate presence of the Divine, albeit as little more than a partial and momentary glimpse. Here we note the apparent paradox of a 'hidden God', whose countenance or face cannot be seen, but only the mask or the 'Glory' that simultaneously conceals and reveals him. As R. Akiba would surmise in one of the narratives of the Hekhalot: 'he is, so to say, as we are, but he is greater than everything and his Glory consists in this, that he is concealed from us'.²³¹

The narrative patterns of the 'lives' of Simeon Stylites and Mar Narsai in particular, offer the historian an insight into the ways in which these tales of theophany articulated the theme of enthronement, how they unpicked this particular thread from the scriptural narrative and subsequently reweaved it, in order to create various and interesting nuances. Unlike the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd, which would refer specifically to the Lord's *Kavod* enthroned upon a throne of glory, surrounded by celestial multitudes ascribing holiness to 'the majesty of his appearance', the 'Life' of Simeon Stylites would articulate the Lord's enthronement in rather more abstract terms; adapting the scriptural template of Isaiah's vision, to describe how the confines of an earthly martyrion were transformed according to image of its celestial equivalent, and how it's alter became a direct replacement for the Celestial Merkavah. Amongst those earthly confines of the martyrion, Simeon's hagiographer relates how his vision had been replaced by a celestial discernment of 'the court of the temple', how it had been filled with vast multitudes clothed in white and in purple, all destined to receive the Sign of the Messiah and a knowledge of his truth by Simeon's hand.²³² These were the brides and bridegrooms of Christ,

²³¹ *Hekhalot Zutarti*, §352

²³² Lent, p.113; Syriac, p. 511

both ‘modest’ and ‘adorned with great beauty’, though it is with our hagiographer’s articulation of his subsequent visions that we begin to discern something of the incredible semi-celestial space, which Simeon’s mind had started to inhabit. Having been led across the Temple court and towards the temple altar, Simeon’s hagiographer relates how the saint had been immediately confronted by a vision of the creatures of the Merkavah chariot described by *Ezekiel* 1: ‘whose appearance was like the flame of fire’ and from whose ‘eyes went forth as if it were swift lightnings’.²³³ Resplendent with the magnificence of their celestial design though patently ill-disposed to his presence, we read how both began to amble their way towards the ‘Blessed One’ and how both had preceded to ‘unfold their wings and raise their heads, uttering a cry so loud and so strong as to cause the whole earth to tremble with their voice’.²³⁴ An incredible vision and an even more remarkable description, it would seem that the terrestrial and celestial world of these heavenly creatures had converged, though this was by no means the only intimation of the unusual space which Simeon had started to occupy as a consequence of his piety. Struck by the splendour, but also by the wanton aggression of their gestures, Simeon remained rooted to the spot until another vision emerged from behind the altar, not of a celestial creature this time but of a man, ‘whose appearance was more comely than the sun’. His speech was soft and pleasant; his garments a pure white, and he greeted the blessed Simeon three times with much love and said to him: ‘Blessed art thou Simeon, if thou art equal to the part and service to which thou art called’.²³⁵ What Simeon’s hagiographer was describing was an enthroned vision of the Kavod, albeit one which had borrowed from a variety of scriptural traditions to create a patchwork of scriptural allusion. The traditions of Isaiah 6 would account for its contexts, and hence for the particular association of the throne of the deity with the martyr’s altar, though underlying this account of hagiographical theophany, were nuances and details which clearly resonate, albeit somewhat faintly, with Ezekiel’s depiction of a ‘glory’ enthroned.

In the Life of Mar Narsai, we read how these same scriptural threads were equally unravelled and rewoven to form a similar hagiographical pattern of theophany, describing a similar ecclesiastical setting, and an equally abstract

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Lent, p.114; Syriac, p. 512

²³⁵ Ibid.

articulation of the throne vision of God's glory or Kavod. Recalling the traditions of his forebears, Narsai's hagiographer would suggest that each and every heart had an intellectual mirror; and a means of discerning the Lord's 'invisibility'. If it was sullied by the impurities of sin, then the image reflected would offer little more than the details of its basic contours, but to cleanse its surface by eradicating an inclination towards sin, was not only to its original condition but also to its original discernment of the 'glorious rays of all spiritual things'.²³⁶ 'He is able by the secret power of the Holy Spirit to look into them closely as if they were all arranged in order, without any covering whatever, before his eyes' and indeed it was through Narsai's cleansing of his own spiritual mirror, that we read how Narsai became immediately aware of a similar celestial vision to that experienced by Simeon Stylite; one of the celestial temple and Divine Kavod, imposed upon the terrestrial contexts of his monastery. Overwhelmed by the vision, we read an account of his trance-like vision, one which will be discussed in further detail later on this chapter, but what strikes the reader as immediately interesting about this excerpt in the contexts of our current discussion, is the assumption, derived from the scriptural precedent of Isaiah 6, of how the Church altar was assumed to have transformed into something resembling 'the throne of the deity'.²³⁷ God, and more specifically the 'glory' of the Lord's Kavod, was seemingly universally imagined as an enthroned, luminous and anthropomorphic entity. Their scriptural base, derived mainly from ancient Jewish tradition, had certainly had a profound impact upon the development of early Christian conceptions of the person and nature of Christ, indeed John's gospel would depict Jesus as God's glory or 'Kavod' descended to earth, whilst descriptions of Jesus as the high priest of the heavenly temple tradition; all are heir to the same tradition.²³⁸ Though perhaps what is remarkable about these Christian hagiographies and indeed part of what makes them distinct, is how they would both adopt and only minimally adapt, a distinctly Jewish Kavod tradition: combining the distinct characteristics of enthronement with those of a luminous anthropomorphises. Were these narratives merely echoing the eschatological allusions of the scriptures? Most likely- though what strikes the historian about these hagiographical embellishments describing the Lord's Kavod, is that these embellishments were not only scriptural

²³⁶ 'The Life of Mar Narsai', in *The Book of Governors*, p.305

²³⁷ Ibid, p.307

²³⁸ John 1:14; 2:11; 11:40; 12:23, *Revelations*, 5:6-14; 7:13-8:1; 14:1-5

echoes but traditions which would equally determine the theophany and eschatological allusions, of rabbinic Merkavah lore.²³⁹

The Celestial Temple:

‘Every time I am in the church during the service of the Mysteries, my mind is lifted up above the sight of these things which are done during the service, and above the church and its congregation, to the things which are in heaven; and these things which are before my eyes are explained [mystically] by the things which are secret and hidden from every man. The Church which is depicted before me [represents] that of Jerusalem which is upon the earth; the platform which is in it is [represents] Zion; the altar which is in it represents the ark of the Old Covenant; the cross which is upon it, and the Book of the Gospels [represent] the New Covenant and the throne of Christ at the time of his dispensation here... the body of priests which are in it [represents] the companies of the apostles; and the path leading from the platform to the cupola above the platform the narrow path which goeth up to heaven. Three steps which are before the platform [symbolize] the third heaven whither the blessed Paul was taken up; the *Kestroma* the place [which extends] from this [earth] to the firmament; the screen which is over the door of the chancel, and the veils which are upon it indicate to me a type of firmament.’

The Life of Mar Narsai, 306

²³⁹As alluded to in the first part of this thesis, the Hekhalot literature assumed a complex web of scriptural connections that include not only Ezekiel's vision, the Sinai event and Psalm 68, but also the vision of the camps of God in Genesis 32:1-2, the vision of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9-10, the Divine Chariot and fiery angels of Psalm 10:1-4, and Isaiah's vision of the celestial throne room and angelic liturgy. Indeed, scriptural exegesis is fundamental to any overarching explanation of the origins and meaning of the Hekhalot texts. Peter Schafer's, *Synopse Zur Hekhalot Literatur*, which lists Isaiah 33:17 in particular as occurring ten times in the space of six paragraphs in *Hekhalot Zutarti* alone. See P. Schafer, *Synopse*, §§407-412. Also see *Hekhalot Rabbati*, §198; §248 and §259. On the Hekhalot's use of Isaiah's vision of the celestial throne (6:1), see *Hekhalot Rabbati*, §153; §265, *Hekhalot Zutarti*, §350, *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, §566; §568; §582; §590; §593; §595, *Merkavah Rabba*, §655; §675; §688; §§691; 694 One might also consider the Hekhalot's paraphrasing of Isaiah 6:3, in particular its quotation of the Trisagion and the suggestion of its potential uses: see *Hekhalot Rabbati*, §§91-106, where it is quoted a total of eight times, §§152-169 where it is quoted a total of thirteen times, *Sar Torah*, §306, *Hekhalot Zutarti*, §351; §364; §419; *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, §§555; §556; §569; §593; §596; *Merkavah Rabba*, §687; §682; §688; §696.

For a great many of the Late Antique minds lying behind these mystical narratives; heaven and indeed the wider celestial realm was both imagined and articulated in terms of a conceptual vocabulary, familiar from scriptural allusions to the design and details of Jerusalem's Temple.²⁴⁰ *Isaiah* 6 and *Ezekiel* 40-48 would both describe the broader environs of Jerusalem and its Temple as having been built according to the plans of a celestial blueprint but also as the embodiment of a celestial archetype; fashioned and furnished according to the instruction of the Divine. It was for this reason that the narrative of *Isaiah* would articulate how the celestial realm had seamlessly imposed itself upon the template of its earthly equivalent (*Isaiah* 6:1-10), transforming what had been the ecclesiastical contexts of Jerusalem's temple, into an immediate vision of the celestial realm. As Levenson suggests: 'Isaiah was privileged to see the difference between the earthly antitype and the heavenly archetype disappear: iconography becomes the reality it symbolises', and indeed we find the same process of identification and symbolic correspondence between these two realms of reality, underlying the narratives of *Ezekiel* 40-48. These scriptural excerpts relate how the prophet was transported and even escorted around the temple of the future; how he was able to discern its every measurement and appreciate its every feature. This, according to the Lord was the promise for those who were truly repentant - this was Israel's ultimate destiny, and since its physical incarnation did not yet exist upon the earth, we can only presume that what *Ezekiel* discerned was not only an insight into the nature of future things but the vision of a celestial archetype. Just as in the scriptural narratives of *Isaiah* 6, the distinction between these two levels of terrestrial and celestial reality would seem to have all but disappeared, with visions of the earthly sanctuary rendered all but indistinguishable from those of the heavenly throne room.²⁴¹ The sense of symbolic correspondence between the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly throne room had been of central importance to the pre-exilic cult tradition and associated scriptural texts, but it is when we turn our attention away from these scriptural tales of theophany, towards the mystical discourses underlying the narratives of a variety of Christian hagiographical and Jewish Hekhalot texts, that we begin to discern how this sense of symbolic correspondence would, in time,

240 For further reading on the influence of the scriptural motif of the celestial temple, upon later Jewish and Christian imaginings of the celestial realm, see R. Elior, 'From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines: Prayers and Sacred Song in the Hekhalot Literature and Its Relation to Temple Traditions' in *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 4:3 (1997), pp.217-267; J. E. Wright, 'Early Jewish and Christian Traditions III: Common themes and motifs' in *The Early History of Heaven*, pp.185-203 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and A. Y. Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp.21-53.

241 As Morray Jones has argued, it remains doubtful whether this distinction would even have been meaningful to an author, for whom the identification of the one with the other was evidently much more, than a mere dramatic metaphor. C. R. A. Morray Jones, 'The Temple Within' in *Paradise Now* (ed.) April Deconick, pp.145-178 (197).

acquire an additional, cosmological significance. As our excerpt implies, the heavenly temple envisaged by the biblical prophets was not only in heaven; its structures and sanctuaries were ‘the heavens’, and the earthly temple had reflected this structure.²⁴² Whether the holy man’s vision had been of the celestial realm or of its earthly counterpart is thus hard to accurately distinguish, even if its translator’s various inclusions would determine Mar Narsai’s account specifically, as a representative, rather than ecstatic vision. Of course, endeavouring to identify one reality from the other misses the point of these mystical narratives. To draw upon the analogy of Levenson, the ‘iconography’, which in this case happens to represent the ecclesiastical context of the temple/monastery, had become the reality which it hoped to symbolise – in other words, the monastic environment of Narsai’s vision was not only an imitative representation of a celestial archetype. On the contrary, as Narsai describes: ‘these things which are before my eyes are explained [mystically] by the things which are secret and hidden from every man’. The monastery had taken up not only a symbolic correspondence to the shape and the form of the heavens, but something of the substance and therefore something of the reality, of the heavenly realms themselves.

Our excerpt also articulates a narrative of Christian theophany altogether familiar from the mystical discourses of other Late Antique tales of apotheosis: including those of Jewish apocalyptic literature, and those of the ‘Merkavah mystical’ traditions, preserved in the *Hekhalot* writings of the rabbinic and post-rabbinic periods.²⁴³ Indeed, much like the mystical lore and subsequent tales surrounding those described as the ‘Yored Merkavah’, this account of mystical experience from the ‘Life’ of Mar Narsai would both imagine and articulate the saint’s gradual consciousness of the celestial realm, both in terms of an ecstatic ascent of the mind but also in terms of the subsequent progress of its discernment, as it journeyed through the successive levels of a celestial temple. Describing how these new celestial surrounds had imposed themselves upon his discernment of the monastery’s surroundings, and how his initial progress throughout the confines of the monastery

242 Though the prophet Ezekiel was a priest, his vision does not occur in the earthly sanctuary but in Babylonia. Isaiah equally, is assumed not to be a priest and so was not permitted to enter the sanctuary on earth. Both, therefore, must have been relocated in their visions, either to the earthly temple or its celestial counterpart, and perhaps the same assumption of visionary transportation is implied by our hagiographer. See Ezekiel 1:20-21 and Isaiah 6:8-13. For further discussion on the resemblance of ecclesiastical contexts and celestial realms, and the ambiguity of identifying their visions, see C. R. A. Morray-Jones, ‘The Temple Within’ in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, pp.145-148

243 See former discussions, but also see J. Maier, ‘Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelfahrt in der Jüdischen Apokalyptik und Gnosis’, in *Kairos* 1(1963), pp.18-40; M. Himmelfarb, ‘Apocalyptic Ascent and the Heavenly Temple’, in *Society of Biblical Literature 1987 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), pp.210-217; idem., *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and R. Koester, *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature and the New Testament* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1989); R. Eilior, ‘From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines: Prayer and Sacred Song in the Hekhalot Literature and its relation to Temple Traditions’, *JSQ* 4 (1997)

had in turn translated into his steady progress through, and gradual consciousness of, its celestial equivalent, its hagiographer relates how the Monastery had transformed into a vision of the Jerusalem temple, how the 'platform' which was in it had mystically transformed so as to 'represent' Zion, and how the body of priests which were in it had become like the companies of Apostles. The aisle leading away from the platform and towards the Copula meanwhile was at once, transformed into the narrow road going up towards heaven (Mathew 7:14). Yet it is perhaps the details of our excerpt's subsequent descriptions; relating both to the celestial realm and more specifically to its shape and form, which strike the reader as being both extraordinary, but also evocative and potentially indicative of the wider cultural environment in which this source was couched. Unlike the 'Merkavah mystical' traditions of the Jewish 'Hekhalot', in which heaven was deemed to consist of various 'shrine rooms' or 'sanctuaries', neither Mar Narsai nor the hagiographical excerpt make mention of or articulate an understanding of the heavenly realm in terms of successive Hekhalot 'sanctuaries', yet both would rather interestingly allude, to a comparable seven tiered celestial structure.²⁴⁴ In perhaps what proves to be one of the interesting components of this already extraordinary tale of Christian theophany, Mar Narsai relates how three steps had ascended to the Monastery's 'platform', but also how his ascent of these three steps had been transformed to symbolise his transcendence of the first three celestial realms. The first had represented the celestial sphere and lower levels of Paradise into which the apostle Paul had been permitted (2 Corinthians, 12:2), followed by what is referred to as the *Kestroma* or place extending from the earth to the firmament; with the 'screen' and its 'veils' representing a third and final gateway towards a place both above and beyond the heavens- the Naos²⁴⁵ or 'the heaven of heavens', and the 'Divine Shekinah'.²⁴⁶ Finally, and perhaps crucially, the last of the seven heavens are represented by the Monastery's altar, which Narsai relates had transformed into the throne of the

244 The association of the heavenly realms with the number seven is a frequent feature of the mystical literature of both the Christian apocalypses and Jewish Hekhalot, where, as Deconick has argued, it would appear to have been used in reference to the seven planetary spheres, in combination with aspects of the Jerusalem temple which number seven: seven gates, seven steps, the seven branched lampstand (Josephus, *Ant* 3.6.7 and *War* 5.5.5; 7.5.5). One might also look to the descriptions of the seven levels as enumerated by R. Jose: the area within the balustrade, the court of women, the court of Israel, the court of the priests, the area between the altar and the entrance to the temple, the sanctuary, and the holy of holies. See, A. Deconick, *Paradise Now*, p.14 and A. Neher, 'Le Voyage Mystique des Quatre', *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 140 (1951), pp.73-76. For further reading on what Francesca Rochberg-Halton describes as the common Jewish and Christian expression of this mythological theme, see A. Yarbo Collins, 'The Seven Heavens in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses' in *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). For further reading on its ancient Mesopotamian origins, see F. Rochberg-Halton, 'Mesopotamian Cosmology' in N. S. Hetherington (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Cosmology: Historical, Philosophical and Scientific Foundations of Modern Cosmology* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993) pp.398-407.

245 'כֶּסֶם', the coffer of chest in which the Eucharistic elements reside.

246 The 'screen' and its veils, the 'מַכְשֵׁר' separated the chancel from the nave. It stood either upon the third or highest step leading to the apse 'מִזְבֵּחַ', or by the side of the lowest step on the floor of the nave. It would seem that the screen must have represented the third heaven 'שְׁמַיָּה הַשְּׁלִישִׁי'.

deity, whilst its surrounding priests had in turn transformed into the heavenly congregations of adoring ‘Cherubim’; ‘Seraphim’ and ‘Thrones’, reminiscent of the scriptural theophany described in *Isaiah* 6.²⁴⁷ Mar Narsai may not have been describing the heavenly shrine rooms of the Jewish Hekhalot, though it is nevertheless apparent that there are several points of contact between this hagiographical imagining of the celestial realm, and those corresponding considerations described by the mystical narratives of the Jewish Hekhalot. Of course the conceptualisation of heaven as a celestial temple pervades throughout his account of apotheosis, but perhaps what is striking about Mar Narsai’s concluding remarks, is how he describes his participation in the angelic liturgy of the ‘Great Glory’: reminiscent of scenes from the scriptural precedents of *Isaiah* 6, but also unequivocally integral to both the narratives and the goal of the Hekhalot practitioner.²⁴⁸ Mar Narsai would imply:

‘The gathering of us all in the Church [symbolises] the universal assembling which [shall take place] before the face of our Lord in the celestial heights. Our choirs which face each other, and the service which is sung by two choirs, represent those which cry each to each, and say ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord the mighty one’.²⁴⁹

What’s more, this particular hagiographical excerpt was by no means unique in its assumption of the involvement of the pious within the celestial chorus. Indeed, the ‘Life’ of Rabban Hormizd would equally describe how he had participated in this moment of angelic ritual, suggesting that at the moment when ‘the young man had been united with the sweetness of the vision which had [burst] upon him’, the unparalleled wonder of the spiritual beings in their natural state stood before him, ‘ascribing holiness to the majesty of the Lord’s

247 ‘The Cherubim, Seraphim and Thrones [which form] the first congregation represent to me Patriarchs, Metropolitans and Bishops; the second congregation [which consists] of powers, Lords and Rulers represents priests and deacons and solitaires; and the third congregation [which represents] sub deacons, readers and believing laymen’. See, *The Book of Governors*, p.544 The angels, like the monastery’s priests and ascetics, were here associated with the temples functionaries, performing cultic activities there. They are the guardians of the covenant and the heavenly temple and its gates, as well as servants of the throne, petitioners and worshipers offering blessings and glorifications sung as liturgies. Indeed, the singing of these priests is assumed by Mar Narsai to represent the songs of those ‘which cry each to each, and say ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord the Almighty One’ (Isaiah 6:3). For further discussion of the complex angelology assumed in this excerpt, see Solomon of al-Basra’s descriptions in Budge, *Book of the Bee*, pp.9-11.

248 As Peter Schafer had emphasised, participation in the angelic liturgy was an primary goal of the *Hekhalot* ascende: ‘the Merkavah mystic represents in his person the participation of Israel in the heavenly liturgy and simultaneously confirms of the earthly congregation that is stands in direct contact with God in its synagogue liturgy’. See, P. Schafer, *Gershom Scholem Reconsidered*, p.11.

249 *The Book of Governors*, p. 540.

appearance'.²⁵⁰ Several episodes with the Life of Simeon Stylites would equally recount similar experiences of celestial apotheosis; a subsequent discernment of the celestial realm in terms of the form and structure of an ecclesiastical equivalent, and a momentary participation within its angelic liturgy- all hagiographical fragments and anecdotal insights into the Late Antique Christian conceptualisations of the cosmos. Though; be that as it may, it is perhaps also true to say that these fragmentary insights and hagiographical anecdotes, alluding to the form and the various features of the celestial realm, pose a number of interesting and perhaps even important questions for our understanding of the source material, and of the wider cultural environment in which they were written. Having merely scratched the surface of the complex currents and mystical motifs which underlie these excerpts of spiritual apotheosis, it is possible to discern traces of a narrative, and a conceptual framework which, whilst by no means identical, would seem nevertheless to have strikingly resonated with certain dominant features of the Jewish mystical traditions explored earlier in this thesis.²⁵¹ Indeed, the pursuit of a programme of ascetic practice, defined according to largely consistent assumptions of spiritually efficacious patterns of behaviour and technique, was deemed within the accounts of the hagiographer, just as they had been within the instructions of the Jewish Hekhalot, to have been a fundamental prerequisite before encountering the Divine, and for thereby absorbing something of the qualities of divinity. Whilst their comparable assumptions of piety's potential to elevate man beyond the experience of his ordinary consciousness, and the shared suggestion of the discernment to be gained from having done so, perhaps encourage us to wonder whether the variable, but almost parallel flow of the mystical streams which run throughout these literatures, allude to something rather more significant than a mere coincidence.²⁵² The nuances of either discourse perhaps preclude the possibility of assuming the direct influence of one textual tradition upon the other-indeed, too much discussion concerning 'influences', especially in studies of the history of religions, has been based on common features

²⁵⁰ *Rabban Hormizd*, 7a.

²⁵¹ DeConick notes a similar resemblance between the ecstatic visions portrayed within the Jewish Hekhalot and a number of Late Antique Christian texts. For further reading see A. A. D. DeConick, *Voices of the Mystics: Early Christian Discourse in the Gospels of John and Thomas and Other Ancient Christian Literature*, (London: T&T Clark, 2001).

²⁵² Their accounts of the journey towards self-denial and ritual purification would certainly vary considerably, both in terms of their disparate understanding of the severity of its demands and perhaps more importantly, in terms of its intended duration. Indeed, far from being a permanent vocation, the apparently limited dietary restrictions; sensory deprivation, ritual immersions and isolation demanded of those who wished to pursue the promise of the Hekhalot, were only ever intended as a temporary regime. For R. Akiba's discussion of the preparatory rituals of necessary for the proper learning, remembering and performance of the adjuration for celestial ascent and investiture with the knowledge of Torah, see 422-424. Also see Schafer's commentary in *Origins*, (2009) pp.301-303.

that have no causal link, yet there is an intriguing parallelism here worthy of consideration.²⁵³ Aware of the dangers of identifying potentially meaningless parallels between common mystical motifs, my analyses shall now look beyond the immediately comparable assumption of piety's potential to propel man beyond the ordinary limits of human consciousness, and indeed beyond their similar conceptualisations of celestial discernment and the wider cosmic realm, to another really rather important aspect of resonance between the texts of both mystical treatises.

Looking beyond the immediate parallelism of their accounts of spiritual apotheosis, perhaps what is striking about the portraits of piety which emerge from their text, has less to do with the conceptual vocabulary of apocalyptic visions- seeing the king enthroned, the heavenly temple and angelic liturgy- than with the individual seer for whom such a vision, otherwise denied to all but the dead and the divine, was assumed to have been miraculously bestowed. The visionary's discernment of the celestial realm and those various details of what he had seen, would seem to have played a supporting role to the central and pervading theme; that men such as Rabban Hormizd, Mar Narsai and Simeon Stylites *could* see, and by virtue of their newly found discernment, had been transformed into initiates, and even communicators of the 'heavenly mysteries'. For Thomas of Marga, and indeed for a long line of other Late Antique hagiographers, the experience of ascending on high whilst and indeed clearly worthy of describing in detail, was nevertheless a mere matter of course; one to be taken for granted by all who actively pursued the rigours of ascetic labour. In the discussion which follows, I wish to emphasise how it was the person, rather than the phenomenon, that what was of interest in these inverted scriptural narratives of celestial ascent; how their tales mediated something of the piety of the individual to whom such a vision had been given, but also, and perhaps somewhat more importantly, something of the power and privilege, which such a discernment was assumed to bestow.

The Power and the Privilege of Celestial Discernment

²⁵³ As Michael Morony aptly remarks, 'One can usually find whatever one looks for, and a predisposition to emphasise similarities or differences will have prejudicial effect on the outcome'. Such conclusions resemble 'an intellectual house of cards' and tend to dissolve into 'meaningless generalisations'. See M. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p.16.

In his extensive study of the Jewish Mystical traditions of the 'Hekhalot', Schafer identifies one aspect of difference between the narratives of ascent described by the macroforms 'Hekhalot Rabbati' and 'Hekhalot Zutarti'. What divided and distinguished these albeit largely unstable bodies of literary tradition, was a crucial component of their narrative- each defined by the inherent principle of mystical ascent and subsequent encounter with the Divine, though unequivocally divided in their understanding of both its purpose, and indeed of its repercussions for those who had been sufficiently pious to do so. Part One of this thesis has already offered something of an insight into these tales of apotheosis; their accounts of the tools and procedures of ascending on high as well something of the varying nature of their revelations, so I shall here forgo any further discussion of these narratives in any extensive detail. Instead, it shall suffice to say that where the mystical traditions of Hekhalot Rabbati would enthuse over visions of the Lord enthroned and details of the mystic's eventual participation in the heavenly liturgy (Isaiah 6), Hekhalot Zutarti and the various mystical narratives or 'microforms' from which it is composed, would seem conspicuously oblivious, if not entirely opposed to these major concerns and details.²⁵⁴ Indeed, far from ascending to 'behold the King and his throne '*le-histakkel be-melekh we-kiss'o*', his majesty '*hadaro*' and his beauty '*yofyo*',²⁵⁵ the editors of Hekhalot Zutarti would renegotiate the focus of their narratives, and thereby something of the motive of the mystic's enterprise, to encapsulate not only an understanding of the mystic's potential to ascend, but also something of the consequences of doing so. The disciplines of ascetic piety guaranteed an increasing proximity to, and an eventual vision of, the Lord enthroned upon the Merkavah; though it would seem that for a few Jewish mystical authors at least, such a degree of closeness to the Lord might also have furnished the seer with something of the privilege, and something of the potential, of such an intimate encounter. Those who were able, might 'explore the universe'; 'behold his radiance'; 'dwell with his crown' and be 'transformed by his glory'. They might even learn how to 'combine letters'; 'say names'; 'know the meaning of the living' and 'see the vision of the dead'.²⁵⁶ Evidently, to strive and to toil upon the path towards spiritual purity was not only to steadily realise an immediate experience of apotheosis, but to be illuminated with

254 See Schafer's discussion of the distinct material which interpolated within the texts of *Hekhalot Zutarti*, and its contrast to the mystical traditions of Hekhalot Rabbati, see P. Schafer, *Origins*, pp.282-306 [289, 293 and 295].

255 *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, 81

256 *Ibid.*, 348

revelations from the holy in all of its manifestations, and an insight into the potential of its practical application. In some respects, this framework of contrasting narratives; defined by the divergence of themes and perhaps therefore by the diverging expectations of their respective readership, is something which is equally apparent within a great many of the Christian hagiographical accounts of theophany explored in this thesis. Indeed, unlike those biblical precedents of apotheosis upon which they were based, those who were assumed to have been holy enough to endure a long sojourn in the wilderness, had not only seen the Lord as Isaiah and Ezra had before them, but brought back with them a ‘touch of the haunting completeness of Adam’.²⁵⁷ Nature, categorized by great antithetical categories, was assumed to fall into place around them, whilst their exceptional degree of closeness to the Lord, and their newly perfected being, bestowed them with the potential to interact with the Divine in a way which had been all but denied to those whose inclination towards sin had kept them at a distance. Certainly, piety had the potential to be powerful in the imaginations of many Late Antique Christians, just as it had been within the narratives of Hekhalot Zutarti. Though before we consider the array of its miraculous and often unusual potential, let us first devote our attention to our hagiographer’s attempts to both articulate and conceptualise precisely, how the mystical potential of piety had been bestowed.

Patterns of Mystical Revelations in the Lives of the Holy Men

‘And when the working of God dawneth upon the souls of the holy men there dwelleth and abideth upon it the gift of the Holy Spirit, and He bestoweth this gift upon the good, and maketh them worthy of the grace of natural knowledge, and to possess life and happiness forever’

The Book of Governors, 5:15

²⁵⁷ B. Flusin, *Miracle et Histoire dans l'œuvre de Cyrille de Scythopolis* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1983) pp. 126-128.

The ascetic life represented the practical Way to be trodden by all who sought to unveil the secrets of the divine mysteries, culminating in the revelation of 'all spiritual things', including those 'which are near and those which are afar off'.²⁵⁸ Through the conquest of 'self', and through the renunciation of his passions, the saint diverted the consciousness of his mind to the heights of its cognitive potential, from where it at first contemplated, and then increasingly came to discern the invisibility of the Lord, and to hold direct communion with him. The ideal of eventual intercourse between the newly perfected souls of the pious and the Absolute was perhaps both the core and salient motif of the hagiographer's narrative, yet it would seem that a significant number of the hagiographical writers behind these texts hoped also to endorse another, rather more interesting aspect of divine discernment and celestial gnosis. Inherent to even the earliest teachings of St Paul, was the belief that the human soul was both 'the image and the glory of God'; albeit one which was evidently defiled by the temptations of the flesh, and in desperate need of drastic realignment before returning to God. 'To be carnally minded' he implied, was 'death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace'.²⁵⁹ By self-mastery of the passions, subsequent enlightenment and the unending pursuit of love, the seeker might attain to the vision of God reserved only for those fitted to receive it, indeed 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him'.²⁶⁰ Yet, perhaps what is more remarkable about St Paul's understanding and advocacy of these attributes, is his suggestion that those who had subsequently been permitted to 'know' and 'see' the Divine, would also become like one of his children: in whom and indeed with whom, He would work and live in conscious union. 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God'.²⁶¹ Here we have, at least in its earliest incarnation, the germ of the motif which would shape a great many of the hagiographical conceptualisations of celestial gnosis: a remarkable doctrine, which assumed that having recognised and attained the qualities of divinity, one might in turn, obtain something of its stature. To gaze upon the Divine beauty, according to St Paul, was in turn to become 'god-like', indeed 'we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as

258 See J. Scully, 'The Ascetical System' in *Breaking the Mind*, pp.297-312 [305]

259 *Romans*, 8:6

260 *1 Corinthians*, 2:9-10

261 *Romans*, 8:19

by the Spirit of the Lord'.²⁶² In proportion to the love which he feels for the Lord, he penetrates into the inner shrine of Divine Mysteries, and is thereby transformed into that divine and holy state, which had hitherto been natural to the soul. As he passes through the mystic stages, he receives more and more illumination and enlightenment, until at last love, which teaches the pure in heart to look upon God face to face, restores him to a state of perfection, and once again to be possessed of complete certainty and perfect comprehension.²⁶³ We have already discerned and explored how Thomas of Marga would adapt and utilise the conceptual repertoire of St Paul's mystical discourses, so as to describe the process of initiation by which the gnostic, in this case Mar Narsai, was gradually admitted into the radiance of that pure light of understanding. Yet beyond this excerpt's account of how one man's piety had permitted him to discern the celestial realm; how it had imposed itself upon his consciousness of his ecclesiastical surroundings, and how he had subsequently traversed its various shrines and ascending layers, it is perhaps his hagiographer's concluding remarks: his imagining and articulation of the consequences of such a mystical insight, which prove really, rather extraordinary.

Echoing apostolic theorems and early scriptural motifs of self-mastery, enlightenment and divinely bestowed discernment, Thomas of Marga's account of the strange though undoubtedly familiar dynamic of exceptional piety and mystical experience, concludes with what might perhaps be described as a cluster of extraordinary, and certainly revealing detail. We have already begun to unpack and consider at least something of the bare bones of this tale of the mystic; how his piety had facilitated his transcendence of the boundaries of conventional human experience. So let us now focus on one aspect of the narrative in particular: a facet of the hagiographical tradition, pointing not only to the hagiographer's imagining of the mystical experiences undertaken by the truly pious, but also to his expectations of the potential and privileges associated with having done so. Following a long succession of details alluding

²⁶² *Ephesians*, 3 :19

²⁶³ We see also from the teachings of Ephraim the Syrian, that through ascetic vigil, love and sincere faith join together as wings that cannot be separated, for truth (or rather a discernment of the celestial mysteries) cannot fly without Love, nor Love ascend without Truth. To the one who thus communes with the Lord, and has this intercourse in love with him, the Way to celestial apotheosis reveals itself, and the very gates of Heaven are opened, and there are none to hinder the soul from entering therein. Hence, the soul is deified, made one with God as God is one with it. 'The Lord is blended with his creatures far and near, lo! They seek him and He is carrying them. Everything is in Him and He is also in them all. He is the Life of our soul which dwelleth in us'. See Ephraim, 'adversus Scrutatores Hymni 8:5 and 14:1' in T. J. Lamy (trans.) *Sancti Ephraem Syri: Hymni et Sermones* (Rome: H. Dessain, Summi Pontificus, SS. Congreg. Rituum et de Propaganda Fide Necron Archiepiscopatus Mechliniensis Typographicus, 1902).

to both the setting and circumstances of the saint's trance-like and mystically induced vision, this episode in the 'Life' of Narsai narrates how the lights which had adorned and illuminated the Chancel, had suddenly 'filled the place with Divine splendour': elevating Narsai's consciousness away from the terrestrial congregations and service of the Psalmody, and supplanting it with a vision of its celestial equivalent.²⁶⁴ According to Thomas of Marga, the glow radiating from the Chancel's lights had not only illuminated and subsequently bestowed Narsai with a vision of 'heavenly splendour', but furnished his mind with the kind of discernment 'divine in all things', which made 'all the companies of spiritual beings sparkle and shine'. Thomas writes:

'The censer which hath been transmitted by the priests, from hand to hand, in order from the priests of the early [period] to those of the middle [period], and from the priests of the middle to those of the last times, represents the doctrine of the things which are about to come to pass, and of the things which must needs be, and which the Divine dispensation demandeth, and which the angels receive by teaching from one another. And the knowledge of things which are about to come to pass, and the insight into things which are hidden, and the gratification and joy which we receive therefrom are like unto the sweet scents which censer breatheth forth in our holy temples.'²⁶⁵

With the eye of a purified and newly-enlightened soul, Mar Narsai had been permitted to look upon God as he really was, for the darkness of the sin with which it was once engulfed had gradually diminished, unburdening and subsequently unveiling its perception to the radiance of Divine light. God, according to many of the textual traditions explored here and indeed in a great many of those which are not, was assumed to send forth a brightness from himself to those that sit in darkness, articulated in this narrative in terms of the illuminative glow bestowed by the lights of the Chancel, and by means of its shining, the souls of those able or inclined to perceive it, were not only offered

²⁶⁴ 'Book V, Chapter XV' in *The Book of Governors*, pp.541-547

²⁶⁵ Ibid, p.545

visions of the Lord's glory, but subsequently admitted into the glory of his immediate presence.²⁶⁶ Allowing oneself to be turned from the beauty of worthless things and instead, towards an increasingly clarified image of the beauty of God himself, equated to an equal bestowment of divine radiance; until at last, inundated with divine enlightenment, the soul was permitted to mingle with the God it loves, and to thereby pass into a state of unparalleled union.²⁶⁷ In this way, the soul of the mystic was assumed to have been made one with God and God one with it, 'blended' as Ephrem the Syrian would imply, so that 'everything is in Him, and He also in them',²⁶⁸ though in removing the darkness which had formerly obstructed its discernment, this excerpt and many like it, would assume that the souls of the pious were not only united with God in spiritual union, but transformed in his image.²⁶⁹ Carried away by the splendour of the 'Vision', and being reckoned 'holy among the holy', we read how Narsai had been permitted to inhale the sweet wafts of a powerful mystical gnosis, otherwise hidden and unknowable to human discernment: including an understanding of 'things yet to come to pass', 'that which must needs be', and which the 'Divine dispensation demandeth'.²⁷⁰ He had been exalted to the incorporeal congregations of the spiritual beings to feast eternally upon the unknown delights of the Divine vision, and in so doing had

266 A. L. Oppenheim's study 'Why Mesopotamian Religion Should not be Written', would suggest that luminosity was considered not only within Christian hagiographical tradition, but within wider Near-Eastern iconography, as an inherent and specifically divine attribute: one which defined the Gods' supernatural and awe-inspiring quality. What is more remarkable, is the fact that this shared expression of the ineffable in terms of supernatural radiance, was also equally perceived as a gift to be potentially bestowed upon all things considered holy and worthy of divine status, such as kings, heroes, and the case of Christian hagiography, the ascetic holy man. For further reading on 'luminosity' as one of a number of divine attributes presented repeatedly in Ancient Near Eastern iconography, and its continued adaptation within Christian literary sources, see A. L. Oppenheim, 'Akkadian pul(u)t(u) and melammu' in *JAOS* 63 (1943); *ibid.*, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) pp.31-34 and E. Cassin, *La Splendour Divine* (Paris: Mouton, 1968), pp.9-12. See also, A. Golitzen, 'Recovering the Glory of Adam: 'Divine Light' Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Ascetical Literature of Fourth Century Syro-Mesopotamia' in *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity: Papers from an International Conference at St. Andrews in 2001* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003).

267 Ephraim articulates this concept particularly well with the suggestion, 'let each one of us then be a dwelling place for Him Who loves us. Let us come unto Him and make our abode with Him. This is the Godhead Whom, though all the creation cannot contain, yet a lowly and humble soul suffices to receive him'. See A. Edward Johnston (trans.), 'Homily on Our Lord: 57' in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 13*. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1898).

268 *Adversus Scrutatores*, Hymni 14:1.

269 To use the words of Christopher Buck, the goal of existence is full and perfect deification, augmented through self-purification and a godly life of spiritual service, culminating in the complete transformation of body and soul into the realm of the spirit. See C. Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm*, p.123.

270 This revelation of 'hidden things' and 'things which were about to pass', would appear to resonate with certain details of the apocalyptic revelations which had supposedly been bestowed upon Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-3), indeed the scriptural base of Isaiah's vision would appear to have underlined and largely defined a great many of the details of Narsai's revelation; from the ecclesiastical contexts in which it was assumed to have been bestowed, the various details of the celestial realm revealed and its eventual culmination in the vision of angelic worship or Qedushah. Unlike the original scripture however, Narsai's confession of his celestial revelation would not extend to an account of angelic interaction: a significant difference when consider the role of that particular motif in both of those narratives, though this should not detract from the otherwise significant scriptural resonances which underlie this narrative of spiritual apotheosis. The influence and scriptural echoes of Isaiah's vision are here plain to discern, and require very little further articulation. Instead we might perhaps consider what our hagiographer's adaptation of this scriptural heritage, was assumed to add to this portrait of individual piety and his reasoning for doing so.

been imprinted with something of the image of their divine prototype, as a consequence.²⁷¹

In assimilating, as far as may be, to that which is by nature passionless, and this by holding undistracted converse with the Divine; the enlightened saint was invited to know the Lord and thereby reclaim something of the status of divinity. By penetrating the mysteries of the celestial realm and unravelling its secrets, he was assumed to have been steadily made like him, and in becoming like to him, to have been one with him: at once both holy and Divine.²⁷² Bearing God and the qualities of divinity within his soul, and being borne in the mind of God as one of his favoured servants; this depiction of the pious would seem to move beyond the basic premise of celestial ascent and mystical encounter, and towards introducing the idea of transformation; and even deification, as the logical conclusion of spiritual union with the Divine.²⁷³ Indeed, instead of ascending to and merely beholding the hidden mysteries of the celestial realm, this and other hagiographical narratives like it, would surmise how the pious were also irrevocably and unquestionably altered by the privilege of their discernment. Piety in these texts, was not only a precious declaration of individual intent towards abstention and spiritual perfection, but a potentially powerful process of reorienting the mind towards heavenly realities, and potential rehabilitation.²⁷⁴ The extreme behaviours of Mar Narsai's asceticism had allowed his mind to renegotiate its former heavenly disposition, and thereby effectively reclaim his discernment of the invisible realities of God and the celestial realm, but it would also facilitate the

271 For further reading on how a knowledge of celestial 'mysteries' or 'raza' رازا were assumed to transform and even divinize the faithful Christian, see Christopher Buck's comments in 'A Symbolic Profile of Syriac Christianity' in *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha'i Faith*, (New York: State of New York Press, 1999), pp.85-134 [85-87]. Also see K. Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels: a Study of the Relationship between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004).

272 Issac of Nineveh would suggest that '[ascetic] labours and humility make man a god on the earth'. See Bedjan, *Perfectione Religiosa*, 95; Winsinck, *Mystical Treatises*, 64.

273 Thomas Marga's 'Life' of Mar Narsai was by no means unique in its adaptation of this theme, indeed the mystical discourses of a number of early Syriac Christian writers would seem equally to have contemplated the potential for deification, as a consequence of one's commitment to spiritual perfection. The works of Simon Taibutheh would articulate this point succinctly, suggesting: 'Blessed is the one who, going out of Egypt, was not afraid of tribulations and trials, but headed straight for the harbour of life, because if he is saved, he will become a god among men, and if he dies in his tribulations, the angels will conduct him to the bosom of Abraham'. John the Solitary rather eloquently implies: 'as iron when placed in a fire has the fire passed into it to become one substance with it, the iron united with the fire assuming its likeness and colour, no longer appearing its former aspect, but becoming like the fire, because they have become absorbed in each other and have become one, so it is when the love of Christ has come into the soul as a living fire which burns away the thorns of sin from the soul; it become one substance with him and he with it; then the soul which was old, becomes new; dead it comes alive; and the likeness of its own nature is changed into the likeness of God'. See, 'The Book of Degrees, xxii' in B. Colless, *The Wisdom of the Pearlers: An Anthology of Syriac Christian Mysticism*, p.125

274 Seppalla argues that in fact this was in fact the main purpose of Christian asceticism, that spiritual perfection transformed the human soul and its terrestrial condition into its final, or rather into its original, heavenly character. For further reading, see Seppala, pp.145-148.

beginnings of his acquisition of the angelic life, angelic status and potential.²⁷⁵ Turning our attention to any number of hagiographical traditions, it is possible to uncover an adaptation of at least the basic premise of this imagining of piety's potential, indeed, there is certainly more than one episode in both the 'Lives' of Simeon Stylites and Rabban Hormizd which would allude to the mystical insight and subsequent potential, assumed to have garnered as a consequence of saintly piety. What is perhaps remarkable about these rich and condensed treasuries of hagiographical mystical thought and Late Antique Syriac Christian tradition however, lies not only in their shared imagining of this essential premise, but rather in the catalogue of symbolic expression with which these traditions poetically conceived of the saint's veneration and newly sanctified status.

As both Brock and Murray have previously observed, 'Syriac Christianity had a genius for symbolic expression'; defining and articulating the experience of ecstasy, and Christian spirituality more generally according to a rich array of 'poetical images' and imaginative details.²⁷⁶ Thus in this christologically attuned cosmos, acquiring the 'robe of glory' was the father's favourite way of describing the drama of human perfection and gradual redemption,²⁷⁷ whilst the motif of the defective mirror, its reduced luminosity and blemishes, was just as frequently employed to articulate the inadequacies of tarnished souls, whose blemishes failed to reflect the full and true beauty of celestial truths. Among these symbolic curiosities, it is possible to encounter yet more peculiar motifs, such as Issac of Nineveh's 'harbour of peace', referring to an ineffable stupefaction and spiritual intoxication *rewa* 'ܪܘܐ' of experiencing the rapturous state of ecstasy,²⁷⁸ and John of Dalyatha's 'total living lustres' and 'statute of light'.²⁷⁹ Though of all the mystically laden

275 B. E. Colless discusses and articulates this point particularly effectively in his study 'The Wisdom of the Pearlys', suggesting that the Syrian monks of Late Antique Mesopotamia expected to receive visionary and ecstatic experiences as a matter of course in reward for their ascetic labours. Tales of the miraculous were an expectation from those whose piety bought a close relationship with the Divine, but also with the power of the divine. See B. E. Colless, *The Wisdom of the Pearlys* (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 2008), p.22.

276 R. Murray, 'The Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity' in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (ed.) N. Garsoian, T. Mathews and R. Thompson (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982) pp.3-16 (12). Also see S. Brock, *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984) pp.10-12, 24-48.

277 See S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian*, (Kalamazoo, M.I. Cistercian Publications, 1992) p. 68. Also see R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p.69.

278 The Syriac Verb to express drunkenness is *rewa* (ܪܘܐ), but occasionally the verb *bahli* (ܒܠܝ) and its derivation (ܒܠܝܬ) are sometimes used in a similar or parallel fashion. It is important to note that its use does not denote drunkenness as caused by alcohol, but rather of falling into a rapturous and overwhelming state of apotheosis and incomprehensibility. For further reading see S. Seppala, 'In Speechless Ecstasy: Expression and Interpretation of Mystical Experience in Classical Syriac and Sufi Literature' in *Studia Orientalia* 98 (2003).

279 'ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ' and 'ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܡܝܬܐ'.

symbols with which the Syriac Christian hagiographer would imagine the saint's experience of theophany, and the privileges of his newly deified status, it was perhaps the image of 'the pearl' (ܡܝܬܪܐ): a coveted and precious natural treasure, which would emerge as perhaps one of his most important motifs, alluding both to the value and indeed to the difficulties of their quest, into the unknown abyss of mystical experience. It is to our hagiographer's articulation of this motif; his poetic expression and the inherent premise of its symbology, to which this chapter now turns its attention.

Gifts of Apotheosis: Symbology and the Symbol of the Pearl

'Religions enshrine symbols, the stained glass windows of faith. Sacred symbols present an explorable treasury of religious thought-an information-rich, condensed language of spirituality.'²⁸⁰

'Symbol'- or perhaps better still, 'Raza'- was arguably the key hermeneutical term used by the hagiographer's of the Syriac Orient to impart something of the spiritual truths of mystical experience. Indeed, as Hugo Rahner suggests in his introduction to *Symbole der Kirche*: 'wherever the Fathers unfold their theology with its veils of imagery, we discover a wealth of symbols and truths clothed in symbols', derived from and largely formulated within the established orthodoxy of biblical precedent, or at least, defined according to the parameters of a biblical subtext.²⁸¹ From descriptions of the divinity as 'fire' and spiritual cleansing as gradual 'illumination', to the theme of the 'wedding feast' as the glorious destiny of the chaste, the texts of the Syriac fathers would paint a rich and complex Christological landscape in hues of vivid symbolic colour- the 'stained glass windows' as Buck suggests, through which the scholar, as much as the congregational minds of the Late Antique Christian pious, might perceive and potentially explore something of the hidden truths of

280 C. Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Bahai Faith* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), p.1.

281 H. Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche* (Salzburg, 1964) p.8

Christian spirituality.²⁸² Though for all the apparent artistry and occasional creativity of their expression, it is evident that the ascetic authors of these hagiographical texts, unlike St. Ephrem, Jacob of Serugh, and those other outstanding early theologians of Syriac Christianity, were by no means poets. As Seppala has recently argued, their language and choice of expression had neither the tendency nor the aim to produce aesthetic images merely for the sake of form, but instead attempted to impart the details of genuine subjective experience and personal perception.²⁸³ Indeed, the imagery of their symbolism was not merely descriptive or allegorical, but would surpass the beauty and 'genius' of the reference; to articulate, but also to participate, in the reality of what it represents. In order to more fully comprehend this doubtlessly unfamiliar dimension of Syriac Christian thought and literary expression, it is important to identify not only the array of the Syriac Father's vocabulary of symbols but to better appreciate something of the sense and complexity which underlies its usage.

The English rendition of the term 'Raza', used by the Syriac fathers to describe 'spiritual truths' and 'mystical insight', suffices perhaps only in part to articulate the true sense of what was intended. As the research of Sebastian Brock on the semantics of symbolic expression is careful to point out, 'symbol' in the works of the Fathers differs significantly from the rather static and signficatory sense of 'symbol' common in modern usage.²⁸⁴ Indeed, though 'Raza' and 'symbol' are perhaps terminologically equivalent, on closer inspection, there can be little doubt that the conceptual constructs upon which both terms are ultimately defined, are derived and accordingly based, upon different expectations. In the Christological universe of the Syriac Fathers, the entire cosmos was suffused with symbolism pointing to a higher reality, but symbol was much more than merely what it evoked. Symbol or 'raza' participated in the reality of what it represents. According to Yousif, the use of the term 'Raza' in its native Syriac context pointed to complex web of possible meanings far beyond the parameters imposed by its English rendition; the first of which points to the origins of the term as a Persian loan word and to its eventual transition into Imperial Aramaic, where it was used to denote royal

282 Christopher Buck suggests that 'religions enshrine symbols', and describes them as the 'stained glass windows of faith', through which we are able to discern something of the complex and colourful patterns of Late Antique Christian spirituality. See C. Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm*, p.1

283 See S. Seppala, 'In Speechless Ecstasy' (2003), p.91

284 S. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise* (New York: Crestwood, 1990), p.42

secrets.²⁸⁵ Based upon the research of Beck, who has similarly drawn connections between the Syriac father's use of the term 'Raza' and the Greek term 'mysterion'; Yousif has also argued that the notion of 'Raza' might equally have embraced the concept of a spiritual reality, surpassing all ordinary human intelligence.²⁸⁶ Finally though, and perhaps most importantly, Yousif has suggested that the term can be found embracing notions of Christ bearing 'types' within the Hebrew scriptures, and when used in its plural form, to denote the 'mysteries' of the Sacraments. According to the Syriac fathers, during the mystic Christian initiation, consisting of Chrism, Baptism and the Eucharist, matter is dynamised by the spirit, acquiring a divine power all of their own so that the worshiper partakes not only of the symbol of Christ's recognition and forgiveness, but in its reality as well.²⁸⁷ In this respect, the 'symbols' of Chrism, Baptism and the Eucharist articulate a powerful and tangible expression of 'raza' - one which perceives 'symbol' as holding the potential to conjoin realities, transforming and perhaps even partially divinizing the faithful Christian, through renewed and enhanced mystical insight. It is this particular sense of 'symbol', as something evidently more complex than the constraints of English translation are able to convey: both evocative of but also deeply engaged with the celestial reality it was supposed to convey, which I would like to explore here further, and to focus on the Syriac fathers' understanding of the implications of obtaining and subsequently engaging with these potentially transformational tools towards divinity.

True to the Christian Orient, the goal of existence for the authors of our texts was full and perfect deification, augmented through self-purification and a godly life of spiritual service, and culminating in the complete translation of body and soul into the realm of the spirit. Towards this end, the life of the celibate and of the continent was considered exemplary, compared by the Syriac fathers to various types of ornament; including jewels and precious adornments, but also to the radiance and perfect lustre of hidden pearls. Indeed, perhaps more than any other Christological motif, it was the image of

²⁸⁵Its Persian provenance is apparent from its Aramaic occurrence in Daniel 6:4, where the term carries the sense not of royal enigma, but rather of divine gnosis. See P. Yousif, 'Symbol and Reality in St. Ephrem' in *Bayn al-Nahrayn* 16:4 (1976) pp.435-48 and idem, 'Approaches to Divine Realities in the Thought of St. Ephrem of Nisibis' in J. Madey and G. Kaniarakath (eds) *The Church I Love. A Tribute to Rev. Placid J. Podipara* (Kottayam: CMI, 1984) pp. 54-69. Yousif's work focuses on the terminology of Ephrem specifically, though his research and conclusions are evidently valid for the terminology of Syriac Christian literature more generally.

²⁸⁶ For the research of Beck, see E. Beck, 'Symbolum- Mysterium bei Aphrahat und Ephram' in *Oriens Christianus* 42 (19-40).

²⁸⁷ P. Yousif, 'Symbolisme Christologique dans la Bible et dans la Nature chez S. Ephrem de Nisibe', in *Parole de l'Orient* 8 (1977-78), pp.5-66 (48)

the pearl which would emerge as one of early Syriac Christianity's most important literary symbols of perfect virginity: one explored and extensively articulated in Ephrem's specifically devoted hymns to the Pearl (Madrasc 'al-Marganita) and broader treatises *On Faith*.²⁸⁸ Yet, in addition to appearing as a symbol evocative of the quality of Christian sexual discipline, Ephrem's references to 'the pearl' would seem also, on occasion, to have taken on a slightly different complexion: one which would advance a more exotic, if somewhat more stained analogy between the image of the pearl and exceptional Christian spirituality. Indeed, as Brock has formerly implied, the *Hymns of the Pearl* would exhibit an understanding of the Pearl as an object to be admired not only on account of the immediate perfection of its appearance, but as an object in nature produced immaculately and without sexual union.²⁸⁹ The pearl which is by nature mortal, had gained life by chastity- that most unnatural and divine of all qualities, and hence was an element of nature which conjoined the realities of terrestrial existence with heavenly perfection and celestial truths.²⁹⁰ Indeed, it was an object uniquely positioned on the boundaries between natural/mortality and unnatural/immortality, whose lustre and soft sheen, at least for the sufficiently pious, reflected and revealed something of the mysteries or 'raze' of the 'Kingdom on High'. This particular sense of Ephrem's meaning of the 'pearl' is in evidence throughout Madrase 'al-Marganita, where an invidious comparison might liken the 'pearl' to a crystal ball in which an array of heavenly realities and celestial images are said to appear. Having dived into the unknown abyss of ascetic hardship, and having thus located the Pearl of sexual virginity, Ephrem relates from his own contemplation of the pearl's surface how:

'I saw within it mysteries, O sons of the Kingdom, images and types
of that majesty. It became a fountain and from it I drank the

²⁸⁸ For translation, see E. G. Mathews, 'St Ephrem, Madrase on Faith, 81-85: Hymns on the Pearl, I-V' in *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38:1, pp.45-72.

²⁸⁹ Adopting and adapting contemporary conclusions, Ephrem's Hymns contemplate the pearl as an object of immaculate-conception: conceived on those rare occasions when lightening deigned to strike the shell of the oyster or the 'mother' of the pearl-a poetic allusion to the Virgin Mary, who had equally conceived through miraculous intervention. For further reading on this assumption, see S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p.85.

²⁹⁰ See 'Pearl II: 2' in E. G. Mathews, *St Ephrem Madrase on Faith*, pp.45-72.

mysteries of the Son'. Blessed is he who compared the Kingdom on high to a pearl'.²⁹¹

The symbol of the Pearl in these contexts was not only a symbol of spiritual excellence but something to be physically acquired, a precious object whose purity and spherical indivisibility was not merely evocative of the value of their devotion, but indicative of its subsequent purpose. Having contemplated the reflected 'raza' of its unsullied surface; Ephrem relates how his mind had been transported and invited to permutate the manifold mysteries of the celestial realm, how: 'in its clarity, I saw the Clear One whose is not clouded. In its purity, a great mystery: the body of the Lord which is unsullied'.²⁹² 'Symbol' and the image of the 'Pearl' in particular, would evidently have a multifarious set of meanings beyond its evocation of perfect Christian purity and sexual virginity. In line with Syriac Christian interpretation, Ephrem's articulation of the symbol of the pearl would also partake in the reality of what it represents, so that to perceive the pearl: to 'taste its sweet taste', to smell its 'sweet odour' or to contemplate its luminosity and perfection, was to partake in the perfection of the celestial truths which the pearl itself was supposed to symbolise.²⁹³

This understanding of the symbol or 'Raza', it's potential as something to be spiritually acquired, and indeed the consequences of acquiring the inherent mysteries of the 'pearl' in particular, is a recurring theme seen punctuating the efforts of a number of Late Antique hagiographers, but let us take the opportunity to review this motif and the exotic complexities attributed to it, in one text in particular: the Life of Simeon Stylites. In this episode of involuntary encounter with the Divine, we are presented with an account of theophany as a consequence of individual and exceptional piety, though perhaps what strikes the reader is not only the hagiographer's understanding of symbol of the Pearl and its transformational power for the mystic, but the significant and almost essential role which the 'pearl' and the accompanying narrative of celestial investment would play in this hagiographical account of

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² See 'Pearl I:3' in E. G. Mathews, *St Ephrem Madrase on Faith*, pp.45-72

²⁹³ Seppalla argues that the mystical experience, and more specifically the symbol, was something often described with the help of any of the allegories or images derived from ordinary natural sensing, like that of tasting, hearing and occasionally smelling- especially the 'sweet odour of that which is ineffable'. See Seppalla, 'In Speechless Ecstasy', p.91.

individual piety and saintly sanctity. To borrow a phrase from Jean-Claude Poulin, ‘the Life of Simeon Stylites’ and other hagiographical ‘Lives’ like it, may indeed describe something of the ‘lived’ experience of Late Antique Christian piety, but its value, at least for the argument of this thesis, lies somewhat more in the way in which its hagiographer, Thomas of Marga, chose to give it expression: the ‘imagined’ minutiae and underlying expectations of an ‘imagined sanctity’. The symbol of the pearl was by no means merely an aesthetic detail: the metaphor of an aspiration of individual sanctity. It was an object to be seized- the embodiment of celestial mysteries-and a dimension of the ‘Pearl’ which, perhaps significantly, offers an insight into a whole range of less clearly focused expectations surrounding the figure of the holy man in Late Antiquity.

Simeon the Pearler

‘Concerning the visions and revelations which appeared from God to the Blessed Mar Simeon, no one is capable of telling about them, or speaking of them. He too, was very careful and fearful least any one should think of him as though he told them in ostentation. But to those in whom he had confidence from time to time, he spoke openly, making it known to them that it was not his wish that they should tell them to the people while he was living’.²⁹⁴

Simeon may have been reluctant and even fearful about discussing the mystical visions afforded to him as a consequence of his ascetic dedication, but it is apparent that celestial discernment would nevertheless play an integral role within his hagiographer’s imagining and subsequent depiction, of exemplary piety and eventual sanctity. Like those textual traditions surrounding Mar Narsai and indeed to a certain extent the holy Ephrem; the ‘Life’ of Simeon Stylites would relate something of the saint’s quest towards the rigours of an increasingly harsh and ascetic practice; of his adaptation to a largely unknown and unforgiving Spartan landscape, and steadily unfolding union and with God

²⁹⁴ *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, Lent, p.151; Syriac, p.571.

and the divine as a consequence of his unwavering devotion and ascetic renunciation. Though, other than its adaptation of the same spiritual narrative of individual purification; gradual illumination and subsequent divine union, what is perhaps particularly noteworthy about this hagiographical tale of dogged Christian devotion is its author's articulation of the same extensive conceptual vocabulary- including the symbol of the pearl- to describe the saint's ever-increasing reception of celestial insight. The excerpt with which we are primarily concerned begins by offering something of the wider context of Simeon's gradual experience of celestial truths and celestial insight; describing something of the saint's initial mountainous seclusion as a wandering and distant shepherd, his inherent disposition towards a state of silent solitude, but also something of his hagiographer's attempts to draw immediate connections with one of Christianity's important early motifs – that of the 'Good Shepherd'– and an appellation alluding both to the kindness and divinity of Christ. It is hard to comprehend the contexts in which the motif of the pearl and that of the 'great shepherd' might possibly coexist; indeed long confined to their mountain seclusion or desert isolation, many of these mystical 'Pearlers' would neither have set their eyes on the sea or ever watched pearl divers plunging into the ocean in search of unknown treasures. Though, as Issac of Nineveh implies: 'as the diver plunges naked into the sea to find a pearl; so the wise monk goes naked throughout the wildernesses to find the pearl'- the mysteries of Jesus Christ himself. Simeon's wandering through the mountain wildernesses as a solitary shepherd had led him to uncover the pearl and other spiritual treasures of a life in imitation of Jesus Christ, yet the motif of the pearl in the contexts of this particular episode, was more than merely figurative. For the author of the 'Life' of Simeon Stylites, and indeed many other hagiographers like him, uncovering the 'Pearl' was not only to uncover a path towards perfect faith in Christ, but to receive a knowledge of Christ and a mystical insight into a dimension of celestial truths far beyond the confines of ordinary cognition.

Adopting yet another familiar mystical motif from the hagiographer's lexicon-that of illumination- Simeon's hagiographer would relate how it was 'in the blaze of torches' that the saint was first introduced to the immediate presence of the Divine and to a discernment of sacred mysteries; how a man 'whose appearance was like lightening' and whose face 'shined like the sun'

had approached the saint, and revealed to him ‘all that his quest for the pearl would permit him to see’.²⁹⁵

‘He held a golden staff in his hand, and called and raised him up. When the Blessed One [Simeon] raised his eyes and saw this wonderful sign, he trembled and was affrighted, and fell upon his face on the ground. But he gave him his hand and, raising him up, said to him: ‘be not afraid, but come after me without fear, for I have something to tell thee and show thee. For the Lord wills that through thy hand his Name should be glorified. And that thou shalt be chief and director and leader to his people and to the sheep of his pasture... And many thou shalt turn from error to knowledge of the truth. And if thou dost serve acceptably, thy name shall be great among the Gentiles...only have patience and endurance, and let love be in thee toward all men. If thou dost indeed observe these things, not among the first and not among the last shall he be who glorifies himself and becomes as great as thou art’.²⁹⁶

Simeon had been offered an overwhelming vision of the divine and an insight into the potential of his future: a truly extraordinary description of the assumed potential of the pious and their piety, in the imagination of the Christian in the Late Antique world of Mesopotamia. Though, it is perhaps through the embellishments of those excerpts which follow, that we discern the true extent of his hagiographer’s imagining of the potential vision that might be bestowed, and its incredible consequences. In a scene reminiscent of the mystical visions described in the ‘Life’ of Mar Narsai and the scriptural precedent of *Isaiah* 6:1-3, Simeon’s hagiographer relates how the saint had been invited to partake in a peculiar vision indeed: one which had circumvented the ordinary conventions of time but also traversed the boundaries of terrestrial and celestial worlds. The

295 Simeon’s hagiographer does state precisely who this celestial apparition was, though it is with the description of its golden ‘shepherd’s staff’ that one might perhaps begin to speculate. It is in the gospel of John 10:1-21 that Jesus is depicted as the ‘Good Shepherd’ who lays down his life for his sheep, whilst the motif of Christ as a shepherd of men can be found throughout the Gospel texts. Did Simeon’s hagiographer believe that it had been Christ himself who had gone out into the open country to collect one of his lost sheep, just as the parable of Luke 15 promised he would. The comparisons certainly are striking, and like the shepherd who finds his lost sheep and ‘joyfully places it over his shoulders’, we read how that glorious vision took hold of the Holy Simeon and preceded to bring him back to the fold; guiding him and tending to him on this new journey towards the Divine. For further reading on Christ’s staff and early Christian presentations of Christ as a Shepherd of men, see L. M. Jefferson, ‘The staff of Jesus in Early Christian Art’ in *Religion and the Arts* 14 (2010), pp. 221–251.

296 *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, Lent, p.112; Syriac, p.509

vision would take place in a nearby Martyrium, one in which Mar Timotheus: the disciple of the apostle Paul was assumed to have been laid to rest, and in which people: 'the number of which could not be counted', had gathered in abundance.²⁹⁷ Indeed, as we might expect, these gathered multitudes were certainly no ordinary vision. Some had been clothed in white and 'were like to bridegrooms', whilst others in 'the likeness of women' had been clothed in purple: all modest and adorned with great beauty- all destined to receive the sign of the Messiah and the knowledge of his truth by Simeon's hand.²⁹⁸ There, amongst those very earthly confines, Simeon was assumed to have received an illusory vision of things which were yet to pass, and a remarkable insight into the potential of his future piety, but it was perhaps the emergence of a dazzling spectacle: two celestial peacocks with an appearance 'like the flame of fire' and whose 'eyes went forth as if it were swift lightnings', that we begin to realise the true extent of his hagiographer's imagining of the semi-celestial space which Simeon, and his cognitive discernment, had begun to negotiate.²⁹⁹

Resplendent with the magnificence of their celestial design and evidently ill-disposed to his presence: it would seem that Simeon and that the terrestrial world of the martyrium had surreptitiously converged with the parameters of their celestial realm, just as they had in Thomas Marga's account of Mar Narsai's visions. Yet the remarkable adaptation of this ancient Mesopotamian cosmic motif was by no means the only intimation of the unusual space which Simeon was assumed to have occupied as a consequence of the simplicity of his piety, and the purity of his solitude. Having pacified and bypassed the aggression of these heavenly guardians, the saint was confronted by yet another vision; though this time not of aggrieved peacocks or of celestial brides and bridegrooms, but of a man: 'whose appearance was more comely than the sun' and whose 'beauty was beyond compare'. His face had been 'glad' and his

²⁹⁷ Lent, p.113; Syriac, p. 511.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ The mystical motifs underlying a great many of the Syriac Christian hagiographical texts of Late Antiquity, often correspond with ancient Near Eastern mythological convention, including a variety of symbols and qualities describing the attributes of divinity, as well as the design and composition of the heavenly realm. Arbel offers an interesting discussion on the similar effect of Near Eastern mythological patterns upon the Jewish Hekhalot, and its imagining of the celestial realm. See V. D. Arbel, *Beholders of Divine Secrets*, pp. 131-138. Also see A. L. Oppenheim's discussion of ancient Mesopotamian considerations of unearthly luminosity as a divine attribute, a motif which as we have already seen, was enthusiastically embraced by the hagiographers of the Late Antique Syriac Orient, A. L. Oppenheim, *Antique Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilisation*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp.176-177. For further reading on the adaptation of the ancient cosmological symbol of the peacock in particular, how it had symbolised immortality and rebirth in a variety of Ancient and Late Antique Near Eastern traditions, see the excellent discussion offered by Asatrian and Arakelova in G. S. Asatrian and V. Arakelova, *The Religion of the Peacock Angel: The Yezides and Their Spirit World*, (New York: Routledge, 2004) esp. p.22.

countenance 'exceedingly cheerful', his hair 'sprinkled white and growing in clusters'.³⁰⁰ His garments had been 'pure' and his speech 'soft and pleasant', with proclamations of various blessings on account of the saint's unwavering devotion, and somewhat more interestingly, with promises of his yet untapped future potential, announcing: 'Blessed art thou Simeon, if thou art equal to the part and service to which thou art called'.³⁰¹ Through the purification of a remote and godly life amongst the flocks and mountainous solitude of their pasture, Simeon was assumed to have cultivated, and to have finally completed, the translation of body and soul into the realm of the spirit: permeating the parameters of its conventional existence and illuminating its perception to a new and extraordinary insight. It was as a consequence of this endeavour, of 'cultivating a purity of heart', of opening its chambers to the illumination of the mysteries of Christ, that this excerpt finally articulates and ultimately concludes with that most important and quintessential of all Late Antique Christian mystical motifs- relating to the circumstances under which Simeon was permitted to initially perceive, then forcibly fed an object: 'White like snow and round like a pearl, whose taste cannot be found in this world'.³⁰²

'Then the two of them laid hold of him and brought him to the altar, and he put in the mouth of Mar Simeon something white like snow and round like a pearl, and thus said: Such a taste and such sweetness cannot be found in the world'. And his soul was satisfied and fat exceedingly. Then this man gave him the golden staff which he held, and said to him 'With this staff thou art to shepherd the flock of Christ. Be strong and mighty'.³⁰³

300 A variety of diverse scriptural texts would similarly allude to the qualities of God in this way, often with particular attention paid to his pure white garments, as well as his white and woolly hair. See Isaiah 6:1; Ezekiel 16; Daniel, 7:9; Isaiah 63:1-3; Psalms, 60:10.

301 Lent, p.114; Syriac p.512.

302 Murray suggests of all the mystical concepts and vocabulary to emerge from Syriac Christian mystical discourse, 'Probably the famous is the pearl'. See R. Murray, 'The Theory of Symbolism in St Ephrem's Theology', *Parole de l'Orient*, 6-7 (1976), pp1-20 [8]. 'Perhaps Ephrem's favourite and best known image' Mathews concurs, 'is that of the pearl'. See, E. G. Mathews, 'St Ephrem, Madrase on Faith, 8185: Hymns on the Pearl, I-V', in St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, 38:1, pp.45-72. Ephrem's Hymns on the Pearl begins: 'One day, my brethren, I took a pearl into my hands; in it I beheld symbols which told of the Kingdom, images and figures of God's majesty. It became a fountain from which I drank the mysteries of the Son'. See, 'Hymns on Faith, no.81, on The Pearl' in S.P. Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit: Poems of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Cambridge: The Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, 2013). According to Ephrem, and indeed according to the underlying mentality of Simeon's hagiographer, to consume or handle the pearl is to be made aware or knowledgeable of the Lord's 'mysteries' or raze ܠܝܫܐܝܬܐ, those elements in nature that figure heavenly realities.

303 Lent, p.114; Syriac p.512.

As a result of the labour of his ascetic exercises, both those he had already performed and those he was yet to perform, Simeon-like so many of the holy men of Late Antique Mesopotamia-had received the precious pearl of mystical insight and experience.³⁰⁴ The purity of his soul and the enlightenment of his mind had bought a spiritual union with the divine, and his soul was to be made 'exceedingly fat' and 'satisfied' as a consequence. Though as the apparition would imply, this was a pearl to be stored deep amongst the valuable treasures of his mind, for it was gift intended not only as a symbol of the saint's ever closer union with the divine but somewhat more interestingly, to his investiture with the potential of communicating divine and benevolent power for all. Placing the Golden staff which he had held in Simeon's hands, the apparition commanded 'with this staff thou art to shepherd the flock of Christ. Be strong and mighty'. From a shepherd of sheep to a shepherd of men: Simeon had been committed to the care of the vulnerable; bound to the duty of steering Christ's flock and preventing it from straying by the example and strength of his asceticism, but also and perhaps somewhat more interestingly, through the power and the might of the miraculous potential which such a devotion to the divine and a subsequent mystical discernment was assumed to provide. his excerpt from the 'Life' of Simeon invites us to discern a Christian literary tradition, and a wider Christian mentality, which not only presumed the existence of a dynamic between piety and mystical discernment, but between the subsequent acquisition of a semi-divine status and the assumed celestial privileges embodied within celestial symbols such as the Pearl. Yet it is perhaps by turning our attention to the following excerpt, articulated according to similar suppositions of piety's potential to mediate access to God and the celestial realm, and a subsequent discernment of divine mysteries, that we are able to more fully comprehend something of the true potential assumed to have been bestowed by celestial symbols and by an insight into Divine 'raza', as it was transformed and eventually utilised to express countless examples of

304 A number of Late Antique Mesopotamian writers would describe themselves and their monastic brethren as 'mystic pearl divers' and 'pearl merchants', searching for spiritual pearls. Writing in the later centuries of the Late Antique period, John the Venerable would suggest 'these precious pearls are gathered and stored among the treasures of his mind by the merchant who is occupied with prayer, the strenuous diver captivated with desire for the sea that washes him. His contemporary Joseph the Visionary, spoke of the ascetic exercises of the solitary monk as 'the labour of the merchant up to the time when the pearl of great price falls into his hands, whilst Isaac of Nineveh would suggest that 'The diver plunges naked into the sea to find a pearl; and the wise monk will go naked through the desert places to find the Pearl, Jesus Christ himself'. Their quest thus led them out into the wilderness, into monastic arrangements of variable sizes, and to lives of varying ascetic severity, to achieve a purity of soul and enlightenment of mind which bought spiritual pearls of all shapes and sizes, and a gradual proximity with the divine. For further reading on motif of the pearl and the lives of those who sought them, see B. E. Colless, *The Wisdom of the Pearlers: An Anthology of Syriac Christian Mysticism* (Kalamazoo, MI, Cistercian Publications, 2008).

tangible and miraculous potential. From an ascetic's pursuit of 'the pearl' to the divine 'bestowal' of 'celestial crowns', we turn to an account of mystical insight defined and articulated in terms of a gift divinely given, as opposed to a goal merely terrestrially attained: 'bestowed' according to a Syriac translation of the Hebrew 'שָׁכֵלָה', and liked here specifically to the mystical investiture of majestic regalia and the glorious coronation of a celestial crown.³⁰⁵

The symbolism of the Crown and Celestial Coronation

The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honour you. She will give you a garland to grace your head and present you with a glorious crown.'

Proverbs 4:7-9

An extensive array of Late Antique Mesopotamian conceptualisations of the celestial realm, portray an environment awash with the familiar trappings of this worldly-kingship.³⁰⁶ Indeed, various forms of correspondence between the cosmic or primal kingship of the Gods and that of its temporal imitation have been duly noted and investigated within the earlier research of this chapter;

305 Hagiographer's would draw upon an extensive and often creative repertoire of vocabulary and even newly coined nouns in order to describe something of the mystical insight experienced by those exceptional few amongst the pious. We are told in line 345 from 'The Life of Rabban Hormizd' how the Rabban had received 'joy' (ܪܝܝܐ) the 'extent of which the tongue of flesh cannot relate' (ܕܠܥܝܢ ܠܥܡܠܐ ܕܠܥܝܢ ܕܠܥܝܢ). In line 368 how he remained in 'wonderment' (ܪܝܝܐ) and in 'ecstasy' (ܪܝܝܐ); how he was 'warmed with the love of Jesus as with a flame of fire' (ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ) in line 447, and was 'united unto Him in prayer' (ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ) 'intermingled' in 'one soul and one body' in line 337. We read how Christ had 'filled' him with 'revelations' and with 'visions of the spirit' (ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ); how he 'shone' and was 'illuminated' by their disclosure, and was even 'fattened' (ܪܝܝܐ) by the revelation of their 'secrets' (ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ), see 'line 367' in *ibid*. Through this ensemble of sensory experience, Rabban Hormizd 'ascended the lofty grade of spirituality to become magnified'; his whole being becoming 'fire in fire' like that of a cherub. He would also reach his 'perfection', a state and condition defined by perfect and absolute 'contemplation' of those truths which had shaped his terrestrial existence, but also of those hidden 'Razim' embodied within the Pearl, which would henceforth direct his journey towards semi-celestial status. See, 'line 374' in *ibid*. Late Antique theories of diligent ascetic practice would ensure that the saint's specific devotion to ascetic abstention received ample space within the texts assessment of theophany's cause, yet several features of the syntactic and semantic structure of its discourse would also point to mystical insight as an experience of 'bestowal': a 'gift' likened here to the bestowal of celestial majesty and divinity. The motif of celestial contemplation is frequently referred to within the 'Life of Rabban Hormizd' as 'a gift bestowed' (ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ ܕܡܝܢ) by the Holy Spirit, see 'line 367' in *ibid*.

306 Divine kingship has been a major theme in the writings of a number of scholars concerned with the history of religion. A summary of older anthropological views can be sourced in Frazer and Gaster, *The New Golden Bough* (New York: New American Library, 1959). See also the important essays of T. H. Gaster, *The Sacral Kingship* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959). On the symbol of God's crown in ancient, Late Antique and Medieval Jewish literary sources, see the thorough study and references of A. Green, *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 2003).

including the motifs of expansive royal residences, vast audience chambers replete with doting and enquiring dignitaries, ceremonial thrones or Merkavah, garments and finery, and perhaps most important of all amongst the various symbols of divine and temporal majesty-the crown. Yet the motif of the crown- that most synonymous of all majestic regalia, denoting the privilege and position of absolute and unquestionable authority, was not only an integral component in describing and imagining the concept of deity within the mystical discourses examined in this thesis: indeed for a great many of the authors of Late Antique Christian hagiography and Jewish Hekhalot alike, the 'crown', and the concept of celestial coronation, was also an increasingly important means of describing the perfection of saintly piety, and the ultimate reward of his ascetic journey towards the Divine. The saints of the Syriac Christian hagiographies explored in this chapter, and indeed a great many of those which are not, were often depicted as crowned saints- celestial denotations of their increasing proximity to the pre-ordained condition of spiritual perfection which God had initially intended for mankind, though perhaps more importantly, of their new found and quasi-divine status. By imitating something of the Divine condition, both through the perfection of their ascetic inclination and by the harsh austerity of their enterprise, the saint; indeed much like the 'Yored Merkavah', was assumed to have been bestowed with the royal regalia of celestial discernment: but this remarkable act of coronation would not only bestow a mystical comprehension of God and the celestial realm, but an insight into the condition of divinity itself. To achieve a vision of the 'glory' of the 'father' was not merely to be 'filled' with divine 'revelations', nor indeed was it simply to be 'illuminated' and 'rewarded' by their disclosure: acquiring a discernment of the Lord enthroned was to be transformed into the object of one's vision. To 'know' was to become that same reality that was known; to be transformed through enlightenment into the actual object of knowledge- in this case 'divinity'. Put differently, the coronation or act of receiving the celestial crown- an integral motif to both the Jewish Hekhalot and Christian hagiography- would symbolically depict the narrowing of the gap that otherwise separates human and divine nature. It's bestowal was a gift: one given in recognition of the saint's devotion and therefore of his submission to the Divine will; though in a way which is perhaps less clearly spoken, though no less deeply meant, for the authors of Syriac Hagiography and

Jewish Hekhalot alike, it was also evidently a step towards approximating the experience but also the condition of divinity.³⁰⁷

Ascending on High to Receive the Crown in the 'Life' of Rabban Hormisd:

'When he was sunk deeply in sound slumber, a vision appeared unto him from our LORD, Who was sitting upon the throne of the glory of His honour (Isiah, 6:1), and the heavenly hosts were standing before him, and were ascribing holiness to the majesty of his appearance (Isiah, 6:3). And as soon as the motions of the soul of the young man had been united by the sweetness of the vision which had burst upon him, and by the unparalleled wonder of the sight of the spiritual beings in their natural state, the King of praise gave the command, and one of those spiritual beings who were standing before the King Christ flew and stood before him (Isiah 6:6). And he answered and said unto the young man, 'Man, why

307A number of studies have recognised the resonance between this particular mystical expression of apotheosis, and the literary patterns of a far more ancient Mesopotamian mythical tradition; albeit with due consideration for the enormous chronological and historical distance which separates the ancient Near East from the reality of the Jewish and Christian Mystic. Careful to differentiate between suggestions of 'direct inheritance' of borrowed motifs, and the more natural 'evolution' of ancient mystical traditions 'evoked', 'reworked' and 'reapplied': the studies of scholars such as S. N. Kramer and H. W. N. Saggs have identified a variety of historical, textual and archaeological sources which would seem to demonstrate how Mesopotamian traditions- those embodied in literature, art and myths- migrated not only to immediate neighbouring cultures in the ancient Near East, but also to later cultures in Late Antiquity. See Kramer and Maier, *Myths of Enki, the Crafty God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) p.154 and H. W. F. Saggs, *The Encounter with the Divine in Mesopotamia and Israel* (California: Athlone Press, 1978), p.8. It was this percolation of Mesopotamian tradition, channelled through the migratory routes of folk-lore and tradition, which some have argued would shape the Late Antique literary correspondence between cosmic and temporal kingship; and it is perhaps this same process of percolation, which would also shape the Late Antique assumption underlying the following excerpt within the 'Life' of Rabban Hormisd: namely that to acquire the regalia of Celestial coronation was not only to proximate the qualities of divine sovereignty; but something of the power of divinity as well. One such scholar who sees Mesopotamian links between gods and kings' arising some twenty-three centuries before the Common Era, in the 'Sargonic age' is W. Halo. Commenting on this most ancient of associations, Halo writes: 'If, then, the monarch was to be deified, it was presumably essential that, at the least, the 'real' gods be treated like monarchs...The new ideology of the deified king, in other words, implied an assimilation of god and king that worked both ways- the king became more like God [upon coronation], but at the same time the gods became more like King and, inevitably, like human beings altogether. See W. Halo, 'Text, Statues and the Cult of the Divine King' in *Congress Volume* (Vetus Testamentum Supplements 40; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), p.59. Indeed, a great deal has been written on sacral kingship within Jewish and Christian mystical literature, and its possible roots in ancient Near Eastern mythology. See in particular Arbel's discussion in V. D. Arbel, *Beholders of Divine Secrets: Mysticism and Myth in the Hekhalot and Merkavah Literature* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003) pp.56-66. Avoiding terms such as 'direct inheritance' and 'transmission', Arbel's study attempts understand the apparent resonance of motifs without being tied to any particular evolutionary models, preferring to note how mythological themes and patterns, rooted in ancient Mesopotamian tradition, and accessible in late antiquity among other sources, were reapplied in the new evolving contexts of Late Antique Jewish and Christian mystical literature. Also see N. Wyatt, *Myth of Power: A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition* (Munster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), pp.373-424; V. D. Arbel, 'Junction of Tradition in Edessa: Possible Interaction Between Mesopotamian Mythological and Jewish Mystical Traditions in the First Centuries CE', in *Aram Periodical Journal for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies*, 11:2 (2001), pp.335-356 and A. Salvesen, 'The Legacy of Babylon and Nineveh in Aramaic Sources' in S. Dalley, *The Legacy of Mesopotamia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp.131-161

standest thou in a country which is not thine, and which belongeth to the country of the beings of the spirit? Then the young man answered and said unto the spiritual being, 'because a power over which I had no control took me from my own country, and set me down here; but do no harm unto me, I beseech thee'. And the spiritual being answered and said unto him, 'Fear thou not, O son of man, for it was I who appeared unto thee to lead thee unto this country and not to do thee any harm; and as for what thou sayest 'harm me not', I have done thee no harm up to this present'.

The Life of Rabban Hormizd, 'Folio 7a'

This episode within the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd offers perhaps one of the clearest insights, not only into the Late Antique hagiographical adaptation of ancient Mesopotamian mythical motifs, but into the process of mediation through which ancient ideas of celestial apotheosis, divine recognition and individual transformation, were received and subsequently reframed within Late Antique mystical contexts. Ancient mythological themes and textual patterns, deeply ingrained within the literary fabric of Mesopotamian lore and tradition, have long been recognised as integral components of a number of scriptural sources; including the traditions of Genesis, Exodus and Deuteronomy, and the prophetic literature of Psalms, Lamentations, the Song of Songs and a number of other biblical texts, where aspects of correspondence and even direct correlation have been discerned most clearly³⁰⁸. An effective example of this can perhaps be best discerned with the scriptural speculation of ecstatic encounter described by *Isaiah* 6:1-7, where we discern not only the same fundamental assumption of apotheosis, but a repertoire of corroborative details echoing the designs of a more ancient Mesopotamian template. Indeed, it is in *Isaiah*

308 Arthur Green perhaps articulates this point succinctly with the suggestion: 'In the post-biblical world...Jews and various competing versions of Judaism were important repositories for the mythic imagination: sometimes figures from the archaic pre-biblical world reappeared with new vigour...at other times new motifs, including some borrowed from the surrounding cultures of the Hellenistic world'. See A. Green, *Keter*, p.ix. For discussion of these texts and debates about the mythological background of Genesis 2-3 and Ezekiel 28, see representative studies: U Cassuto, *A commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), pp.74-84; M. H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Text* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1955), pp.97-100 and R. R. Wilson, 'The Death of the King of Tyre: The Editorial History of Ezekiel 28' in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East, Essays in Honour of Marvin. H. Pope*, eds., J. H. Marks and R. M. Good (Guilford, Conn.: Four Quarters, 1987), pp.211-218. For parallels between Genesis 2-3, Ezekiel 28 and Mesopotamian Literature, see H. N. Wallace, *The Eden Narrative* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), pp.71-104 and H. P. Muller, 'Parrallelen zu Gen.2 und Ez.28 aus dem Gilgamesh-Epos', in *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 3 (1990): pp.167-178. See also J. Morgenstern, 'The Mythological Background of Psalm 82', *HUCA* 14 (1939), pp.111-114; H. G. May, 'The King in the Garden of Eden: A Study of Ezekiel 28:12-19', in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honour of James Muilenburg*, eds. B. Anderson and W. Harrelson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp.166-176.

6:1-7 that we read of the sacral kingship of God; a central theme of the Hebrew Bible, and certainly a prominent metaphor of ancient Mesopotamian myth, used to describe the relationship of the Gods, their creation and human devotees. We also find consistency in its conception of the celestial realm, describing similar cult practices, court ceremonies, temple traditions and wider cosmological theory; though perhaps what is particularly interesting about the apparent continuum between these patterns of mystical expression, is the way in which these same details would, in turn, appear to have resonated within a great many of the hagiographical narrations of Late Antiquity. Just as David Halperin's research has to a large extent identified the correspondence, and even the dependency of a number of contemporary Jewish Hekhalot traditions upon the earlier scriptural precedents of Isaiah 6:1-7, a closer inspection of the hagiographical 'Life' of Hormizd would reveal a comparable enthusiasm to build upon the same scriptural speculation of ecstatic encounter; drawing upon its verses in such a way, so as to form what was to all intents and purposes, a largely corroborative account of celestial theophany and transformation.³⁰⁹ Indeed, taken altogether, there can perhaps be little doubt that this fascinating excerpt from the 'Life of Rabban Hormizd, much like a great many of the passages and contemporary traditions of the Jewish Hekhalot, would represent a carefully crafted mosaic of biblical verse and scriptural allusion. Yet for all these suggestions of imitation and scriptural echoes, it should also be clear from our hagiographer's manipulations of the original biblical verse that *Hormizd 7a* was not just a dry rendition or merely a simple paraphrase of the original scripture, but was in fact soaked in the influences of other theophanic and eschatological allusions- perhaps even ancient Mesopotamian tradition and Jewish Merkavah lore.

Evidently, a number of different traditions would play a part in the formation of this broader mystical discourse, indeed throughout its wider narrative, old mythical material from several biblical texts would seem to have been both elicited and eventually reformed in order to embody and therefore articulate certain novel, and largely unorthodox mystical notions. Yet, it is by taking a closer look at this episode within the 'Life' of Hormizd that we discern its explicit affinity to the traditions of *Isaiah* 6:1-7, and its appreciable adaptation, according to new mystical

309 David Halperin argues that the traditions of the 'Merkavah', as alluded to within the texts of the Jewish Hekhalot, were derived primarily from the templates established by scriptural exegesis. Reconstructing a tradition of synagogue exegesis associated with Shavuot sermons, Halperin believes much of what can be found in the Hekhalot was the product of a combination of the scriptural 'visions' of Ezekiel and Isaiah, and those accounts of the revelation of the Torah, described in both the Book of Exodus and Psalm 68. For further reading, see D. J. Halperin, *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven: Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1980) and idem, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988).

themes and conceptual patterns. The following discourse of this chapter shall turn to the narrative of *Hormizd 7a* presently, but before doing so, it is perhaps fitting that some limited commentary be offered upon the dense cluster of scriptural citation from which it was evidently drawing. The scriptural traditions echoed here would relate something of the vision and inner-otherworldly journey assumed to have been experienced by Isaiah from within the confines of Jerusalem's Temple; how he had been intoxicated with the sensory stimuli of his surroundings, and how he was subsequently bestowed with a kind and type of discernment, far beyond the parameters of his ordinary consciousness. Exceeding all human perception, Isaiah was assumed to have acquired a consciousness of divine reality; one which took the form of a celestial temple, and had supplanted itself upon the foundation of its earthly equivalent (Isa 6:1). In a moment of clarity, and in a way which would perhaps imitate the unveiling of the 'Holy of Holies', the scriptural tradition would describe how Isaiah had been offered a vision of the glory of God 'high and exalted', (Isa 6:2) seated upon a throne and surrounded on all sides by processions of adoring Seraphim, whose adoring homage was assumed to have shaken the foundations of the celestial realm (Isa 6:4). Reminding us of the humanity, Isaiah was said to have trembled at the ethereal vision which had been bestowed upon his consciousness; to have wondered at its bewildering beauty, and perhaps rather more importantly, to have lamented at the prospect of the celestial retribution he assumed he'd endure as a consequence of his celestial infiltration. His fear, certainly initially, would seem to have been well-founded: having witnessed how the voices of the Lord's Seraphim had already shaken the foundations of the heavenly realm, both as a consequence of the power of their love for the Lord and as a result of their zeal for his glory against sin. Though, rather than chastise Isaiah for his apparent violation of the celestial realm and for the sin which permeated his being, the scripture illustrates how the Lord's seraphs had approached Isaiah with neither the intent of celestial damnation or even with the purpose of preventing his further progress, but rather with the gift of celestial investiture and spiritual atonement (Isaiah 6:6-7).³¹⁰

The immediate resonance of *Hormizd 7a* is only too clear to discern. Indeed, much like the biblical prophet, Hormizd was assumed by his hagiographer to have

³¹⁰ Isaiah 6:6-7 describes how the seraphim flew to Isaiah with a hot coal which had been taken with tongs from the alter, so as to address his concern of being 'a man of unclean lips' (Isaiah 6:5). By pressing it against his lips, we are told how the Seraph had relieved him of his burden, purifying him of his sin and thereby justifying his presence within the celestial realm. Similar motifs of human fear would also define the celestial vision described in the 'Life' of Hormizd, though in that case, Hormizd's fear of angelic retribution would seem to have been all the more justified. See Rabban Hormizd, folio 6b-7a

received a vision of the celestial realm and of celestial realities, albeit one received in a dream and from within the relatively modest confines of his family home, rather than the trance-like visions bestowed upon Isaiah in the confines of Jerusalem's temple. Equally, the 'wonder' of the celestial things which he saw; including his discernment of the 'spiritual creatures' surrounding the Lord's throne and the song of their divine praises, would appear to correspond fairly convincingly with the suggestions made within the scripture, though it is perhaps upon closer inspection of those details alluding to the saint's initial interaction with celestial guardians, that we discern a distinct but also significant aspect of textual divergence. This extraordinary scriptural motif of angelic interception and eventual interaction, whilst undeniably integral to the narrative of celestial ascent alluded to in the 'Life' of Hormizd, would seem nevertheless to have manifested according to the influence of entirely different hermeneutic. Indeed, far from representing an act of Divine mercy or celestial kindness, Rabban Sergius would appear to have profoundly reimagined this scriptural account of angelic concern for Isaiah's welfare into an episode of boisterous interrogation and unfair provocation; replacing details of burning coals and acts of ritual purity with suggestions of angelic confrontation reminiscent of the mystical experiences of the Yored Merkavah. From the emboldening encouragement and comforting reassurance which had greeted Isaiah in the original scripture: 'See, this [burning coal] has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for' to the intimidating questioning found in this hagiographical excerpt, 'Man, why standest thou in a country which his not thine, and which belongeth to the country of the beings of the spirit': the variance of angelic response described in these accounts, I would argue, is not only stark but also potentially significant. Precisely how so, is perhaps made all the more apparent, when we realise that this angelic questioning of Hormizd had in fact been rhetorical- that the Lord's Seraphim had been fully aware of the fact that Hormizd had ascended involuntarily, for he had done so specifically in accordance with their intervention. For Rabban Sergius, this remarkable episode within the Hagiographical narrative was not just as an interesting point of departure from the original biblical scripture, but served as a rather important literary device: one which would allow him to exercise and emphasise his particular understanding of how Hormizd had ascended into the celestial realm not only in accordance with the Divine will, but more specifically, in accordance with a specific divine design.

'Now whilst the spiritual being and the young man were holding converse together, suddenly there appeared in the right hand of the spiritual being a splendid and glorious crown of fine gold. And the spiritual being answered and said unto the young man, 'Behold, O young man, [how] beautiful in its appearance is this crown which I hold in my right hand! If thou wishest it to be thine I will give it unto thee. If thou 'possesest spiritual wings, like unto mine, take [it] and it shall be thine' And the young man answered and said unto him, 'Then give it unto me, master'; and straightaway the angel placed the crown on the head of the young man, whereupon the crown began immediately to shine upon his head, and it have forth splendour, and the spiritual being flew away'.³¹¹

His ascent was assumed to have had immediate purpose and celestial dispensation; an understanding all but lacking from the scriptural account upon which it was nevertheless quite evidently based. Indeed, quite unlike the precedents of its scriptural template, this excerpt from the 'life' of Hormizd would appear adamant in its assumption, that the saint's ascent had been not only celestially anticipated but even specifically devised, so as to bestow the saint with status and eternal blessings embodied by the 'celestial crown'.³¹² Of course the original scripture had described how Isaiah received the commission of prophet largely as a consequence of his celestial adventure, though it would nevertheless fall short of the suggestion that his ascent had been celestially designed in order for him to do so - in fact, having volunteered for the position upon overhearing the Lord's celestial converse, such a commission would appear to have been little more than a happy, but ultimately unintended outcome. It is in this distinct difference between our hagiographer's imagining of the saint's celestial ascent, and the original scriptural account upon which it was based, that we are able to discern the quite different focus and subject of interest of either text. Indeed, from his careful manipulation of the original scriptural verse, it is relatively clearly discernable that for Rabban Sergius, it is the seer, the

311 'Folios 7a-7b' in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, pp.15-16

312 Isaiah 6:1-7 does not immediately relate what special calling the prophet had received to begin his celestial tour, indeed it would seem that his ascent had at least initially, been entirely without immediate purpose. Yet by verses 8-9, the text introduces a new theme, describing how Isaiah would eventually receive a distinct call and mission. He was told to 'go to the people,' and he was instructed to say to them "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.' (Isaiah, 6:9-10). This is quite in contrast to the hagiographical narrative of the 'Life' of Hormizd which, despite the clear influences of the biblical extract, would introduce the theme of celestial vision according to the specific hermeneutic of its preconceived and ultimately celestial intent.

transfigured visionary, who is the primary subject of interest, indeed just as it had been within the Hekhalot accounts of the Merkavah mystic. It is he who is both the locus and cause of the divine presence; it is he who was invited to demonstrate 'the strength of his spiritual wings' through the experience of ecstatic adventure, and much like the revered rabbis of Merkavah mysticism, it was he who was subsequently invested with the potential of having done so. The essential premise of spiritual ascent established by Isaiah 6:1-7 had evidently been integral to the narrative of our excerpt, but I would argue that the precedent of its template was nevertheless merely peripheral to the novel and distinct construct of our hagiographer's narrative: that man could achieve a proximity to the Lord and the celestial realm, but also to the status, experience and potential of divinity. What perhaps seems to have been little more than an interesting but small variance of details between scripture and exegesis, in fact belies a seismic shift between original theories of spiritual apotheosis, and the hagiographic re-imagining of its potential, and I believe such a shift might in fact offer a significant insight into the influences of other, non-traditional themes and conceptual patterns, which would seem to have equally helped shape these hagiographical discourses.

This mystical narration within the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd was not merely a clever exegetical exercise in scriptural manipulation. Contemplating the nature of its discourse, this study and its analysis demonstrates that this hagiographical tradition would also employ specific patterns, often characterized as mythological, such as prose narrative style, pictorial imagery, tangible metaphors and figurative language, in order to construct and articulate abstract, mystical concepts, far beyond the parameters its scriptural inspiration. The present investigation calls attention to mythological forms of thought which would seem to resonate not only in this episode of the 'Life' of Hormizd but within various mystical narrations of Late Antique Christian hagiography, including notions of mystical experience and revelation. Much like the mystical literature of the Jewish Hekhalot, which would equally crystallise within the atmosphere of this same Late Antique environment, the mysticism of these hagiographical narrations would reflect an attempt to mould new spiritual attitudes and religious perceptions through a combination of conformity to existing scriptural traditions and the reintegration of specific themes rooted in biblical and Mesopotamian mythological traditions. Weaving ancient threads to create new visions, this infusion of both scriptural and Mesopotamian mystical exegesis would

convey personal, inner processes of traversing spiritual realms and of attaining transcendent truths, and a process of personal transformative praxis, qualifying the adept to transcend ordinary human perspective but also the confines of human status and potential. Turning our attention away from scriptural speculations of the mystical journey, and instead towards this excerpt's integration of ancient mythological perceptions of its consequence, our analysis of the final details of this excerpt pronounces something of the privilege of enhancing their spiritual perception. So far, the 'Life' of Hormizd has only hinted at Late Antique expectations of piety's potential, alluding to the ascent of the qualified adept into the celestial realm and his recovery of what at first glance, might appear to be little more than a celestial trinket. Though it is by taking a closer look at the hagiographical appropriation of this ancient Mesopotamian mystical motif, that we begin to discern a little more about what it was to be invested not only with the honour of the celestial crown, but with its potential. Of course, a number of New Testament texts would allude to the early Christian conceptualisation of celestial crowns and Divine investment, imagined as a sign of spirituality and an indication of divine benefaction,³¹³ yet this mystical narration would appear to have invested its depiction with the mythological echoes of a more ancient pattern of mystical lore.

The Crown as an emblem of Divine status and Celestial Privilege

An indirect form of mystical exegesis was evidently at the heart of this hagiographical narration, depicting the transformation, and the subsequent and immediate elevation of the holy man and his human standing, according to the mythological components of ancient Mesopotamian traditions. Yet their adaptation within new hagiographical contexts would seem to have introduced them in a fresh light, suggestive of a new and alternate exegetical understanding. Patterns of mystical discernment and themes of subsequent divinization, along with other mythological motifs derived from the

313 Five heavenly crowns are mentioned within the texts of the New Testament, including the 'imperishable crown' (1 Corinthians 9:24-25); the 'crown of rejoicing' (1 Thessalonians 2:19, Luke 15:7, Revelation 21:4); the 'crown of righteousness' (2 Timothy 4:8); the 'crown of glory' (1 Peter 5:4); and the 'crown of life' (Revelation 2:10, James 1:12, Hebrews 12:2). In each case, the crown is offered as a badge of honour for the righteous, and it is perhaps 1 Corinthians 9:24-25 which best defines how those crowns were rewarded. 'Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate [disciplined] in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown'. The contest was an endurance of life itself; the crown a celestial prize rewarded eschatologically on the last day, though it would seem from the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd that the crown was not only a celestial trinket, but a potentially powerful tool for manipulating celestial power, and once which might potentially be made available, in the here and now.

literary precedents of Mesopotamian lore, would all be utilised to convey the same inner, personal processes of immediate apotheosis and of attaining celestial insight, though it is within the subsequent details of excerpts such as *Hormizd 7a* that we discern how they were also adapted and transformed according to alternate meaning, and perhaps more importantly, according to revised expectations. We can sample an aspect of this process of exegetical revision by taking a closer look at the narrative prose of the Sumero-Akadian tradition of Enmeduranki; its description of Enmeduranki's celestial discernment and the elaborate process of his subsequent transformation; how he was honoured by the God's with majestic regalia, and thereby with celestial position, identity and status.³¹⁴ At variance to the mythological patterns of this ancient prose, the hagiographical 'life' of Hormizd would largely revise and reformulate this premise of apotheosis, by describing a metamorphosis not of form but of perception and privilege, as a human being spiritually elevated by celestial visions rather than existentially modified through corporeal rapture. The hagiographical narration is plain in its suggestion of how the saint's experience of celestial apotheosis 'had failed to leave its mark in flesh and blood'; how the crown with which had been bestowed had faded entirely, leaving him only with a sense of his destiny. Though, that is not to say that the 'Life' of Hormizd would reject the assumption of the transformative effect of apotheosis entirely. The narrative would by no means imagine Hormizd as an official power in heaven nor even a guardian of its mysteries, though it is by looking to the concluding details of our excerpt that we discern in more definite terms, something of the imagined consequences of the saint's celestial investiture. We are told how Hormizd had 'straightaway understood within himself, in a hidden manner, what the grace of the LORD had wrought for him', and how the 'fire of his love of Christ burned in a hidden manner' with the thought of it.³¹⁵ Stirring in the 'secret chambers of his soul', he had eventually been guided by means of Divine agency towards the esteemed company of three holy men from the Monastery of Saint Rabban Bar-Idta,; all masters of the life and contemplation of divine things, and it was in there in their esteemed company, that we read how Hormizd had grown luminous with 'the lustrous flames of the divine fire which nothing resemblath'. 'Enshrouding the young man in a secret manner', the three holy men had recognised at once both its meaning and its potential:

314 For translation of this ancient tradition and discussion of divination/observation techniques, see W. G. Lambert, 'Enmeduranki and Related Matters' in *JCS* 21 (1967), pp.126-138. For discussion of the resonance of these ancient Mesopotamian mythological patterns and its influence within late Antique concepts of apotheosis and divination, see Arbel's discussions in V. D. Arbel, *Beholders of Divine Secrets*, pp.96-102.

315 Budge, Folio 7b

‘The three of them understood concerning the mysteries of the new world, and concerning his election for the service of the hidden life and conversation, and concerning the gifts [of healing] which would be wrought by his hands, and the mighty deeds, and wonders, and acts of might which should be performed through him Then they were moved by the holy spirit and began to prophesy concerning him in a hidden manner, saying ‘My Son, thou art about to become a chosen vessel unto Christ, and many shall become members of the household of the LORD through thee, and at the uttering of thy name the devils shall flee, and evil spirit which eject the venom of death at the remembrance of a word of thine shall be at peace...’³¹⁶

Conversant with the mysteries of divine intervention and adept in its interpretation, the three ‘devoted servants of God’ had perceived with their minds the choices which Hormizd had made so as to devote himself to Divine service; his celestial investiture with both the power and favour of the holy spirit; but also, and perhaps somewhat more importantly, the way in which he would eventually exercise its latent potential through an extensive repertoire of miraculous consequence.³¹⁷ The ‘crown’ with which Hormizd had been celestially bestowed was thus, certainly no mere trinket. Nor indeed was it assumed or depicted to be merely the sign of the eschatological promise of eventual salvation described by the New Testament scriptures, far from it. According to his hagiographer, Hormizd had not only been invited into the celestial realm to be bestowed with the crown in the present, but had been invested with an emblem of the power and potential of Divine recognition. Perhaps much like the editors and authors of the mystical texts compiled within the Hekhalot, to ascend on high was not merely the means through which to touch the Divine, but rather of acquiring the potential of knowing the Divine on an intimate level. Having been bestowed with the celestial ‘crown’, the Yored Merkavah was assumed to have acquired the name of the Divine and thus the potential of the Divine, and we might perhaps detect at least some resonances of this hermeneutic

³¹⁶ Folio 8b, p.18.

³¹⁷ David Brakke suggests that the life of the monk was one measured according to his progress towards rejecting the passions and a subsequent knowledge of God. The goal then of every monk was to be a gnostic, a ‘knower’, for it was knowledge of God and an understanding of his mysteries that gave the monk his power. For further reading on the connections drawn between piety, privilege, knowledge and power in Christian Hagiography, see, D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, M.A: Harvard University Press, 2006).

underlying our hagiographical extract.³¹⁸ Of course our excerpt would at no point refer to the celestial crown as one of the LORD's celestial names; nor indeed would it imply that the 'crown' had been engraved with the elaborate sequences of esoteric and incomprehensible phrases, assumed by the authors of the Merkavah texts, to denote the ineffable qualities of Divinity. Though, for all the apparent differences which define our hagiographer's adaptation of the 'crown' motif, Rabban Sergius does at least implicitly imply, that to be invested with the 'celestial crown' was to be bestowed with a comparable command of its blessings.

It is the apparent resonance of this common assumption of the potential of celestial investiture, coupled with their similar adaptation of ancient Mesopotamian Mythological motifs such as the 'crown', which perhaps invites some interesting and even significant questions about the nature and textual influences behind Rabban Sergius' hagiographical text and other hagiographical narrations like it.

Contemplating the nature of the mystical discourse present in *Hormizd 7a*, it is apparent that the tradition would conceptualise and convey many of its mystical notions by evoking a variety of mythological forms, including those provided by the precedents of scripture, though it nevertheless seems plausible to consider how Rabban Sergius may also have formulated and conveyed his mystical perceptions by drawing upon ancient Mesopotamian mythological themes which were clearly accessible and utilised throughout the mystical narrations of Late Antiquity. Here we discern the influence of a motif deeply rooted in ancient Mesopotamian lore, but actively reimagined within the Late Antique contexts of Christian hagiography, articulating new mystical themes and expressing new meaning beyond the parameters of its mythological precedent. Though in addition to emphasising the ancient heritage of this carefully adapted and readily re-used mythological theme, this investigation into the hagiographer's assumption of the 'gifts of apotheosis' would also encourage one to consider the wider availability and adaptation of this motif within the cultural environment of Late Antiquity, and to question the significance of the similar adaptation of this motif, within the Jewish Hekhalot's

318 The association of the crown and the holy name can be found in a number of Late Antique and earlier esoteric sources, where a name is often spoken of as being 'engraved' or 'inscribed' on the crown'. Sometimes it seems that the crown itself is altogether made up of words, including the forty-two-letter name, the seventy-two-letter name, and with God's seventy names in the seventy languages of humanity. This association goes back to an early linking of 'name' and 'crown', one possibly evidenced as early as the Mishnah. In *Avot* 1:13 Hillel is quoted as saying 'He who uses the crown will pass away', the meaning of which seems somewhat obscure. *Avot de- R. Nathan*, the standard Aramaic commentary to *Avot*, understands him to be speaking of improper use of the divine name, that the 'name'/'crown' was something to be used and only by those who truly merited it. For further reading on the association of name and crown within Late Antique Jewish mystical literature, see G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1960), pp.34-36; P. Schafer, *Origins*, pp.282-306; and 'The name on the Crown' in A. Green, *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 42-49.

mystical narrations. Rabban Sergius and the textual traditions, if not the final form of the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd, were approximately contemporaneous to the final redactions of Jewish mystical texts such as 'Hekhalot Zutarti', so it is perhaps of little surprise that we should identify in the mystical streams of either text, a certain parallel flow. Both have been assumed by a number of historians to be branches of a common current, derived from a common basin of ancient Mesopotamian mythological themes and patterns. Both traditions indeed had common scriptural roots, and a shared geography. Why would we assume that a resonance of ideas concerning piety and its potential, and comparable patterns of scriptural exegesis and mystical motif, had not percolated through that common earth? It is hopefully therefore apparent, that the motif of the Crown in the mystical discourse of this represents far more than an opportunity to discern ancient Mesopotamian mythological influence, or even Late Antique Christian assumptions of Piety's potential, but a literary and conceptual connection linking Christian hagiography not only with the mythological traditions of ancient Mesopotamia but with the mystical notions and wider cultural world of the Hekhalot texts. Of course, suggestions of linear mediation of shared traditions is as difficult to prove as theories of the vertical continuum between ancient Mesopotamian lore and Late Antique Mesopotamian mystical discourse, so the intention of these final thoughts concerning the Late Antique mystical conceptualisation of the 'Crown' is not to draw conclusions on the ancient heritage or mythological origins of these materials nor to suggest inter-communal dialogue on issues of mystical experience, but rather to encourage us to consider how phenomenological analysis of shared literary motifs such as 'the crown' of mystical insight, might contribute to a clearer understanding of both the uncertain dynamic underlying these texts, and those Christian/Jewish individuals who wrote them.

Final Thoughts on the Power and Privilege of Celestial Discernment

According to the hagiographical narrations considered within this chapter, and indeed, according to a vast array of those Late Antique hagiographical traditions which are not, a life dedicated to the pursuit of the spiritual instruction of Christ was imagined not only as a journey towards ever-increasing ascetic dedication, but towards an ever-growing proximity to the

Divine and Celestial realm. Such had been the virtue of those considered worthy of hagiographical commemoration, that these texts would relate an almost universal assumption of how the quality of their spiritual excellence, had permitted them to traverse not only the parameters of ordinary human cognisance but the boundaries of terrestrial and celestial existence. Indeed, unlike the predominant interpretations of the Christian scriptures, which would imagine communication between the Divine and human beings in terms of limited revelation; the narratives of these texts would emphasise a personal, visionary potential and praxis, culminating in an experience of God and a discernment of the celestial realm, equivalent to that bestowed upon the angels. Their vision, or at least their hagiographer's account of what they saw, would seem to have derived from a common repository of motifs and ideas unravelled from the precedents of scripture, rewoven to articulate theories of the 'Glory' of God, the cosmological form of the celestial temple, and the Lord's throne or Merkavah. Though as this chapter has emphasised, perhaps what is striking about this hagiographical approach to articulating theophany, is that its embellishments were not only scriptural echoes but equally fundamental aspects of the eschatological allusions, described within rabbinic Merkavah Lore. As in the speculative tales of apotheosis described by the Jewish Hekhalot, the ecstatic encounter between the pious and Divine was imagined to have been not only enlightening; furnishing the holy man with the tools of true celestial discernment, but transformative. A key component in the Lives of the Holy men was concerned not with the details of the saint's celestial discernment, but rather with the imagined consequences of this acquired understanding, implying that to know the unknowable, to be familiar with the mysteries of celestial gnosis as a consequence of apotheosis, was not merely to be 'filled' with divine 'revelation' but to have acquired something of the essence of that which was known. In the excerpts examined in this chapter, we have discerned how the saint, much like the Yored Merkavah, had been honoured with the gifts of apotheosis: how his piety had warranted rewards of mystical pearls of understanding, and even emblems of majestic authority and celestial comprehension, such as the crown. But these remarkable gestures would not only bestow a true mystical comprehension of God and celestial secrets, but invest the saints with the status of their understanding- in other words, for the authors of Syriac Hagiography and Jewish Hekhalot alike, to acquire and comprehend the mysteries of the Divine was to comprehend something of what it was to be divine themselves.

Through the literary framework of growing spirituality and spiritual maturity, the 'Lives' of men like Mar Narsai, Simeon Stylites and Rabban Hormizd would describe the potential of the pious to resemble, both in their dedication to God and in the glorious works of their excellence, something of the manner and condition of celestial beings. By adorning themselves with the qualities of ascetic excellence, the pious would depict with ever-increasing confidence nothing but their unfeigned and self-effacing humility- the very garb of Christ, whom as the Christian scriptures reminds us, gave grace to the humble, and 'unto the humble mysteries are revealed'.³¹⁹ Through the pursuit of gradual perfection and personal refinement, those willing to abide by the demands of the Lord's life-giving commandments, were enlightened with a degree of divine grace, which not only shone gloriously and brilliantly upon the perception of his intelligence, but opened to him a discernment otherwise denied to human comprehension. His mind had discerned the hidden treasures of the celestial realm, and his soul had been filled with every kind of spiritual excellence; but the manner of his life was not only assumed to have been conducive for the refinement of his spiritual nature and perception, but to have been fundamental in his transformation as one enriched with the potential of his gnosis. In the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd, just as in the hagiographical narrations depicting the Lives of other Late Antique Holy men, the pious were imagined to have been enriched with the potential of affiliation with the Divine realm and Divine power, and in the Lives of all those studied in this chapter, it was a potential which he would come to orchestrate not only on an ever-increasing basis, but with an ever-increasing panache. It would seem to have so often begun by exposing the wiles and crafts of those demonic entities who had conspired to thwart his conviction and compromise his resolve; outwitting their cunning stratagems, unfoiling their plots and revealing those pitfalls strategically placed to ensnare and thereby harm the spiritual well-being of their more vulnerable ascetic compatriots. Indeed, where monks were willing to concede to their vulnerability and admit to the delicacy of their efforts of resistance against the subterfuge of their demonic opponents, Rabban Hormizd became a spiritual warrior of incorruptible and unassailable faith: able to not only thwart the advances of demonic aggression, but to advance and storm the citadel of Satan himself.³²⁰ A number of episodes within the

³¹⁹ Luke 10:21, Mathew 11:25, Psalm 25:14.

³²⁰ The authors of hagiographical texts such as the 'History of Rabban Hormizd' understood their struggle with temptation to be combat with demons as well as with the passions. Being 'attacked', waging 'warfare' and 'fighting' the demonic aggressor- all served as shorthand to describe the experience of temptation; the presence of demons as the monk's opponents is implicit in the vocabulary of struggle and combat. For further reading on the vocabulary of monastic aggression against the demonic, typical of hagiographical accounts see B. Ward, *The Saying of the Desert Fathers: The*

'Life' of Simeon Stylites would equally describe the saint's engagements with various manifestations of satanic temptation; appearing to him in the form of mischievous and lustful camels;³²¹ fierce and hissing vipers;³²² fire-breathing lions and dragons which stung his feet;³²³ all in the hope of distracting him from his spiritual exercises, but failing on every occasion through the power of the saint's rebuke. Of course, Rabban Hormizd and Simeon Stylites were by no means unique in their experience of combat with the powers and manifestations of Satan; nor indeed was the repertoire of their potential merely limited to these feats of supernatural combat. These physicians of the coenobites', as Rabban Hormizd and so many of the holy men of Late Antique hagiography came to be known, would eventually include a whole variety of divine gifts formerly bestowed upon and exercised exclusively, by Christ's holy apostles.

'In very truth, the promises of our LORD unto His disciples have been fulfilled throughout all the generations of the world, and he hath raised up unto himself spiritual physicians in His church that they might be the salt which should salt the palates of those who had lost their taste, and the light which should illuminate the hearts which had become darkened, and should direct and lead the children of men into the great and beautiful habitation of the spiritual beings. And after this manner even in that period of dryness and feebleness did He raise up this young man Hormizd'.³²⁴

Through their discernment of celestial gnosis, and increasing realisation of the potential of their enterprise, holy men like Hormizd would not only 'breathe upon those polluted hordes of devils the fiery blaze of fierce lightnings', but exercise the power of the divine through frequent and often spectacular coup de theatre. Christ had commanded his disciples to 'heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and cast out devils' so it should perhaps come as little surprise, given the apostolic catalogue of miraculous wonders which were assumed to have followed, that the

Alphabetical Collection (Kalamazoo, Mich., Cistercian Publications, 1984) and Brakke, (2006), pp.145-156. See Folio 13a for perhaps the best insight into Hormizd's 'struggle', 'resistance' and 'combat' against the temptations of his passions and against the relentless efforts of Satan, and to the inevitable suggestion of his formidable mastery over these diabolic combatants, and the power which he wielded, so as to thwart and frustrate their malevolence.

321 Lent, p.129; Syriac, p.536

322 Lent, p.121; Syriac, p.523

323 Lent, p.137; Syriac, p.549

324 Folio 14b, p.28.

potential to heal, resurrect, exorcise and generally command the forces of nature should also have been attributed to the holy man's wider repertoire of miraculous potential.³²⁵ From examples of miraculous restoration of life to those 'vexed by the devil', to incredible tales of healing the lame, curing disease and rehabilitating the paralysed, the 'Lives' of those assumed to have touched the Divine through devotion were filled with suggestions of their mediation between the Divine and the needs of the necessitous.³²⁶ The shadows of those sufficiently enlightened with the truths of celestial secrets and thus with the special privilege of divine affiliation, were assumed to have been sufficient enough to have healed those who became enveloped by it, whilst the very dust from under their feet was equally assumed to have embodied the potential of the divine benevolence which he had channelled.³²⁷ Men like Simeon may have admired the labours of the apostles and may even have walked in their footsteps, but as the words of his hagiographer would clearly emphasise, his measure had undoubtedly 'extended far and above all other men'- apostles included.³²⁸ As such, the

³²⁵ *Mathew* 10:8.

³²⁶ A number of different excerpts might be mentioned here, and indeed this chapter shall offer greater discussion of these tales of the miraculous in Part two, so it shall here suffice to reference but a few of the many episodes of the saint's miraculous potential for healing and resurrection. See Hormizd, Folio 15b for a particularly interesting account of a youth 'greatly vexed' and 'grievously worked upon by an evil devil', how he had been brought to Hormizd and his monastic brethren in the hope of securing his salvation. The excerpt relates how the youth had died as a consequence of his suffering, though less as a result of demonic affliction than as result of divine benevolence and sympathy for his suffering. Yet perhaps what is noteworthy about this excerpt is the way in which the distress of Hormizd and more specifically his entirety on behalf of the family of the afflicted, would serve to mediate the power of Divine for the sake of the youth's resurrection. Folio 37a would describe the plight of one man so overcome by the harrowing torment of 'fiendish games and cunning stratagems' that he was said to have gone blind and lost his sight. The saint, so we are told, had foreseen his arrival and had prepared a washing of his cross as a salve for those 'simple eyes which were guileless of fraud and lying hypocrisy'. Applying it with his right, we read how Hormizd also offered up a petition, calling upon the Lord to act on behalf of the plight of the afflicted, though also evidently in accordance with the will of this mediator of divine miracles. Folio 40a meanwhile even describes how Hormizd had been celestially transported by means of angelic intervention, in order to treat a shepherd poisoned with the venom of a malevolent snake. Lent, p.126; Syriac 531 would equally describe the potential of Simeon Stylites power to heal as a consequence of both his celestial discernment of secret gnosis and as a consequence of his subsequent and esteemed position as one, uniquely placed on the boundaries of celestial and terrestrial existence. Through the power of oil blessed by the grace of his adjuration, it relates how paralysed youths, daughters of village chieftains and soldiers smitten by the power of demons, had all been healed and brought to a faith in God. Lent, p.127; Syriac 533 would describe how Simeon had equally healed through the power of his adjuration alone, a man who had been unable to support the weight of his own head. For accounts of how the Holy Spirit had bestowed Mar Narsai with the power of healing, see the comparatively few but nevertheless interesting excerpts offered by *Book of Governors*, p.548. His hagiographer, Thomas of Marga relates how the only son of a certain 'believing people' in the royal city of Baghdad, had 'suffered with the sickness and the pains of the palsy al from the moment of his birth, how his body had been ravaged, and how his parents had abhorred him, preferring his death to his being alive, for he received no benefit from the physicians and he found no relief from the prayers and gifts which his parents would distribute on his behalf. His ailment had required a celestial solution; the power of miraculous healing, which according to the people of Baghdad, had been openly and actively wielded at the hands of this devout but distant wonder-worker of God. Equally, *Book of Governors*, p.552 relates an account of a boy from Baghdad crippled by his ailments, and whose parents had desperately sought the intervention of Mar Narsai's ritualistic potential.

³²⁷ For further reading on the value attributed to Henana, both by the saint and those who had sought the gift of his intervention, see B. Kötting, *Peregrinatio religiosa: Wallfahrten in der Antike und das Pilgerwesen in der alten Kirche* (Münster: Regensburg, 1950), 403–13; P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient: histoire et géographie des origines à la conquête arabe* (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 237–41; and G. Vikan, 'Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium,' *DOP* 38 (1984): 68–72.

³²⁷ Folio 37a, p.69.

³²⁸ Our hagiographer draws comparisons with the accounts offered in Acts 5:15, where Peter's shadow is understood to have been endowed with spiritual healing, and Acts 19:12, where things of all kinds were brought to the Apostle Paul to be blessed with the potential of divine healing. Simeon did not only imitate these blessings, according to our hagiographer, his potential extended far beyond them, delivering not only divine healing but miraculous potential of all kinds.

repertoire of his supernatural possibilities were in no way limited to these copious and powerful acts of healing alone, indeed as many of the hagiographers would boast 'these things were but a few of the many': a mere glimpse into the treasures of the faithful which, 'like grains of sand on the seashore, and in their entirety unknowable'. If one by one were written those things which did our LORD Jesus Christ, the world would not contain the books which should be written',³²⁹ and so it was with the incredible exploits of the holy men examined in this chapter. Though, as the hagiographer of Simeon Stylites concedes: 'since your ear loves to hear of his illustrious deeds, and more sweet to you than honey to those who eat it is the story of the beautiful deeds which our LORD did through his athlete, little from much, dear sir, from the treasury of the splendid acts of the Blessed One we are telling you...',³³⁰ if only to reveal a mere glimpse of those supposedly immeasurable and unfathomable treasures of the power of his piety and its potential.

As we might expect of one whose piety extended beyond even that of the Apostles, the privilege of their unusual proximity to the Divine would appear to have allowed them to move mountains, figuratively speaking of course, but at times, also literally. Through the power of their gnosis and with the privilege of their status, these hagiographical narrations would illustrate how the prayers of men like Mar Simeon, Rabban Hormizd and Mar Narsai could cause mountains to retreat,³³¹ crops to grow,³³² fountains to burst forth,³³³ and marauding mountain lions to scamper. They were able to levitate and walk on water; turn water into olive oil; command the divine and exorcise the demon; all as a consequence of having ascended on high and having obtained the power of divine status by doing so. It is this theological construct, assumed to exist between the piety of a life devoted to the practices of diligent asceticism, a subsequent and ever-increasing proximity to the divine and that individual's subsequent proximity to the potential of orchestrating the power of the Divine as one of the many gifts of apotheosis, which I hope to more fully explore in the second part of this chapter.³³⁴ By further analysing the literary traditions of these and other, as yet

³²⁹ John 21:25.

³³⁰ Lent, p.137; Syriac, p. 548

³³¹ Lent, p.146; Syriac, p.563

³³² Lent, p.150; Syriac, p. 569

³³³ Lent, p.145, Syriac, p.562

³³⁴ The image and concept of the 'Holy Man' was by no means a uniquely Christian phenomenon, for the paradigm of piety and power would also define the image of his Rabbinic and Pagan contemporaries. For further reading on the wider cultural impact of the 'Holy Man', see G. Fowden, 'The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society' in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 102 (1982), pp. 33-59; R. Kalmin, 'Holy Men, Rabbis, and Demonic Sages

undiscussed examples of Late Antique Christian hagiography, I hope to discern and explore in greater detail, something of the parameters of this construct and the conceptual vocabulary with which it was articulated, but also to question what this tripartite construct represents for our understanding of a wider, more general Christian expectation of piety's practical potential in Late Antiquity. It is perhaps through paying particular attention, not to our hagiographer's assumption of the saint's capacity to communicate something of the power of celestial gnosis, but to his particular depiction of the way in which holy man was assumed to have done so, that we discern not only something about the assumed dynamic between piety and power but something of the wider location of this pattern of Christian spirituality, within the wider religious environment of Late Antique Mesopotamia. Indeed, in many ways, these assumptions of the potential of the 'gifts of apotheosis' represent some of the least exceptional aspects of these narratives, validating practices and assumptions well attested to within the scriptural traditions of Christian spirituality. So in this chapter's reorientation towards hagiographical accounts of the miraculous, this thesis shall turn not only to discern the rich and speculations of the saint's potential as a consequence of piety, but rather to the much wider questions which their presentation and articulation often pose.

These important assumptions of piety's potential, to traverse the parameters of ordinary human cognisance but more importantly to be invested with the discernment and thereby with the fundamental experience of semi-divine status, would not only resonate with important and fundamental components of the Jewish Hekhalot but with those more ancient interpretations of celestial ascent and apotheosis depicted within Mesopotamian mythological lore, and it is with this in mind that we might begin to formulate an assumption of the wider, non-scriptural elements which may equally have contributed to the particular assumptions of these hagiographical texts. It is with an appreciation for the wider background of Late Antique apotheotic speculation, both in terms of its manifestation within Jewish Merkavah lore and in terms of its ancient heritage, that we might begin to better understand a whole range of assumptions surrounding the image of the Christian pious in Late Antiquity. Thus far, I have been content to examine the saint close up as it were, to describe and outline the visible contours of the

in Late Antiquity' in *Jewish Culture and Society Under the Christian Roman Empire*, edited by R. L. Kalmin & S. Schwartz, (Peeters, 2003), pp. 213-247 & J. N. Lightstone, 'Magicians. Holy Men and Rabbis: Patterns of the Sacred in Late Antique Judaism,' in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

hagiographer's expression, and whilst this discourse has served to effectively introduce the material and hint at the possible influence of its milieu, it erroneously, if albeit intentionally, follows the grain of our principle sources too closely. Seen in terms of his capacity for piety, his invitation for celestial bestowal and subsequent transformation, both in terms of the faculties of his cognition and in terms of the inherent potential of his discernment; our analysis places the holy man, like a figure in a Chinese landscape, in the midst of a misty and indecipherable context. How to relate subject of our painting foreground to the context of its wider landscape, or perhaps to put it another way, how to correlate the assumptions surrounding the apotheosis of the Christian holy man with their wider social and cultural implications? The assumptions surrounding the Christian holy man, including suggestions of apotheosis, enlightened discernment, and divinization, whilst usually presented by his hagiographer as dramatic and utterly atypical of interaction between the terrestrial and divine, were nevertheless little more than highly visible peaks within the mountainous landscape of Mesopotamian spirituality. Some of those peaks were far older, some would prove to be younger, some were more dominant, and some rose up from the expectations of different faith groups, yet each shared similarities in the patterns of their composition. Without wanting to overstretch the analogy, the Christian holy man was not the only significant figure within this composition of Mesopotamian spirituality, he was, as the research of this chapter and Chapter Two have begun to demonstrate, one of many significant individuals to have contributed to the visual expressions of its foreground, and it is by identifying the holy man against this wider spiritual backdrop that we might begin to appreciate something of the composition of his form within the hagiographical text.

Approaching the Divine and Appropriating its Power: Initial Conclusions

In these final words of initial analysis into the adventures of the Christian pious, I conclude with what is perhaps a rather obvious, though by no means any less significant suggestion of both the nature, and therefore of the value of those excerpts hitherto explored in this chapter. What emerges from these Late Antique speculations of the 'Lives' of the pious, as we follow them over the

course of the period in question, is not only an evolving story of human access to the Divine, but also; and perhaps somewhat more importantly, an understanding of their endeavour as Late Antique minds specifically chose to give it expression. The essence and particular complexion of their accounts, in addition to the particular circumstances in which those expressions were articulated, are in every case important to the conclusions that can be drawn. In this chapter, I have not been concerned to use these texts as potential insights into the actual events described or indeed to deduce the historical authenticity of its narratives, as perhaps Aviad Klienbergh has been inclined to do in his study of several hagiographical texts from the Western Medieval tradition. To draw upon terminology coined by Jean-Claude Poulin, whose scholarship has contributed to a renewed interest in the value of Late Antique and Medieval hagiography, this study has been principally concerned not with the 'lived' sanctity of the saint, but with the 'imagined' sanctity of the hagiographer's expression, so that even where the hagiographer's account can be proved to be a reliable source concerning the acts of the saints and those around them, I have been less concerned with establishing the historicity of those acts than with the particular way in which our hagiographers chose to articulate them.³³⁵ Their particular crafting of these exceptional accounts of the pious would reflect, in particular, both the expectations of Christian piety in Late Antiquity, and the demands of the hagiographical genre to provide instruction and edification for its aspiring readership-demands and expectations which, as some scholars have been inclined to suggest, would cause him to construe the truth of the saint's life in a way different from the conventions of the modern biographical genre.³³⁶ On the other hand, this study has not been intent to focus primarily, as a large number of former studies already have, upon the genre of hagiography itself or indeed upon its typical features, motifs or structures, though the implications of these particular features remain a significant consideration throughout. Instead, this study has been drawn to exploring the 'Lives' of Mar Narsai, Simeon Stylites and Rabban Hormizd as expressions of the historical person of the writer himself, his particular shaping of the text, and his choices and decisions in doing so. About this, these

335 J. C. Poulin, *L'idéal de Sainteté dans l'Aquitaine Carolingienne, 750-950* (Québec : Université Laval, 1975), p.33.

336 Though focused primarily upon far later and decidedly Western European Hagiographical tradition, for scholastic scepticism concerning hagiography and other visionary texts as testimony to religious experience, see P. Dinzelbacher, 'Zur Interpretation erlebnismystischer Texte des Mittelalters' in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 117 (1988), pp.1-23. Also see B. McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism, 1200-1350* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), pp.27-30. On the suggestion of difference between hagiographer's notion of truth and that of modern historians, see the work of T. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.38-71.

excerpts have offered a wealth of revealing evidence, alluding in this sense not just to the imagined experiences of saintly sanctity, but also and perhaps rather inadvertently, to the 'lived' experience of the hagiographer and his particular negotiation of a Late Antique 'religious common-sense', which defined the expectations of his Syriac Christian readership. In that sense, this chapter has indeed been about something 'lived' rather than 'imagined' - not the acts and wider sanctity of the saints however, but the acts the hagiographers- the making of hagiography.

By exploring aspects of Late Antique Christian sanctity through the eyes of its hagiographers, the first part of this chapter has invited us to discern an image of piety articulated not only in terms of ecstatic experience and divine discernment, but in terms of acquired gnosis and the associated privileges of one who came to sit upon the boundaries between Divine and terrestrial worlds. This chapter's analysis has thus far merely hinted at the way in which the hagiographer's expression of saintly piety, would appear to have combined the essence of ancient Mesopotamian patterns of ecstatic adventure with the familiar precedents of apostolic miraculous tradition, and so it is in the second and final part of this chapter, that our enquiry shall finally give due consideration both to the various forms and particular manifestation of the dynamic between piety, gnosis and practical potential. In this, we perhaps deal with the holy man at his least exceptional, as a validator of practices already attributed to the apostolic tradition, but it is then by looking at the particular ways in which this miraculous potential was made manifest, that we might begin to discern how the holy man, and the narratives commemorating these demonstrations of Divine affiliation, were the product of a far from exclusively Christian cultural milieu. The seemingly effortless, 'gravity-free' flow of divine favours received and communicated through the hands of the apostles, both as a consequence of their commitment to the tenants commanded by Christ and thereby as result of their unique position of proximity to the divine condition, were evidently a key component in the hagiographical speculation of piety's potential, though what seems to emerge from these hagiographical writings is a story of much wider-ranging experimentation, in the matter of human access to the Divine. The Holy man, indeed much like Christ's early apostles, would appear in a great many of the hagiographical narrations of Late Antiquity as a mere servant to the will of a heavenly hierarchy; a rather passive component in the effective bestowal of Divine benevolence upon the necessitous. Though in a way which perhaps reflects the ambiguity and hidden complexities of Late Antique conceptualisations of the sacred, many would equally, and sometimes

even simultaneously, imagine the workings of the supernatural in a different way indeed, assuming that the particular enterprise of the saint, as much as the Divine inclination to act through this model of pious sanctity, had been crucial to the effective manifestation of the Divine will on earth. The overwhelming weight of language in our texts would present the holy man therefore, not only as a servant of the Divine will but as a patron and active mediator in the negotiation of its power, and as we shall in the discourse of the following part of this chapter, for many of the hagiographers of Late Antiquity, this role involved far more than the unthinking projection of the invisible world and its power upon the needs of a world separated by its inclination towards sin. It implied a model of intercession, defined by enhanced concepts of the potential of the saint's piety and the assumed power of the gnosis he had acquired, and indicative of a cognitive change in the Late Antique period which saw Christian systems of explanation influenced by the religious common-sense which characterised the wider religious environment of Late Antique Mesopotamia.

By taking a closer look at the image of the holy men examined in this chapter, it is possible to discern, in the penumbra of his reputation as a man of profound piety and powerful gnosis, a busy world of cultic experimentation and religious ritualism which, though largely disapproved of in a great many of our sources as the work of rivals, had nevertheless been largely embraced as part of the wider conduct of the saint's spirituality. We have discerned how for the authors of the 'Lives' of Rabban Hormizd, Simeon Stylites and Mar Narsai, piety was equated not only with spiritual refinement but with privilege and position in the eyes of the divine, imbuing the pious not only with the qualities of one proximate to the divine but with the potential to exploit and choreograph divine power. We have begun to explore the fundamentally crucial role which these models of piety were assumed to have had in deferring when and indeed how that power was exercised, though perhaps what's interesting about these speculations of the saint's conveyance of divine power, is how, much like the mysticism of the Hekhalot, these and other similar hagiographies would also embrace so many of the ideas and understanding more closely connected with the 'magical practices' of incantation texts; notably the belief that one might adjure the divine, and perhaps more specifically, the ritualistic means and tools through which to do so. In the following discourse of this chapter, our investigation shall begin to look beyond the relationship of piety and ecstatic encounter, so as to deduce what might be surmised from the Late Antique speculations of the potential power of celestial gnosis, and how those expectations would seem to have committed the holy men depicted in

these narratives, to a range of activities far beyond the conventions of conciliatory prayer. How are we to understand this convergence and apparent meeting place of ecstasism and 'magic', and what light might they perhaps shine on the historical precedent of those ideas contained within the much more recent, nineteenth-century texts published by Gollancz.

4

Approaching the Divine and Appropriating its Power Part Two:
Thoughts of Apotheosis and Spiritual Capital in the textual traditions of the
Syriac Orient in Late Antiquity

‘The Triumphs of holy men are the boast of the Holy Church, and the beloved rehearsings of them are a lifting up of the head to her children. Abundant helps descend from them, and they confirm in us the love of their Lord. The glorious festivals which we make to them, with whom we expect to receive participation in the kingdom above, and their yearly commemorations, proclaim the praise of that power Who aided them here, Who led them far into His mysteries and Who entrusted to them the pasturing of His flocks, and with Whom they are there [in heaven] enjoying happiness in the glory which He prepared for them. And, moreover, to those men who were [upon earth] became an altar of prayer, which continually breathed forth the incense of life, who rejoiced all who were round about them, and who were angels clothed with bodies here [upon earth] it belongeth to speak to God’.

The History of the Holy Mar Maran-Ammeh the Metropolitan Bishop

For a great many of the hagiographical authors of Late Antique Mesopotamia, the holy man was perhaps above everything else, a man uniquely acquainted with the power of the miraculous. Their devoted narratives, including those selected excerpts so far examined within this chapter, would describe a landscape liberally peppered with the presence of the powerfully pious; all as palpable, as localised and as authenticated by popular acclamation, as were the garrison posts and village settlements which had typified the Syriac Orient’s largely rural milieu. Here was a man who had learned to conquer the demands of the body through the long labours of a life committed to asceticism; a man apparently inclined towards imitation of both the life and principles taught by Christ whom, depending upon the progress of his pursuit of spiritual realignment, was assumed to have been uniquely qualified to penetrate the heights of

an exceptional degree of closeness to both to the Lord and the Divine. The intimacy of these holy persons with their Lord, at least from the perspective of their hagiographers, could be as tender as the relationship shared between a son and his father, by familiar friends, and even by lovers; and it was precisely this privileged subjective experience of the Divine, which was assumed to have furnished a corresponding familiarity with the potential of their sanctity. Indeed, to borrow a phrase from Peter Brown: God had loved these examples of the pious as a father loves his favoured children, doting upon them in a way which would see them not only occupy a unique position of personal privilege through the revelation of his mysteries, but also, and perhaps rather more importantly, adopt the responsibility of one remarkably able to mediate and negotiate this paternal benevolence, on behalf of the multifarious needs of the necessitous. As the mystical discourses of 'Simon of Taibutheh' would imply;

'Blessed is the one who has traversed the sea and the land of labours, crossed [them] and reached the harbour of impassability, and penetrated the plains of serenity, because while still in this world his soul dwells in the next...blessed is the one who, in going out of Egypt, was not afraid of tribulations and trials, but headed straight for the harbour of life, because if he is saved, he will become a god among men...'.³³⁷

This study explores the 'Lives' of the saints not for what they might tell us about those aspects of the saint's disposition which were valued by his contemporaries, nor necessarily for what they might impart about the personal needs which his piety and privileged position were thought to satisfy, but for what they might reveal about how the saint was envisaged to have done so. Having approached the divine through the qualities of their ascetic condition; and having thereby been invited to partake in a vision of the celestial realm, these hagiographical narrations would imagine how the pious holy men and women of the Syriac orient were not only enlightened with the cognition belonging to celestial beings, but how they were ultimately even transformed by the potential of angelic comprehension. To be versed in the mysteries of the celestial realm was, to a great many of the Late Antique Christian minds who imagined and penned these texts, to be honoured and bestowed with something of the

³³⁷ Works of Simon of Taibutheh, '175b' in A. Mingana, *Early Christian Mystics*, p.29

condition of what it was to be divine themselves; indeed to have been invited to comprehend the 'hidden mysteries' of that which only the divine might know, was to have acquired the inner perception; the form and the position of one who was not only more than mortal, but semi-divine.³³⁸ The enquiry of this study has thus far discerned how the saint's journey towards exemplary piety implied action- ascetic action, aimed at refining and rehabilitating the mind and its perception towards the state and condition for which it was initially intended, but having realised the aim and final destination of that journey; having realised the transformative potential of apotheosis, we discern how the pursuit of exemplary piety would equally impel the saint towards action of another kind - practical action for good, or more precisely, miraculous intercession on behalf of the necessitous, as one who had transcended the parameters of the human condition and joined Saint Michael in looking upon humanity with mercy.³³⁹ Here, we chart the rhythm of the saint's career as a man of

338 The Pauline, Johannine and Lukan Epistles consider how those willing and able to contemplate the 'Lord's glory' with 'unveiled faces' are transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, whilst the apostolic traditions of the life of Christ would equally recall the suggestion that all men were destined to be gods as sons of the High. For apostolic traditions of Christ's announcement that all men are destined for divinity, see John 10:34. For further reading on Paul's belief that the faithful who were possessed by Christ's spirit might experience transformation into the image of God and divinity, see Romans 7:24; 8:10; 13; 29; 2 Corinthians, 3:18; Philippians 3:21, 1 Corinthians 15:49; Colossians 3:9. For other scriptural references to the notion of man's potential for divinization, see in particular Psalms 82:6, 8:5. For general reading on the notion of 'angelification' in the Book of Luke in particular, see C. H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997). Whilst these scriptural assumptions of man's potential for divinity would imagine how those truly pious enough might start to experience a transformation of state into the image of God whilst still on earth, their full glorification was deemed to have been a distinctly post-mortem event, though just as we discern from the narratives of those hagiographical narratives examined in this thesis, some early Christians, especially those from the Syriac Orient, would seem to have begun reimagining God's promise as something which might be fulfilled in the present; that the rewards reserved for the last day might in fact be made available to believers now as the gifts of immediate apotheosis. For further reading on this shift in thought, concentrating on the fulfilment of God's promises in the present, see A. Deconick, *Paradise Now*, p.21-24 and On the idea, if not the technical term *theosis* ('deification'), in Ephrem and other Fourth Century Syriac writers, see S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St Ephrem the Syrian*, pp.148-154; Aphrahat in *Demonstration*, 2:20, *Patrologia Syriaca*, I, 92:21-93:1: 'He expelled the impure spirits and made us a dwelling place for his divinity' and 6:10 *Patrologia Syriaca*, I, 277:21-24: 'When our Lord came outside his nature, he walked in our nature...so that on the day of justice, he will make us share in his nature'. On the notion of recapturing something of the primordial state of man, see A. Golitzen, 'Recovering the 'Glory of Adam': 'Divine Light' Traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Ascetical Literature of Fourth-Century Syro-Mesopotamia' in *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity: Papers from an International Conference at St Andrews in 2001*, (ed.) J. R. Davila, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp.275-208. One might also explore St. Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis*, for an early Syriac Christian contemplation of man's original potential for divinity. Indeed according to Ephrem, if Adam and Eve had not transgressed the Divine Command 'they would have acquired divinity in humanity'; whilst one of his many so-called 'Nisibine hymns' would proclaim how 'the High knew that Adam wanted to become a god, so He sent His Son who put him on in order to grant him his desire'. Divinity had flown down and descended, so as to 'raise and draw up humanity. The Son has made beautiful the servant's deformity, and he has become a god, just as he desired'. Athanasius is typically credited with the definitive epigram of theosis, but Ephrem was no less aphoristic. In his *Hymn on Faith* he articulates the matter succinctly enough: 'He gave us divinity, we gave him humanity'. Any man who loved God and who attempted to live a life in accordance with his command was assumed by Ephrem to have been divine by default, because his love places him harmony with the conditions which had once anticipated mankind's earliest attempts of apotheosis.

339 To have encountered the lone hermit therefore was not merely to have witnessed the efforts and often unusual endeavours of ascetic piety, but to have also experienced the presence of an individual who had managed to exceed all measures of ordinary human existence; an individual who, having successfully navigated towards 'the harbour of life', had become something of 'a god among men' as a locus of divine expression. It was a conviction which one might perhaps perceive, at least in part, as an intensification of older scriptural hermeneutics concerning man's potential to approach the Divine condition, and to thereby become the media of the Divine expression. Indeed, Christ's promises of miraculous potential to his apostolic devotees can be found throughout the narratives of the early evangelists, and indeed, it is from the catalogue of their various apostolic wonders, that we discern how the credentials of the apostolic office were defined in large part by the capacity of this potential. Yet there was clearly a fundamental difference in the hagiographer's approach to this scriptural ideal, which would conceptualise and convey the dynamic of exemplary

Divine wonders, measuring his progression from a man of pious intent and mystical insight, to a man who had come to realise what his hagiographer would imagine to be the full potential of his revised condition, as one uniquely placed upon the boundaries between the terrestrial realm of human suffering and Divine resolution. To seize that rhythm, however, is perhaps to risk retelling in one's own words a story which has undoubtedly already been told so well before. Indeed, through a number of vivid and extensive essays, the research of Norman Baynes and Peter Brown have brought this fundamental aspect of post-apostolic sanctity to the attention of both social and religious historians for decades; and so, conscious of its proximity to well-known paths of scholarship, this examination of the saint limits the scope of its potential inquiry to focus upon a quite particular aspect of the hagiographer's depiction.³⁴⁰

The discourse of this chapter has so far described a dynamic of exchange between the divine and devoted defined by the saint's proximity to the divine condition, and corresponding denominations of miraculous capital, though it would seem that the broader economy of divine blessings was in part driven, and on occasion even determined, by the forces of a rather more destructive impetus- one bent upon disrupting the bond and thus something of the reciprocal flow of human devotion and divine benevolence. This external resistance to the dynamic of interaction and miraculous exchange was envisioned in terms of the vandalism of the demon- a once divine entity: fallen from the grace of its original celestial condition as a consequence of ancient rebellion, and subsequently resolved to impede humanity's every effort to remedy the predicament of their inherited spiritual condition. It is thus

piety and miraculous potential not only in terms derived from early apostolic precedents, but in terms defined by Late Antique trends and changing notions of depicting sanctity. For the hagiographers of Late Antiquity, piety was pre-eminently powerful, but its potential was born not merely by acquainting receptive minds with the benevolence of Divine intervention- indeed, unlike the Gospel narratives of apostolic wonder-working, the pious were not merely important but altogether passive components in the dynamic of exchange between earthly necessity and Divine intervention. Instead, their narratives would acquire a slightly different cast in the context of a more complex charting of the saint's embrace of the gospel, one evidently shaped by the gospel's notion of piety's potential to negotiate a position of gradual proximity to the Divine, but also and perhaps rather more importantly, by assumptions that the pursuit of exemplary piety might also lead to a higher consciousness of the Divine condition. Through the qualities of an ascetic disposition, these hagiographical narrations would imagine how the saints were invited to commune with the Divine, and even express the power of the Divine like a divine entity; though as we discern from this chapter's initial analyses, this suggestion of proximity would seem to have equally translated into speculation of the saints capacity to discern and comprehend the celestial realm, and to thereby have acquired the power of cognition belonging to celestial beings. It was an understanding which has profound and certainly significant implications for the way in which we perceive the status attributed to the saint in contrast to apostolic predecessors, but also, and perhaps rather more importantly, in terms of how we perceive the role assigned to the saint in manifesting that miraculous potential, first attributed to the exemplary pious, by the Gospel texts.

340 See the studies of N. H. Baynes, 'The Thought World of East Rome', *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (1960), pp.24-46; as well as the extensive studies of Peter Brown, including P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001). Though focused primarily upon the cult of the saint within the western roman world, one might also read P. Brown, *The cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Late Christianity*. Also see, Howard-Johnston, J., and P. A. Hayward (eds), *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown* (Oxford, 2000); G. Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist: Holy Men and their Associates in the Early Roman Empire* (London, 1994).

to the holy man's interaction and cosmological struggle with the iniquitous demon as much as his subsequent relationship to the Divine; to his own initial conflict in the cosmological war against demonic harassment, and his eventual familiarity with the means and the mode of its potential relief, that will shape this chapter's enquiry into the saint's familiarity with miraculous resolution. Fought initially within the cognitive landscape of this own personal journey towards spiritual virtue, these initial accounts of the saint's personal battles and eventual victories against the demon would allude to little more than hints of the larger cosmological war being fought within the hearts and minds of the faithful. It is hence, within this chapter's second representation of saintly sanctity, that this enquiry shall begin to explore instances of saintly intervention on behalf of those beset by the suffering of their own demonic afflictions; how the saint was imagined to have drawn upon his own spiritual credit and technological know-how so as to tap into the bullion of the Lord's miraculous capital, and thereby relieve the faithful from the diabolic bind of a variety of ills and anxieties.³⁴¹ From tales of demonic aggression and cunning stratagems designed to deceive the inexperienced saint and thereby seize the crown of his humility, to those tales of the wonderful things which he wrought as a consequence of having vanquished the demons who opposed him- it is to the saints cultivation of an ever-stronger bond with the Divine and to the ever-expanding repertoire of his miraculous potential, that we shall now turn in this short but no less insightful enquiry into the potential of saintly sanctity. Before doing so, however, it is perhaps as well to begin with a frank admission.

To explore the potential of saintly sanctity in action; to analyse the various signs of his miraculous potential through a process of carefully managed intercession; is perhaps in many ways to examine the role of the holy man at his least exceptional- as a validator of practices which had been integral to the Christian faith since the moment of its inception. These copious accounts of saints interacting with the necessitous are as precisely delineated as a Late Antique artist's formal representation of the gestures of Christ as he performed the miraculous- hence a certain familiarity, even a monotonous uniformity, to the hagiographer's artistic expression. Indeed, accounts of saintly intervention within the dynamic between diabolic schemes and the destiny of the necessitous, are in fact both too numerous and often too similar to warrant a comprehensive enquiry into this potent and

³⁴¹ Demons supplied a ready explanation for a variety of ills that beset Christian groups, inducing the numerous and persistent divisions among them ('heresies'). For further reading on the demonic nature of affliction, see D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, pp.3-23.

evidently promoted aspect of the saint's miraculous tool chest, and it is for this reason that our observations shall be limited not only to a few archetypal and hence sufficiently expository examples, but directed according to the coordinates of quite a specific and distinctly unorthodox aspect of their depiction: namely the saint's efficacious and often theurgical speech. Where the demon would demonstrate the power of its possession over a victim's cognitive faculties through moments of 'raving delirium'; orchestrating their murmurings but also their command of a specifically diabolic vocabulary, the saint was assumed to have exercised the exorcistic authority of a similar verbal acumen: words which if articulated correctly, were assumed to possess the authority and transferable potential of a divine and subversive power.³⁴² The linguistic mechanics of what we denote here as being the saint's curse, would derive its verbal potency from a repository of invocable wealth; including the illocution of powerful names, scriptural precedents and dependable formulas, all of which shall be explored and scrutinised in the following discourse of this chapter. Though this enquiry shall also explore how the efficacy of this speech- the expectation that what is declared will transpire- would also extend from the saint's 'curse' to his potential of his 'blessing'. The hagiographer's narratives would attribute a complexity to the demon's schemes which was expressed not only in terms of an individual's diabolic possession, but also in terms of an indirect source of devastation; mediated by proximity to the demon and manifest according to a subsequent spiritual and corporeal corruption. Within these contexts, the efficacy of the saint's speech and ritual performance was assumed to have transferred the protective power of prevention rather than the curative intent of the curse, with these two diametrically opposed forms of speech alluding to a spectrum and scale of human delinquency and capitulation to the demon. This chapter shall argue that the subversive power of the saint's 'curse' and the benevolent protection of his 'blessing' would reflect not only a complexity to the demons potential, but the saint's relative ritual authority and expertise- with the 'curse' and the 'blessing' as effective speech dependent not only

342 Where some amongst the demonic hordes may have been inclined to leave humanity with traces of their potential for devastation, others for reasons which are never truly identified by the Late Antique hagiographer, were imagined to invade and indeed even occupy the individual's being; thereby usurping their cognitive and corporeal faculties, and manifesting their possession through the raving, delirium and mania of their unfortunate victims. Dominant opinion throughout the Late Antique hagiographies held that once inside, this foreign entity interacted with the human body internal physiology, including the organs, the senses, the mind and the individual's indigenous spirit. For further reading on the physiological model of spirit possession and discernment, see Nancy Caciola's discussion in 'Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe' in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42:2 (2000), p.268-306 [280]. For possible theories of hagiographical reasoning for demonic possession, see Trzcionke, *Magic and the Supernatural in Fourth Century Syria*, p.156

upon the speaker's ascetic dedication and spiritual acumen, but upon his status as one who knew how to utter words of power.³⁴³

An analysis of the unusual array of potential attributed to the saint's spiritual acumen promises to take us far and away from the holy man at his humble routine; describing a record of miraculous triumph with important ramifications for our understanding of the Late Antique Christian perception of sanctity. From hagiographical narrations depicting the potential of the saints in mediating and negating the immediate effects of diabolic hostility as a consequence of spiritual diligence; to those alluding to the rather more mechanical means by which he was assumed to have acted on behalf of the necessitous, the second part of our discussions shall here focus upon the potential of the saint expressed in terms of his adjurational curse and his blessing, but also in terms of a dynamic with the demon defined as much by technological know-how, as a spiritual acumen. Framed initially, though not exclusively within the framework of diabolic possession and saintly exorcism; these anecdotes of ritualised expertise encourage us to draw back from the immediate and narrow focus of these accounts, and to view the narrative and its genre from a far broader base, noting its resonance with the wider spiritual ecology of Late Antique Mesopotamian environment. Here, within these excerpts, the holy men were impresarios as much as passive participants in the theatre of life, able and indeed evidently inclined, to both command and make demands of the supernatural, as much passively placate and conciliate. It is my intent therefore, to explore and discern the parameters of this literary construct; to question the scope of the saints' miraculous potential, but also to investigate Late Antique suppositions of the mechanics behind those miracles; which were evidently driven by much more than the mere dynamic of that special relationship, believed to have been nurtured between the pious and the Divine.

The Dynamic of Ascetic Struggle and Demonic Aggression: Demons as Signs of Ascetic Virtue

‘There is nothing greater and more laborious in ascetical struggles, and nothing more excites envy in the demons, than if a man prostrates himself

³⁴³ See Frankfurter's discussion on the significance of the saint's authority as the 'sin qua non' in the manifestation of the effective curse, in Frankfurter, 'Curses, Blessings and Ritual Authority', p.180

before the cross of Christ, praying night and day, and is like a convict whose hands are bound behind him'.³⁴⁴

One winter's evening probably in the mid-sixth century, Rabban Hormizd, a righteous new recruit to the monastic fold of Rabban Bar Idta, was unable to sleep. As his hagiographer would relate in a short discourse describing the events of his early monastic career, he was once more in distress; conscious of the failings and depravity of his earthly condition and inclined to progress beyond the confines of his predicament, through a regime of ever-more extreme demonstrations of unfeigned and self-effacing humility. Choosing to rise from among those who had 'given themselves up to a little rest in sleep', and 'girding up his loins with a piece of twisted rope'; this recent disciple of the monastery's ascetic regime decided to devote these empty hours of habitual sleeplessness to labours of personal and monastic purification, selflessly removing ashes from the monastery's furnace, and even cleansing its latrines with what his hagiographer assures us was little more than his bare hands.³⁴⁵ It was a moment of utter selflessness, one suggestive of the extreme behaviours of renunciation pursued by those who chose to adopt the ascetic garb of a servant of Christ. Yet, it is apparent that this excerpt has a value beyond describing one man's inclination towards the self-deprecation and self-loathing of his ascetic discipline. Indeed, its significance, at least from the perspective of this study, would lie in its intimation of that wider conceptual framework which had governed Late Antique Christian perceptions of sanctity; namely that the conduct exhibited by moral excellence was congruent with the mind's heavenly orientation, its gradual elevation, and eventual emancipation. By moving according to the rhythms set by their radical detachment from the world, men like Hormizd were imagined to have transformed from a state which had belonged to the body and to the conservation of its personal interests, to a condition defined by the cognisance of the mind and its spiritual salvation. Through the renunciation of 'self' and by rejecting all former inclinations towards materialistic interests- articulated here in terms of the Hormizd's personal disdain for earthly preconceptions of rest, personal dignity and self-esteem-the holy men of Late Antiquity were imagined to have slowly removed the corrupting entanglements which had separated the human mind from God and divine contemplation, and to have initiated a process of gradual rehabilitation

³⁴⁴ *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Issac the Syrian* (trans.) by D. Miller, (Boston, MA., 1984), p.38

³⁴⁵ 'Folio 11a' in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, pp.23-24

from the predicament which had been endured by mankind since the moment of Adam's primordial demise.

One night's frustration and subsequent dedication to selfless acts would mark but a moment on the long and arduous journey towards ascetic excellence, indeed a raft of further excerpts would describe how Hormizd had laboured diligently sought to make his soul 'a habitation of every ascetic exercise': how he was 'chaste and long-suffering', 'wise', 'prudent' and 'of great discernment'; how he subsequently possessed 'a remarkable degree of power to understand the things of wisdom' and how in 'his pure soul was an exceedingly great abundance of knowledge [celestial gnosis]'. Through his ascetic dedication to personal refinement, he had learned to 'depict nothing whatsoever except Christ', and he travelled along the celestial way with nothing but a joyful heart- 'burning through and through with the affection of the love of Christ'.³⁴⁶ By day he toiled strenuously in the service of the monastery, tasting nothing but a piece of the Holy bread given to him but the sacristan at the compline and a handful of water before retiring, and being 'well-ordered in mind, gentle and prudent', had laboured in self-denial which was both 'boundless and immeasurable'. Such was the dedication of Late Antiquity's ascetic stars, indeed such was the assumption of their devotion to emulating the unfeigned humility which had once defined mankind's enlightened primordial condition. Though, it is when we look beyond these suggestions of the holy man's efforts of reorienting his mind's cognition, and of his attempts to thereby recover something of the enlightened condition once enjoyed by primordial man in paradise, that we discern a hitherto concealed but equally important component of these hagiographical narratives. Indeed, written into the concluding remarks of this hagiographical discourse, is an account defined not by the simplicity of the saint's ascetic inclination alone, nor indeed in terms of his own solitary battle against his propensity to sin, but by the physical manifestations of a demonic world provoked by the labour of his ascetic struggles and determined to disrupt, deter and ideally sabotage any sign of his or any other human's efforts, towards attaining a state of spiritual emancipation. Indeed, as the Mystic treatises of Issac the Syrian would so eloquently imply: 'there is nothing greater and more laborious in ascetical struggles, and nothing excites envy more in the demons, than if a man prostrates himself before the cross of Christ, praying night and day'.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ Ibid, Folio 9b, p.21

³⁴⁷ *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Issac the Syrian*, p.38

The narrative and indeed the identity of ‘the pious’ constructed here within these Late Antique tales of ‘the making of the monk’, would depict only part of the larger story which his hagiographer intended to tell. Indeed, it is within the following accounts that we discern how anecdotes of exceptional asceticism had served, not only as a means of describing the saint’s progress towards recapturing his original heavenly disposition, but as a platform from which to articulate what his hagiographer had assumed to be the corresponding ferocity of demonic reaction to those ‘laudable deeds’ of the saint’s ‘exemplary life of perfection’.³⁴⁸ Hormizd’s ascetic endeavours, like those of all the saint’s, would not only fill the ‘old enemy’ and ‘the hater of truth’ with particular revulsion, but inspire ‘his vengeful indignation’: goading him to ‘rage with furious wrath’ against the righteousness of the young coenobite, and indeed, against the ‘naive’ path of his resistance to Satan’s self-acclaimed sovereignty of the earth.

‘and on a certain night when he [Hormizd] was continuing in vigil and was alone in his prayer before our Lord, the devils rose up before him, and answered and said to him ‘O, thou good young man, Hormizd, wherefore dost thou drive us away? In what thing have we offended against thee? Shew us why thou dost persecute both us and thyself, and why war is directed by thee against us. Unto me hath been delivered this world and all that therein is. Thou art a young man and a wise, but thou dost not comprehend my sovereignty, for thou art a young man who dost only discern the thing which ought to be. If thou desirest I will make thee to triumph over all the monks who live in this region of the east, and thou shalt be more glorious than all those who have triumphed therein. And I will show thee my glory, even as I have shown it unto thy triumphant fathers, and I will fill thee with my spirit, and will reveal unto thee all my hidden things, and will teach thee all my secret things to the utter of my will...if thou dost resist me, and dost set thyself in opposition to my words, thy days shall be passed in tribulations with me, and I will afflict thee

³⁴⁸The narrative and indeed the identity of ‘the pious’ constructed here was defined not merely by anecdotes of exceptional asceticism but by the wider dynamic of a cosmological struggle against Satan and his demonic compatriots; by his constant pursuit towards attaining the original condition determined for mankind, and by his resistance to those diabolic schemes designed to prevent him from doing so. As rational beings, both had fallen from the original celestial condition from which they had worshipped God as pure intellects, but it was Satan and his demonological hordes that had fallen farthest-damned and divided by the insurmountable void of an eternity of celestial excommunication. It was this most ancient of assumptions which would underlie the monastic sense that demons, as a consequence of the originally equal rational nature which they shared with humanity, were somehow both able and perhaps even all the more inclined, to decipher the sinful inclinations harboured by the pious and to chastise them with the allure of their particular vice, so as to scupper the monk’s quest for emancipation and ensure its sovereignty over the earth and all that is therein. For further reading, see Brakke’s discussion in, D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, pp.9-16

greatly, and thou shalt live in cruel sufferings with me. But be persuaded [to obey] my words, and to receive the fair council which I have spoken unto thee, O young man'.³⁴⁹

A number of important points for discussion arise from the details of this latter account of ascetic endeavours, not least among which concern the saint's potential to test and to challenge the parameters of mankind's inherited primordial predicament, and the suggestion of his ability to engage with those diabolic entities which had preserved his and all of mankind's state of primordial damnation. Though, perhaps what is striking about this excerpt is the suggestion of an array of techniques employed against the ascetically inclined; to challenge and corrupt the premise of their motivations; to seduce their natural disposition towards the tendencies of a more basic instinct; to appeal to the saint through reasoning; and to cajole with the promise of the hardships to be suffered by the more resilient. Satan would reason that Hormizd had been beyond reproach for the naivety of his rebellion, that his youth excused him from reproach for seeing things 'as he and the God he followed had hoped for them to be' and not 'as they actually were'.³⁵⁰ He'd also question the unlikely benefits of ascetic insubordination against the sovereignty of his diabolic hordes over the terrestrial world, and would appeal instead to what he presumed were the motivations of his diligent labours, promising to offer 'glory' and 'admiration' far in excess to that enjoyed by 'men of old who lived before thy time'. By 'filling him with his spirit', Satan promised the gift of hidden mysteries equivalent to those he had received from the LORD; all manner of hidden things with overwhelming potential upon those who mattered, from Kings to governors, and perhaps even things unknown to the LORD himself, for as Satan reasoned, if the LORD had enlightened his mind and these things continued to be hidden from Hormizd, how could it be otherwise. In conscious contrast to the asceticism demanded by God as a prerequisite of proximity and celestial revelation, Satan promised that a life in imitation of his example and expectations was one of ease rather than austerity; of rest rather than labour; peace rather than warfare. Resist, however, and the hardships which he and brethren had already suffered would only prove all the crueller until he capitulated, promising 'I will afflict thee greatly, and thou shalt live in cruel suffering with me'.³⁵¹

349 'Folio 12a' in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, p.26.

350 Folio 12b, in *Idem*.

351 *Ibid*.

The theme of demonic reprisal, in retaliation for the ascetic's unequivocal rejection of Satan's sovereignty, was by no means unique to this discourse from the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd. Indeed, Dadisho's treatises on 'Solitude and Prayer', to take one of a great many monastic discourses on diabolic resistance to the ascetic labours of the pious, would rather eloquently if somewhat indirectly allude to an understanding which, was evidently both integral and intricately woven into the literary fabric of the broader Late Antique Syriac Christian tradition. Indeed, warning his brethren, he writes:

'Let it be known to you brothers, that when you sit with good intention in your cell and endure your solitude, spurning the pleasures of the body and worldly glory, and suffering the tribulations that assail you, for the love of God and the desire of his benefits- because of this good and pure intention all things will be granted to you, whether they be those which give joy or pain, rest or tribulation. They will be granted to you by a sign of the will of God, through the intermediary of the holy angel who accompanies you and guards you by order of God, during all the time you are in your cell. When owing to the severity of your fight, you weaken in your resolution, so as to leave your cell and seek consolation and comfort from intercourse with men and from food and drink, all the things that happen to you, from the time you leave your cell to the time you return to it, happen to you, owing to the withdrawal of God's help from you, through the intermediary of the demon that accompanies you and troubles you...'³⁵²

Demonic reprisal was by no means limited to the saint's transgression beyond the confines of his cell, but Dadisho's speculation and mystical disquisition speaks to us of an underlying perspective; of the demon and of its potential, which would circulate amongst the monastic traditions of the Syriac Orient. As for so many of the monastic authors with which this thesis is concerned, Satan and the demon were both a menace and a genuine hazard to the spiritual integrity of those seeking emancipation from the clutches of their postlapsarian predicament - one made all the more so, by the weaknesses of one's own inclination towards corporeal comfort, which had served not

³⁵² 'Dadisho on Solitude, Folio 45b'.

only to compromise the spiritual pursuit of God, but to erode the integrity of that divine bond which had been the saint's only defence against demonic onslaught. Dadisho would remark that the exercise of asceticism might be considered according to two separate impetus; the first of which is indicative of those things caused by the piety of the individual, the second of those things done to him by his Lord, and further sub-categorised according to 'the power to fight', 'help for victory', and 'the total withdrawal of divine benevolence'.³⁵³ There was in effect, therefore an economy in this dynamic of divine blessings and demonic schemes; defined by a perseverance of ascetic exertions and measured according to ascending denominations of Divine grace. Seeking his help through prayer, for victory against the passions and for the fulfilment of the commandments, was to be rewarded with a bounty of spiritual credit- the currency and symbol of his sanctity, which he periodically acquired or dispensed through his ongoing pursuit of spiritual excellence. 'When also you knock at the door of his mercy to ask of Him salvation and deliverance from demons and temptations, it will be granted to you without doubt, in accordance with the truth of His words and His unshakable promise: 'Knock and it shall be opened to you". But by implication, therefore, it was also possible to acquire negative credit- to be a debtor within the cosmological exchange of Divine grace and Demonic reprisal, and it was for those found wanting that the full malevolence of demonic custody was typically reserved. Dadisho's discourse would also highlight a rather more interesting aspect of this dynamic however, one which would imagine the onslaught of demonic aggression not necessarily as an indication of individual relapse into weakness and wickedness. Indeed, Dadisho would remark how perseverance rather than a periodic rejection of humility, was on occasion recognised and recompensed by God, not with the bounty of divine grace but in fact with intentional exposure to the periodic onslaught of the ravenous and insatiable demon:

'What I said to you above to the effect that the things done to you by our Lord are divided into three parts, namely, power to fight, help for victory, and the withdrawal of God's help leading to your defeat is true: [however] when you are persevering in your solitude and striving in the service of your Lord, sometimes a divine sign orders the angel to extend to you help in your struggle against the passion that is fighting against you, and the demon that is attacking you, while you are neither defeating the passion

³⁵³ Ibid.

nor being defeated by it, but are all the day tormented in your struggle, so that your love towards God may be tested, and your good will towards our Lord and your good intention with which you have undertaken your solitude, may be made manifest to the angel that is accompanying you and to the demon who is tormenting you, and so that you may feel your love towards your Lord and rejoice in your mind.³⁵⁴

In a way which ensured the integrity of the devotee's commitment and hence the value of the currency in this spiritual exchange; the love expressed by the saints towards their Lord was tested constantly for the impurities of a failing resolve, and a subsequent debasement. It is this dynamic between the Lord and the faithful; his protection against demonic wiles but also the occasional withdrawal of his hold upon 'his young children', like 'a father who relaxes his hold upon his young child when teaches him how to walk', that we discern from a great many of the early narratives of the Syriac hagiographer's text.³⁵⁵ Indeed, the 'Life' of Simeon Stylites would relate over the course of an array of anecdotes how Satan had attacked, abused, and even mocked the saint as he glorified the Lord with prayer and benedictions, appearing to him on one occasion in the form of 'a venomous and malicious black serpent', which had slithered around his feet and eventually entwined its serpentine coils around his legs so as to impede his devotions.³⁵⁶ Elsewhere we read of his appearance in the menacing form of 'a large and fearful dragon', lashing its tail upon the ground so as to cause the earth shake by the noise that it made';³⁵⁷ in the likeness of mist, smiting him upon the eyes and taking his vision; ³⁵⁸how he had charged at Simeon in the form of a fire-breathing lion³⁵⁹and mocked the saint in the form of a 'lustful' and 'mischievous' camel.³⁶⁰ Indeed, the 'abominable one', 'the doer of evil deeds' and 'lover of wickedness' went to war with Simeon openly and relentlessly, assaulting him with demonic hordes like an army of soldiers well-equipped for battle, though evidently, this was by no means a fight which he

354 Ibid. 'folio 47a'.

355 Such abandonment to the devil works for the persons betterment in some cases, such as the Apostles Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7) but not in all- for example Judas (Mathew, 26:48-50; Mark 14:44; Luke 22:48).

356 Lent, p.125; Syriac, p.529

357 Lent, p.125; Syriac, p.529

358 Lent, p.120; Syriac, p.522

359 Lent, p.130; Syriac, p.537

360 Lent, p.139; Syriac, p.536 Having placed its head upon Simeon's back as he prayed, we are told how his ultimate failure to dissuade Simeon from his ascetic vigil was proceeded by the vision of a beautiful woman at prayer, clothed in garments of gold and adorned in beautiful trinkets; how she had laughed at the transition of his focus from prayer to an admiration of her beauty, and how Simeon crossed himself and redoubled his efforts in the face of this ultimate temptation.

fought alone. Echoing the sentiments of the studies of Brakke and Frankfurter; what in fact made the holy men commemorated in these hagiographical narratives 'holy', was not only their pursuit of whole-hearted devotion to God, but their individual and gruelling tolerance of the many demons inflicted upon them as part of their struggle to regain humanity's lost prelapsarian condition.³⁶¹

The dynamic of this cosmological drama, in which the pious were imagined to have been pitted against the diabolic onslaught of Satan and the malevolent intent of his demons, would appear to have been an equally prevalent and decisive motif in the literary constructions of Thomas Marga's 'Holy men'. Here the holy man's struggle to maintain his devotion to God was defined by his resistance to those attempts by the Devil to dissuade him from his purpose; by his negotiation of those evil thoughts carefully sown within the faculties of his cognition; by his contest and eventual defiance of Satan's insults and mockery; and by his repudiation of those constant reminders of the material obsessions and comforts of the ordinary life he had once enjoyed but had since forsaken. Satan and his diabolic legions had sought to lure the pious away from their rehabilitation with God through the art of their carefully-honed skills of seduction; appealing to his human appetite for superficial obsessions and a toxic preoccupation with self: including the memory of possessions, the intimacy of relatives, love of money, love of glory, the diverse pleasure of food and the other relaxations of life. Indeed, Thomas of Marga, like the discourses of so many other Late Antique hagiographers, would articulate how Satan and his diabolic hordes had especially exploited the saint's vulnerability to the temptations of fear; perhaps more eloquently expressed in terms of the saint's varying propensity to weaken in his resolution when exposed to the tribulations of the passions which torment him, and the demons whom struggle against him. Adapting a seemingly universal motif in the hagiographical catalogue of demonic encounters, his discourse relates how a certain Mar Maroi had been confronted with the aggression of a destructive dragon; both seething and resolute in its determination to inspire fear and thereby the temptation to capitulate.³⁶² Again, Thomas of Marga would relate how Satan had attempted to distract a certain Mar Shubhal-Maran from 'his great and splendid works' by smiting and blinding his eyes, so that he might lose heart and lose his confidence both in

³⁶¹ See Brakke, pp.3-22

³⁶² See Thomas Marga, *Book of Governors*, p.652

himself, and in his God.³⁶³ Yet, in addition to inspiring and manipulating the weaknesses of 'fear', Satan's manoeuvres against the pious would also exploit what was perceived by a great many ascetic minds within the Late Antique Syriac Orthodox Church, as one of the oldest of his schemes to separate humanity from the heavenly condition for which it was intended- namely the seduction of sexuality and the subversive suggestion of 'self-gratification'.³⁶⁴ Defeating 'the old enemy' by means of his successful resistance to his temptations, Thomas of Marga's account of a certain Rabban Cyprian would relate how Satan had sought to reorient his strategy in what had marked a significant moment of advance, both within the dynamic of the saint's relationship with Satan and in terms of Rabban Cyprian's ascetic career. From the devil's initial arsenal of thoughts and cognitive warfare; involving the temptations of those things which the saint was presumed to have lost and a concern for the struggles of the ascetic life he had come to embrace, Satan resorted to attacking 'the navel of the belly, or what we might describe more precisely as the saint's sexuality. Here too, we discern how Satan had sought to employ 'thoughts', but also how he attempted to arouse the body and finally resort to visual appearances: this time in the form of a woman 'who was exceedingly beautiful' and 'set with the beauty which mortal nature had endowed her as a stumbling-block for the children of the race of mankind':

'Satan incited and led on this woman [to attempt] the ruin of this divine man. And she rose up and adorned herself like a harlot with all the

363 Thomas Marga, *Book of Governors*, P.651. To this we might add an endless list of anecdotes depicting this particular aspect of Satan's diabolic repertoire, including the example of Rabban Gabriel, whose piety had been confronted with the aggression of those wicked men who were his neighbours. Stirred up by Satan 'every day and always', 'they were gathered against him with threats and curses to put him to shame', in a diabolic scheme to dislodge the saint's confidence in his Lord. See, *Ibid*, p.663. Elsewhere we read how Satan stirred up the animosity of the monastic brethren against the piety of Mar Jacob of Beth Abhe, 'who would not enter his snares, and who could not be caught in his nets', p.59 A certain Mar-Yahbh recalls how he encountered a holy woman whilst walking in the mountains, dressed in garments of dried grass and subsisting from roots and wild fruits, who carried and suckled a small child. Mar Yahbh had suggested that having lived the life not only equivalent to holy and pious men but superior to it, resembling that of the angels for forty years, but had fallen through the working of Satan- rare testimony to how even the devout could fall victim to the temptation and inclination of deviance inspired by fear. See *Ibid*, p.74.

364 In contrast to its original scriptural intent, and suggestive of the wider ascetic debate which had given rise to institutionalised and monastic expressions of Christian devotion, the positive message of Genesis 1:28- 'be fruitful and multiply'-had been systematically unravelled and ingeniously reinterpreted according to the exegetical and rhetorical strategies of those, who intended to associate sexuality with Satan. In what concerned procreation, Satan was assumed to have tricked Adam into choosing the way of animalistic intercourse instead of the miraculous asexual way of reproduction originally intended by God, encouraging Adam to seize those things which he desired rather than wait for them, and to thereby realise his potential as one comparable in grandeur to his creator. 'Possess and enjoy yourself; rule, increase and multiply' the evil one is assumed to have counselled, seducing Adam by offering the wrong means to gain what otherwise would have been provided freely; an idea which we see reiterated throughout the ascetically orientated discourses of Late Antique Syriac Christianity, and an exegetical strategy which would not only shape the ascetic prerequisite of chastity but the shape of what was imagined by the Syriac hagiographer's to have been significant tool of Satan's arsenal. For further discussions on sexuality within the Late Antique discourse of the Syriac Orthodox church, as being not an original and integral part of human nature, but as a development that belongs to the fallen world, see in particular S. Monov, 'Marriage and Sexuality in the Book of Steps: From Encratism to Orthodoxy' in K. S. Heal and R. A. Kitchen (ed.), *Breaking the Mind* pp.221-261. See also E. A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp.229-270.

ornaments which stir up lust for women in men, and she put kohl on her eyes, and tied her hair like Jezebel, and she hung upon herself all of her ornaments of gold and silver and rose up and set out from the village and made her journey to the monastery of the Rabban... when Rabban remained alone, she dared to stand before him with her face uncovered, and she showed him her beauty without shame. And Rabban said to her, 'what is the cause of thy coming here?' and the audacious woman said to him, I have come to thee that I might sleep with thee this night and that thou mayest be united with me'. And Rabban was passionately enraged with her, and he cursed her, and she fell down on her face straightaway, and he called Kyuphra his servant to gather her up, and command him to drag her outside, from where she returned to her village in great pain, and on the morning of the morrow she was buried'.³⁶⁵

This was the shape of every monk's combat with the demons; an overarching scheme in the hagiographer's ascetic discourse in which the devil first sought to attack with thoughts, then through a programme of diabolic assault upon the body, and eventually succeeded with visual appearances as a kind of last resort. Indeed, the 'Life' of Simeon Stylites would present another example of the scheme in its ascetic discourse, describing how 'the Abominable One, having failed to seduce Simeon with his original cognitive battle tactics, had appeared to Simeon as he stood praying in the likeness of a similarly beautiful woman: 'clothed with garments of gold and adorned with beautiful things' and consciously reminiscent of the biblical Jezebel. Confronted with the devil's suggestion of the 'ease of pleasure', and faced with the seemingly perfect manifestations of its potential fulfilment; what is perhaps most interesting about both of these accounts of bodily seduction and their place in the over-arching scheme of the monks struggle against Satan, is the suggestion of the saint's potential and tactics to resist, rather than merely tolerate this new phase in the dynamic of Satan's schemes. Both Rabban Cyprian and Simeon Stylites' reaction to the initial temptation of their temptress' seduction would seem to have taken the conventional and therefore largely unremarkable form of prayer, accompanied in the 'Life' of Simeon Stylites by his signation of the cross; but it would seem that both would eventually respond to demonic attempts of bodily titillation, with the rather more awesome power and 'passionate rage' of their adjurational 'curses'. Such was the

³⁶⁵ For Thomas Marga's full account, see *The Book of Governors*, p.672.

ferocity of Rabban Cyprian's 'curse' that it was imagined to have immediately incapacitated his temptress, with our excerpt relating how she 'fell down on her face straightaway'; was 'dragged outside' and eventually to her village, where she died and 'was reserved for a judgement more bitter than death'.³⁶⁶ Meanwhile the curse which Simeon Stylites was reported to have breathed forth 'in the name of Jesus Christ' was imagined to have caused his temptress 'to become like a beast whose hands and feet were cut off, wallowing in howling retreat as though many were pursuing her', until eventually 'vanishing like smoke'.³⁶⁷ To these few but largely symptomatic anecdotes of carnal temptation, one might add a raft of separate hagiographical imaginings of saintly trials and satanic schemes, but what would unite them all is the sense of the saint's fighting for the first time without being vulnerable and necessarily defensive; how in fact they had been the aggressors against Satan's hordes and how they could entertain, and even deconstruct the power behind the demons contest.³⁶⁸

Dadisho's discourses on 'Solitude' would imagine the saint's path towards realising the full power and potential of his enlightened status, both in terms of ascending trials of diabolic disturbance and perhaps rather more importantly, in terms of the saint's gradual progression towards a certain maturity of mind and sufficient level of expertise with which to independently confront, endure and perhaps even overcome diabolic schemes. Of course, to knock at the door of the Lord's mercy- to ask of him salvation and deliverance from the demons- was to be granted irrefutable and mostly immediate victory against the passions, in accordance with the truth of His words: 'Knock and it shall be opened to you, seek and you shall find'.³⁶⁹ Though on those occasions when it was not, in those instances when according to Dadisho: 'your love towards God may be tested and the good intention with which

³⁶⁶ An hagiographical echo of Ecclesiastes, 7:26

³⁶⁷ Lent, p.130; Syriac, p.537

³⁶⁸ See Lent, p.127; Syriac, p.532. Simeon Stylites' hagiographer describes a monk tortured by an evil spirit which would lie with him in his bed in the likeness of a woman, and how he was greatly afflicted by its temptations. An episode in the 'History of Rabban Bar-Idta' would relate how a certain bishop 'Yazdapneh' encouraged the envy of Satan as a consequence of his ascetic diligence, and how he was cast down and his episcopacy vanquished by a woman and his capitulation to the temptations of his 'evil imagination'. See 'Folio 24b' in E. A. Wallis-Budge (ed.) 'The History of Rabban Bar Idta', p.212. Elsewhere Rabban Sergius would relate how 'Emmanuel the Deacon' was forced to withstand Satan's temptations in the form of his 'lascivious, lustful and adulterous' sister-in-law- 'a vile creature' who upon seeing Emmanuel's chastity, would struggle 'with all kinds of schemes and craftiness' to bring the chaste man to love her and 'defile his brother's bed', see Ibid., Folio 51a-51b. Once again in Rabban Sergius' 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd, we discern something of the very real threat of bodily titillation and the seduction of its gratification, with his description of a certain 'harlot' who belonged to the 'polluted tavern of Bezkin' or rather 'the Monastery of Bezkin', who had successfully sought to lure its monks into 'the business of her unclean harlotry'. They were 'shorn outwardly', but in secret 'they were workers of wickedness', 'performing the works of whoredom in a shameful way and after the manner of dogs'- a lasciviousness which was at once a very real risk to the 'Lives' of Hormizd and all holy men, yet evidently contrary the perfect model of ascetic diligence which men like Hormizd were deemed to represent, See Folio 49a in *The History of Rabban Hormizd*, p. 90. For further reading on demonic temptation in the form of seductive women and lust, see J. E. Salisbury's more general discussions of saintly sexuality in A. Harper and C. Proctor (ed.) *Medieval Sexuality: A Casebook*, (London: Routledge, 2008), pp.47-59 and V. Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

³⁶⁹ *Mathew*, 7:7-8; *Mark* 11:24; *Luke*, 11:9; *John*, 5:14

you undertook your solitude may be made manifest', the saint's endurance at the forefront of Lord's ascetic legions was assumed to have endowed him with an ever-more-precise understanding of his enemy; of their identities, their characteristic schemes, and hence with an increasingly comprehensive array of stratagems with which to confront their diabolic offensive, and initiate his own incursions into Satan's territory.³⁷⁰ Having witnessed the integrity, the zeal and indeed the virtue of the saint's perseverance, the angel whom according to Dadisho's discourse had at times fulfilled the Lord's request to alleviate the saint's diabolic trials and at others relaxed his protective hold- was assumed to have united with the saint in a bond of ever-closer union: 'strengthening' and 'invigorating' the saint's mind, but also bequeathing him with the potential to actively rebuke and conquer the demon through the Divine power which Dadisho implies was granted to them:

'This is done to you in order that you may rejoice and delight in your victory, and feel in your soul that the help of the angel is encompassing you...In this way you are given courage for some other struggles of the future, and are armed powerfully against them and are given hope of victory'.³⁷¹

To successfully endure the diabolic trials of bodily sufferings, and the emotional persecutions of poverty, oppression and discrimination; to confront and fight against the temptation of capitulation in the face of increasingly complex diabolic schemes and subsequent demonic wrath, was for Dadisho- and indeed a great many of Late Antiquity's Syriac Christian hagiographers- to have been rewarded with the full potential of an enlightened but still, largely unproven status. Dadisho would reason that Job himself had found blessing with God not on account of divine mercy, but also on account of his diseases (Job 42:10-11), whilst Lazarus was assumed to have found his place in the bosom of Abraham for no reason 'except that he had endured the trials of disease' (Luke 16:20-31). Performed rightly therefore, the labours of the monk's ascetic penance- his fasting; physical chastisement; continued vigil and repeated prostrations; were not only a means of defence against the assaults of diabolic

370 'Dadisho on Solitude, Folio 46b'. Frankfurter suggests, 'beyond the embellishments and clarifying interpretations of hagiographers, holy men seem to have pursued their roles and wielders of verbal power with considerable independence', cursing and blessing not as an angry individual desperate for divine intervention, 'but at a "holy man" and as an expert wielder of verbal power. See D. Frankfurter, 'Curses, Blessings, and Ritual Authority', p.173.

371 'Dadisho on Solitude, Folio 47a'.

enemies, but the potential weapons of his offensive- an arsenal made manifest in the form of angelic blessing, deployed through the curse and adjuration ever-more effectively, to both negate and humiliate his opposition. To borrow a phrase from Dadisho's discourses, the immediate environs of the ascetic's habitation would resemble something akin to heaven on earth: to wear the habit was to dwell amongst the monastic perfection of his ascetic brethren, but also to coexist alongside a hierarchy of angelic compatriots; each gifting their assigned ascetic beneficiaries with a measure of the knowledge and wisdom of their spiritual discernment, but also setting forth something of the arts to be used in purging the pride of the saint's demonic adversaries.³⁷² It is with this understanding that we might return to the excerpt considered in the earliest discussion of our current discourse, namely the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd and its illustration of the dynamic between the enlightened but still unfulfilled saint, and a diabolic horde bent on sowing the seeds of his deviation and eventual destruction. Hormizd, having devoted himself to the 'divine humility' and 'lowly humbleness', evinced by his cleansing of the Monastery's latrines with his bare hands, was assumed by his hagiographer to have purified his mind to the extent that he was deemed worthy of the full potential of his enlightened condition; a potential facilitated by angelic wisdom and divine providence, and rather interestingly made manifest in terms of the saint's first demonstration of the overwhelming superiority, of his cosmological authority over the demon.

'Now up until this point, the holy man had listened unto the Devil. Then the holy man repulsed the Devil and said unto him, 'Close thy mouth, O thou insolent one, from [uttering] these words, O thou lying one and father of falsehood, for Christ, my King, and my God, and the Teacher of truth, is sufficient for me. By the venom of thy crafty doctrine, thou slayest man; of what use to me is thy counsel, O thou who wouldst destroy my life? I shall never become a participator in the impurity of thy wickedness because Christ hath made me full of the love of the holy love of Him that hath vanquished thee, and hath made bare the wiles and crafts of thy

³⁷² Satan and his demonic hordes may have stalked the perimeter's of the ascetic's cell, sowing the seeds of division and obstructing the devotion of the saint's discipline, but in the context of the saint's ongoing journey towards realising the full potential of his blessed and enlightened status, the Late Antique hagiographer would imagine how those truly 'worthy of their friendship' would also benefit in their battles both from the merciful inclination of God, and from the powerful reinforcement of his angels. Though they may have been concealed to ordinary human discernment, it was possible to recognise Satan and his demonic legions, and to thereby understand their obscure works, since the Holy Spirit and the Lord's angels 'exist themselves in this same concealed manner' and disclose to persons of spiritual refinement an understanding of the demons malicious schemes and guises. See D. Brakke's comments in Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p.115

wickedness. And he hath given unto us feeble folk the power to tread under foot by His humility thy head, provided that we keep His commandments with strenuousness, and by His strong power he hath made thee an object of disgrace and a thing to be trodden upon by his friends. In the name of Jesus the Nazarene, cease from thy blasphemy, O thou insolent one'.³⁷³

Having stood alone against the struggle of his temptation, vulnerable to the whim of an opponent whose assaults had been like punches that must be parried; the narratives describing the 'Lives' of men like Hormizd would begin to trace the outlines of a combatant whose contests with the demon were no longer necessarily defensive; recasting the image of the monk from a brave but altogether vulnerable victim into a well-equipped and increasingly experienced aggressor. Here, his hagiographer would relate how Hormizd had not only uncovered the Devil's schemes with the aid of angelic compatriots, but how he had learned to utilise the full potential of his quasi-angelic status to successfully repulse Satan's incursions and humiliate his hitherto unstoppable forces, with banishment.³⁷⁴ A central aspect of this theatre, and indeed a powerful component of the saint's assumed potential more generally, would seem to have been the verbal execration of Satan and his diabolic legions, either by uttering taunts and accusations, or by verbally comparing the devil and demon to some ephemeral entity and its immanent destruction at the hands, or rather 'under the foot' of this 'friend of God'. Indeed, the tirade of his accusations were an illocutionary act: one in which the articulation of words including unflattering descriptions; predictions; labels; and comparisons, had assumed an almost physical force to repel but also to counter the threat posed by the demon. By comprehensively identifying the demon and by artfully articulating and projecting a sense of its tangible form, Hormizd revealed what had formerly been concealed from his discernment, exposing the demon and his diabolic

373 'Folio 13a' in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, p.26.

374 Whether he was fighting demons, his own passions or indeed both, the monk's hagiographer would imagine his subject as a 'fighter', a 'contender' or 'combatant' - a masculine figure. At times he was envisioned to be a gladiator in the arena contending against demonic beasts, at others he was a soldier, in the frontline of the army of Christ alongside his angelic compatriots. The depiction of the saint as an aggressor against demonic ambivalence had been constructed, largely from its participation within what Brakke describes as 'a wider cultural project' within the Late Antique environment of Mesopotamia, which had sought to rework traditional markers of masculinity into new forms of Christian manliness. The monk, after all, did not exhibit many of the observable markers that characterised the ideal of Late Antique masculinity, and as such, many of the texts surrounding the 'Lives' of the holy men can be read in terms of clarifying the ambiguity of the monks identity by presenting the saint's occupation in terms of a particular caricature of manhood. For further reading, see 'Manly Women, Female Demons, and other Sights: Gender in Combat' in D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p.182

schemes but also rendering him victim to the cursory power of recrimination.³⁷⁵ His words worked- transforming a reality in which forces both ambiguous and evil afflict the saint and hamper his ascetic discipline, into one in which his clearly discernable supernatural opponent could be comprehensively defined and eliminated verbally. Indeed Satan, having heard the 'utterance of the name of Jesus the Nazarene', had been forced to take flight in the face of the saint's expertise and realised potential; 'vanquished' by the power of his conjured words and by the force of angelic compatriots. Though, despite the assumption of the efficacious potential of his illocution, it would seem that a certain ambiguity would nevertheless continue to trouble the changing dynamic between saint and Satan. Comfortably assured of his superior position within the cosmological contexts of his fight against Satan, the monk may have thought that he had become 'dead to the world' and its diabolic tribulations but Satan and his demonic hordes, though undoubtedly vanquished, were anything but 'dead'. In fact in the 'Life' of Hormizd, the genesis of diabolic defeat would not only inspire new diabolic tactics but an intensified aggression to Satan's warfare, with Satan declaring: 'can this follower of Nimrod think in very truth that he hath vanquished me? Little by little I will bring him down in his exalted estate until I have brought him down to the depth where there is no place to stand upon, even as I have done unto many other who were proud of and were perfect in the affection of the love of the Nazarene'.³⁷⁶ This intensified exposure to the newly enraged offensive of a demonic horde smarting with the wounds of their failure, is captured within his hagiographer's subsequent discourse, where Satan was imagined to have remained neither quiet nor to have desisted from his tyrannical persecutions, but to have had formulated a plan with which to destabilise the commitment and hence the authority of this rising example of spiritual superiority.

375 The words of the holy man identified the demon by literally articulating it into existence. Indeed the articulation of his utterances would seem to have transformed what was an otherwise intangible entity into one which could be defined and thereby revealed, but to borrow the terminology of J. L. Austin, the illocutionary act would not only expose the demon to saint's discernment but subject it to the power of its performative potential. Words were not only the tools with which he worked but would in fact constitute, quite literally, the power that he had sought to activate. The tirade of the saint against diabolic oppressors would not only express the extent of saintly aversion to the demons schemes, or even the suggestion of the saint's intent, but rather the articulated potential with which they were imbued- engaging the demon and transforming the circumstances of their use by their mere utterance. J. L. Austin would compare the underlying assumption of the saint's words and their potential to the phrases uttered in wedding ceremonies, where the words 'by this ring I thee wed' is enough to transform the civil status of the two individuals who consent to it, according to the authority and assessment of the state. In the case of the saint's curse however, instead of the state, it is the authority of the divine which is enforced through their illocution, transforming the status but also something of the dynamic between diabolic aggressor and the subject of its intent. For a useful introduction to the power potential attributed to the illocution of words, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

376 'Folio 13a' in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, p.27.

‘On another night, a second time, [all] the devils of creation gathered themselves together; and they were holding horns and trumpets which produced all kinds of sweet music, and they were arrayed in white garments which shone like lightning shooting forth splendour and glory, and they surrounded the young man on every side in a bold and insolent manner so that they might make him desist from his prayer and conversation with God. But the mind of the young man, who was mighty in God, united the gaze of his understanding unto Him, and by the divine union of the two spiritual powers he breathed upon that polluted horde of devils the fiery blaze of fierce lightening and suddenly, even like a light summer cloud, the company of devils disappeared from the air’.³⁷⁷

Warfare with Satan was continuous in this life, and may even have gotten worse as the monk progressed towards virtue, but though these tales of the redoubled efforts of Satan and his demonic horde would reiterate the saint’s continued vulnerability to their schemes and inclination, his hagiographer’s prose would emphasise a tone not only of optimism but of outright triumphalism. Once again, Hormizd was assumed not only to have contained the threat of the demons by the mere utterance of the words of his curses, but to have defeated and eradicated the company of devils with the power of his breath. But perhaps more importantly for my purposes, the suggestion of the divine bestowal of power alluded to here so as to reassure monastic readers of victory in his struggle with the unseen forces of evil, would serve not only as the basis of the saint’s personal struggle against Satan but as the basis of a potential which would extend beyond the confines of their immediate conflict.

Having learned to master the potential made manifest through his words and having thereby acquired the potential to thwart the diabolic threat posed to his own spiritual integrity, our hagiographer’s narrative would begin to articulate perhaps one of the most fundamental components of his prose and indeed of Syriac Christian spirituality more generally; how the developed monk had in time begun to look beyond the now largely peaceful ramparts of his personal defences against the demon to encounter Satan in his own space; how the dynamic of their warfare would transform from personal slights and personal injuries, to fighting by proxy. As opponents of the demons, the monks of the Syriac Orient were renowned and hence

³⁷⁷ ‘Folio 14a’, in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, p.29.

remembered by their hagiographers on account of their personal resistance to the demon, and for their successful negotiation of his temptations, but they were also remembered for the way in which the unequivocal power of his curse would transform into a means of bestowing divine blessings. Indeed, no longer truly preoccupied with the defence of his own spiritual integrity, the hagiographers' narratives would almost universally assume how the conflict between Saint and Satan would traverse the parameters of an insular and internalised dynamic, and spill out into the rather more external contexts of the ordinary men, women and children who existed beyond it. Believers as much as non-believers; young and old; rich and poor had all suffered at the hands of the same demonically inspired torments which had harrowed and agonised the monk; indeed all had been traumatised by the temptations of fornication, gluttony, pride and avarice, and all had certainly suffered from at least some of the maladies which shaped the postlapsarian experience of mankind. But unlike the saint, who had so purified his mind that he was deemed worthy of 'discernment', the suffering masses though perhaps having identified the demon as a fundamental element in the cause of their affliction, were neither able to directly discern or remedy the demon's diabolic schemes in the way in which the ascetics had been so frequently credited. In the following discourse; attention shall be given to these individuals not only as the victims of diabolic oppression, but as the individual battlegrounds of a renewed conflict between a triumphant saint and a defeated Satan- how their suffering had served as the foundation, not only for the fight for the victims soul but for the ongoing contest for the saint's supremacy. With his every inevitable victory, the rehearsed potential of saint's cursory words and ritualised adjurations would seem to have cultivated not only an ever stronger bond with the divine, but an ever more expansive repertoire of miraculous potential.³⁷⁸ From tales of demonic aggression and cunning stratagems to tales of the wonderful things wrought as a consequence of the ritualised and subversive power of his curse; it's to the saint's ever more liberal orchestration of the power of adjurational words, to which I shall now turn my attention.

The Ritualised Power to Curse and Bless: Taking the Conflict to Satan and his Demonic Hordes

³⁷⁸ Such was the ferocity of the fight which these devils made against him, that our author suggests 'by reason of the sight of these fearful phantoms his life was destroyed in his body, and his heart also fell down upon him and he became like a dead man'. Had it not been for the intervention of Christ himself, his soul would have departed his body through terror. See Folios, 21b-24a, pp 39-44.

‘So the saint kneeled down and prayed. And when he finished his prayer, he stretched out to him his right hand and said to him, “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ be healed”. And immediately the unclean spirit departed from the man, and he was recovered...’³⁷⁹

In the ‘Lives’ of the holy men of the Syriac Orient, the ascetic devotee was to have known the means of communicating with and even persuading beings that people could neither see nor comprehend: indeed their potential for spiritual discernment, much like their Merkavah contemporaries from the Hekhalot, had furnished them with an understanding of the right words to say, and they invested power over the demonic through their articulation. The force of his words would betray the potential of a dynamic which he had shared with angelic compatriots, an affiliation which had helped him to realise the full capacity of his mind’s primordial comprehension; to see divine truths but also something of the diabolic schemes which underpinned his, and indeed, all of mankind’s postlapsarian existence. Endowed with the ability to identify the demon, it was through the ritualised process of articulating his insults; his accusations, his adjurations and threats of reprisal, that he would expose and transform the demon from a once ambiguous cipher, into a tangible entity: rendering him victim to the divine authority and illocutionary power of the saint’s curse and recrimination. It was an expectation of the saint’s speech-of its potential to help facilitate the intent with which they had been declared- which would seem to have extended from the saint’s potential to vanquish the demon to the not unrelated potential, of bestowing the protective power of blessings. These two seemingly separate expressions of the power of efficacious speech were in fact conversely intertwined as two faces of essentially what was the same phenomenon- namely the potential of the saint in negating the impact of the demon in the lives of the vulnerable, either through the subversive power of his curses or through the protective measures of his blessings.³⁸⁰ The two strands of the saint’s ritualised performance and illocutionary power offer the opportunity for extensive study and numerous avenues of enquiry, but for the sake of brevity, this investigation shall consider extant evidence of its exemplary expressions: firstly in its deployment to curse and exorcise the

379 *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, ‘Lent, p.115; Syriac, p.514’

380 For further discussion of the connection between ‘curse’ and ‘blessing’, see D. Frankfurter, ‘Curses, Blessing, and Ritual Authority: Egyptian Magic in Comparative Perspective’ in *JANER* 5 (2006), pp.157-185

possessive demon, then in terms of its transformation into the protective bestowal of blessings for the alleviation of a variety of diabolically inspired ills and anxieties. Whilst exploring the practical efficacy of the saint's illocution; how the authority of his words were assumed to have been efficacious even beyond the incursions of the saint's immediate struggle, our enquiry of these sources also encourage reflection upon the dynamic of the saint and his words, indeed how the authority of one would seem in many ways to have been no more or no less reliant upon the authority of the other. Curses and blessings as effective speech, whilst evidently of potential value in their own right, had also depended upon their speaker's prior status as one who not only knew the words to utter, but who held the necessary authority to exercise their full cosmological potential. It's by exploring the potential of the saint's words and accompanying gestures but also his status therefore as a privileged and fundamental component in the mechanism of efficacious utterances, that we might begin to consider the wider conclusions which might be drawn from the hagiographer's suppositions, in addition to how his narratives might be situated within the wider spiritual landscape of Late Antique Mesopotamia.

Diabolic Possession, Saintly Exorcism and the Ritualised Curse

'...and the blessed man prayed with holy anxiety that [Christ] would make the Crafty One to have no effect upon either the youth or himself. And when the holy man had received upon himself power from on high, he turned to that crafty one, and spoke with him in the Persian tongue, and said unto him, 'O evil and wicked devil, who from the remote period of thin existence hast never felt shame and who to the end of time and to all eternity wilt never heel shame, by Jesus Christ the Nazarene, Who drove out thy legion from him that used to dwell among the tombs, be thou silent, and hold thy peace, and utter no words. Then the devil who hearkened unto the humble words of the glorious man, was constrained by the command to him of the holy man, and by the might of the angel who had been sent to his help, and by the holy splendour of Jesus Christ'.³⁸¹

³⁸¹ 'Folio 19b' in *The History of Rabban Hormizd*, p.38

Taken from the hagiographical discourse surrounding the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd, this excerpt encapsulates the very essence of this chapter's current discourse; that is to say its hagiographer's articulation of perhaps one of the dramatic demonstrations of satanic affliction-possession, and its alleviation through the restorative rites of demonic expulsion. Here, the thread of the demon's malevolent affliction; hitherto all but confined to the immediate parameters of the saint's dynamic with Satan, would ultimately change and even intensify as the demon sought to take possession of both the corporeal and cerebral faculties of those lacking the stamina to resist its advances. Indeed, just as the Late Antique Christian hagiographer had imagined that there were individuals of such spiritual fortitude to have been able to discern and thereby engage the demon and its diabolic onslaughts, so he would describe the rather more vulnerable predisposition of the many, whose worldly but no less committed struggle against the passions exposed them to the heightened perception of Satan, and hence to the aggression of a demonic offensive for which they were rather less well-prepared. Returning to Dadisho's contemplation of 'Solitude', we read that because of 'weariness' and 'dejectedness', because of 'flimsy' and 'unnecessary' motives, the weakness of individual will- whether that of the ascetic or ordinary devotee, not only weakened the resolve of the angels to protect and accompany unstable souls in their spiritual pursuits, but offered the demonic source of humanity's torments a window through which to penetrate the final defences of that individual's debilitated faith, and desecrate the spiritual integrity of his soul.³⁸² Their temporary capitulation to the allure of spiritual and emotion ease and material lusts; their longing to revel in the predicament of humanity's postlapsarian condition, would facilitate their decline and eventual fall to unsurpassed levels of depravity- a drama directed by the demon and by the demonic intent to diminish all former efforts to renew the affinity between the themselves and divinity, and all in the hope that by its finale this tale of demonic conquest might have reached its intended crescendo: the total eradication of the individual's former self and his occupation, as a corporeal habitation for his diabolic oppressors.

The possession of the spiritually indisposed, the emotionally immature or the spiritually vulnerable; men as much as women- children as much as the fully-grown, was assumed in these texts to have manifested through the demon's orchestration of a disjointed and often disturbing array of human behaviour; with the demon manipulating his victim's faculties as a puppeteer might pull the strings of his puppet's

³⁸² Dadisho, 'On Solitude, Folio 45b'.

extremities, to project the intent and in this case the depravity, of his drama. Hagiographers would describe a sense of general disorder; the delirious raving of a fisherman's daughter;³⁸³ the frenzied mania of house-hold cooks³⁸⁴ and the 'bestial howling' of sexually insatiable young men³⁸⁵ - all manifestations of a conduct which, though not especially threatening to others, was portrayed and presumably perceived as irregular, and not altogether of this world. The narrative behind our leading quotation describes how a twelve-year-old's 'madness' had manifested into behaviour so aberrant, so very different to the Late Antique conventions of acceptable Christian conduct, that societal expectations and a concern for the child's welfare had forced his family to incapacitate him with chains. In this he was of course, by no means unusual. Indeed, a sufficient number of hagiographical anecdotes can be drawn from the existent literature to conclude how afflictions exposing elements of 'frenzy' and 'mania', had threatened the sufferer and those loyal to them with the social shame of societal alienation and communal exclusion; how the detrimental impact of the sufferer's condition, both in terms of its potential infringement upon others and indeed upon familial social standing, had ensured that their 'hands, neck, sides and feet were bound and laden with iron'³⁸⁶ Certainly, he was anything but unusual when having remained thus for 'nine and twenty days', he reportedly 'broke his fetters and tore his garments in rags off his body', biting the flesh off his arms and gnawing at it with his teeth.³⁸⁷ Here in the hagiographer's narrative, to succumb to the passions and diabolic suggestion- insinuated here in terms of one pubescent's boy's temptation with the

383 *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, Lent, p.115; Syriac, p.515.

384 See *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, p.139; Syriac, p.533

385 See for example, an excerpt from the Life of Rabban Hormizd describing the monastic lust of several monastic brethren for the whores of Bezkin, which is described as being like the depravity of dogs. 'Folio, 49a', in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, p.90. For further reading on the unusual behaviour and depravity expressed by the diabolically possessed, see in particular *The Life of Rabban*, Folio 15b, p.31; *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, Lent, p.127; Syriac, p.533. On the gnashing of teeth 'ܥܢܝܢܐ' as a sign of demonic possession, see *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, Lent, p.116; Syriac, p.515; Lent, p.129; Syriac, p.525. See also the *History of Rabban Hormizd*, p.31.

386 The suggestion resembles perhaps the well-known account of diabolic affliction described by the Gospels, Mark 5:2-5, which would describe a man possessed by 'impure spirits'; unable to be bound even with chain; and forced to live among the tombs of Gerasenes. For further reading on societal perceptions of adherent behaviour, how it was largely attributed to demonic behaviour, and how Late antique practices of exiling the ill might have shaped both communal attitudes to those deemed to be possessed as well as familial efforts to conceal the afflicted, see Trzcionka's informative discussion in S. Trzcionke, *Magic and the Supernatural in Fourth Century Syria*, pp.142-157.

387 This, and other comparable examples of the 'mania' with which the emotionally immature and spiritually vulnerable in Late Antique Christian society were assumed to have been disposed, is an ailment difficult to determine. Indeed, despite the relatively large quantity of anecdotes from which we might have presumed to discern a comprehensive insight into this aspect of the hagiographer's discourse, the symptoms which affected these vulnerable victims are not described in any great detail. However, given the hagiographer's use of terms including 'raving' and 'frenzy', 'delirium' and 'mania', as well as making reference to the condition of 'insanity', we might comfortably assume that the hagiographer was referring to some form of cognitive impairment, and more definitely, to forms of behaviour significantly divergent from accepted societal norms. Our excerpt would describe afflictions so severe that they were assumed not only to deviate from individual behavioural norms, but from normal patterns of human conduct, such that they might only be attributed to the immediate residing influence of a non-human and supernatural agent provocateur, that is to say the demon and more precisely- Satan.

passions of his age- was to initiate what can only be seen as the somewhat harrowing process of transformation and negative externalisation. The diabolic agents of his demise may have maintained the spiritual essence of a hidden form once known to primordial humanity, but they were revealed through their victim's actualising of their sinful potential, creating embodied deed from spiritual thought. The result was that those like the youth in our excerpt, both vulnerable and susceptible to the lure of diabolic temptations, became something of a surrogate host to the parasitic essence of the demons; offering substance and sanctuary, whilst unknowingly manifesting the depraved aspects of the demon's hitherto thwarted disposition. Indeed, just as demons were assumed to have come into being due to their fall away from the union which they once enjoyed with God, so they would now incite a movement from their supernatural state to an exterior, visible corporeality: one that embodied the disordering potential of their diabolic personality, and rendered it incarnate.

The demons of these hagiographical narratives were thus both cosmological vagrants and cunning thieves, eager to embody and thereby project a false identity upon the vulnerable- making the body 'their home' rather than the site of a 'legitimate revelation' of their victim's natural, and once nurtured spiritual essence. Though, just as the bodies of the devious became the arena in which evil sought to make itself manifest, so it was the saint's ascetic denial of the body and its material demands that would transform him into a receptacle of divine benevolence and exorcistic potential. The malignant and disturbing infringement of the victim's cognitive and corporeal integrity required a potent and efficacious supernal solution- the expulsion of the diabolic deviant- issued by the authority of one not only fully-versed in the articulation of divine jurisdiction, but all too familiar with both the various schemes and tactics of diabolic warfare. Indeed, exorcistic practice on behalf of the necessitous; those who had lapsed or fallen victim to a state of spiritual vulnerability through the various depravities of the postlapsarian condition, would seem to have been at the core of saint's ongoing fight against evil and against the demonic legions at its forefront. Certainly, enough holy men are picked out in the hagiographer's literature for their ritualised execrations to conclude, if not a general preoccupation with demons among the Syriac Orient's Christian monks, that the regional reputations of many of its holy men arose precisely from their ability to extend the power of an exorcistic potential. The demon may well have been powerful enough to invade and orchestrate the various faculties of its victim; manifesting various and largely aberrant displays of behaviour as demonstrations of their unquestionable triumph, but our excerpt characteristically

emphasises a hagiographical understanding which assumed above all, that the weight of the holy man's cursory words imbued with the potency of divine power, would not only confront but evict the demon, eradicating all traces of its former habitation. Here in this narrative, and within other comparable hagiographical literature, the mind and the body of the necessitous would become the arena in which evil was not only made manifest in the Late Antique world but rendered subservient to the divine potency of the saint's unyielding perspicacity and illocutionary prowess.

From diabolic affliction to the supernatural prowess of saintly cure, from hagiographical tales of individual capitulation to the hagiographical promise of spiritual resuscitation; the discourse of power and control exemplified in this characteristic portrayal from the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd begins by articulating what we might imagine therefore to be a rather unusual, and all the more noteworthy demonstration of the overarching authority invested in the pious. Indeed, having described how for 'nine and twenty days' the youth at the centre of his hagiographer's narrative had been 'grievously worked upon' by the trials of his tribulation; how those who were with him were 'in such sore tribulation' that they were unable to leave him at any time 'lest quickly and speedily his life should be destroyed', the excerpt would relate:

'Our Lord hearkened unto the petition of His servants after the manner of Divine Providence, and He released the youth from this temporary life, and his soul departed from his vexed body unto divine life and rest'.³⁸⁸

They had brought the youth to Rabban Hormizd as a spiritual virtuoso, as one whose resistance to the temptations of his passions had transformed his spiritual vulnerability into a veritable bulwark against diabolic depravity, and as one who might alleviate the source of the diabolic onslaughts lingering at the root of the youth's depraved predicament. We might imagine how Hormizd had offered something from his already proven repertoire of ascetic resistance; how he might have bestowed the power of his protection against diabolic oppressors or even a measure of the efficacious remedy embodied in the illocution of his words against diabolic servitude. But, choosing to pray amongst his supplicants for divine mercy and salvation, the saint

³⁸⁸ *Hormizd*, folio 15b

directed his words instead towards passive placation and ‘the blessing of peace’ rather than to the active interception and powerful procedures of exorcistic release. Despite the evident authority hitherto shown by Hormizd in prior engagements between himself and Satan and the discernable illocutionary power of his words to negotiate the mercy of eternal rest; the saint chose not to engage the demon directly as former narratives might encourage his reader to expect, but to negate the efforts of his schemes by circumventing around them and avoiding the diabolic depravity of their source altogether. This unusual display of passivity in the ‘Lives’ of the Syriac saints was not imagined as having brought his or his monastic brethren’s potency into question, nor was it considered to have brought his reputation into disrepute. On the contrary, his hagiographer’s narrative portrays a victim of possession whose behaviour was such, that it not only dramatically altered as a result of the demonic intrusion, but detrimentally impacted the welfare of individuals within his community- advancing the theory of Hormizd’s apparent display of passivity against the demon into an all the more impressive, rather than dispiriting presentation of good sense and overall saintly superiority over diabolic depravity. Though even the slightest suggestion of passivity, no matter how cunning and carefully strategized, might have undermined his divine authority and status; to have emphasised the strength of his diabolic opposition and even his tenuous position in what was perhaps a rather more evenly matched contest. It was perhaps for this reason that his hagiographer sought to introduce to this narrative something of the saint’s later repentant efforts ‘to make entreaty to His Master’; how the saint resolved to petition ‘his creator’ with ‘tears and sighs’ having had his soul ‘led captive by tearful grief’, ‘casting himself into the strife on their behalf’.³⁸⁹ In a way which sought to reaffirm and perhaps even accentuate the strength of the dynamic between the Lord and the pious, and clarify the sense of the saint’s superior force in the drama of his confrontation with the demon; the hagiographer’s subsequent discourse would articulate how the saint’s remorse and late intervention- and perhaps more precisely the chosen words of the saint’s supplication- had made the Lord both ‘mindful of him that made entreaty’, and inclined therefore to bestow his miraculous potential on his servant’s behalf.

‘He stirred up his servant according to His will to beseech in love for mercy for those who were in affliction, and the Creator moved in love the soul of the young man within him. And the flesh of the young man [who

³⁸⁹ *Rabban Hormizd*, folio 16b

was dead] began to tremble, and the movements thereof to be endued with life, and it was necessary that the glory of His name should receive fulfilment through the deed'.³⁹⁰

It was a powerful demonstration of the bond between a saint dedicated to the ascetic endurance of spiritual realignment, and his Lord. Indeed, his hagiographer is resolute in his understanding, that it had been only as a consequence of his servant's behest, that the Lord had been inclined towards divine mercy: offering salvation to an individual whom, though loved by the Lord, was otherwise just one of an unfortunate number of nondescript exemplars of the human condition. Though, perhaps more than that, more than illustrating the mere bond between saints like Hormizd and a benevolent and merciful Lord, this excerpt is also a powerful illustration of the saint as one who according to his hagiographer, was not only lose to the divine condition but also integral therefore to the manifestation of the divine expression.³⁹¹ Indeed, the Lord had not only been inclined to act on account of his servant's petitions but had deemed it necessary that the glory of his name- or rather the powerful potential of his intervention- should be given fulfilment specifically through the hands of his terrestrial servant; investing him with the potential to orchestrate the divine intent but also with the means to therefore mediate a truly miraculous outcome. Indeed, far from being a privileged but largely passive and powerless bystander in the day to day afflictions of mankind, it is within the following discourse that we begin to appreciate his hagiographer's understanding of the true authority and position of the saint in this dynamic between the Divine and those diminished by the depravity of the demon.

Momentarily devoting his attention to 'the secret eye of his mind', Hormizd with the 'observant brilliance of his understanding' and with the 'contemplative vision of his soul', had seen that whilst the Lord's declaration of intent may have imbued the youth's flesh with life, a guardian angel 'clave to the youth and would not permit the fulfilment of his restoration until it should be brought about in deed by the agency of the blessed man'.³⁹² The command of the Lord whilst integral; would prove to be only

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Peter Brown's significant study on 'The Rise and Function of the Holy man in Late Antiquity' would describe his thoughts on how the holy men of Late Antiquity served as 'arbiters' and as 'patrons' of the holy, paving the way for a religious 'common-sense' which assumed that people could be invested with the divine power and miraculous potential formerly afforded to the apostles and Old Testament patriarchs. For further reading on Brown's theories of Late Antiquity's 'holy men' as uniquely terrestrial manifestations of divine authority and power, see P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', pp.80-101 and *ibid*, 'Arbiters of the Holy: The Christian Holy Man in Late Antiquity', pp.57-78.

³⁹² *Rabban Hormizd*, folio 17a.

part of a rather more complicated process of procedures to mediate and manifest the miraculous. To convince the youth's guardian angel to relinquish his responsibility and allow for the miraculous, Hormizd had been required to intercede directly between the power and authority of the divine and the individual for whom it had been petitioned, as an altogether crucial component in the negotiation and communication of divine blessings. In this cosmological exchange between God and the necessitous, Hormizd- like so many of his contemporary brethren- was both an active mediator and a formidable manifestation of the Divine will; exercising the currency of his spiritual virtue to command the angels and bestow the generous bounty of their divine blessings upon the necessitous. Though as we shall see, a large part of the appeal of the image of piety constructed in the hagiographer's discourse lies not only in the suggestion that the pious were able to embrace and articulate the negotiated power of divine blessings. Indeed, in what proves to be a rather interesting development in our hagiographer's discourse, we discern that the saint was assumed to have exploited his privileged position within the divine exchange of human supplication and miraculous capital as a fearsome incarnation, not only of the divine potential for miraculous blessings but of the divine wrath with which to curse the demon and the depravity of its diabolic intent.

'Then the blessed man with tears in his eyes made with his hands three times in the air the sign of the Cross, and said 'O our Lord Jesus Christ, Thou didst restore to life the daughter of Jairus, the Chief of the synagogue; and didst give life also to the son of the widow, and didst raise up from the grave Lazarus, who had been dead. Thou art at this present the Living One, and the Son the Living One, and for Thy Godhead nothing is too difficult, and Thy Will subsisteth with the Will of Thy Father in thy creative power. O our Lord, Thou didst say unto thy disciples in Thy Holy Gospel, Ask, and it shall be given unto you, and whatsoever ye shall ask My Father in My Name on earth shall be given unto you from My Father Who is in heaven; open thou the door unto the voice of lamentation of these strangers, and accept the feebleness of me Thy servant, and exalt Thou on high the boasting of Her that hath been brought low, by causing the soul of this youth to turn unto life, and also let Thy Holy Name be glorified in the sight of those who have hatred to Thy Holy Church'. And when he had finished his payer, and had said 'amen', he pronounced over the youth three times: 'John, John, in

the Name of Jesus Christ, rise up from the sleep of death. At their recital, the youth straight away opened his eyes and praised Christ with the glory of his benedictions, saying 'glory be unto thee who has given unto me life anew, and who hast also by Thy grace set me free from the baleful might of that wicked Devil'.³⁹³

Besides the privilege attributed to Hormizd because of his pious condition and blessed status; besides the perceived necessity of his intervention as a veritable broker in the cosmological exchange between human necessity and the divine facilitation of the miraculous, it is possible to discern several important and noteworthy features deserving of further discussion. Beyond the mere assumption of the power of the saint's illocution, his hagiographer would here relate something of his understanding of the mechanics which had accompanied and facilitated the blessings with which they were imbued; such as the saint's audible illocution of prayer and the powerful recital of the name of the saviour, his ritualistic signing of the cross according to the tri-partite form of the holy trinity and other gestures, and the powerful potential of his tears.³⁹⁴ To this we might also add the almost legalistic approach towards providing the case for divine intervention; his adaptation of scriptural/historical precedents, and the moralistic argument for divine justice to be served against the depravity of such a diabolic desecration.³⁹⁵ These elements of the hagiographer's narrative, his understanding of the role of the saint in negotiating and mediating the divine intent,

393 *Rabban Hormizd*, Folio 18b, p.37. This was by no means the only occasion Hormizd mediated the power of the divine to resurrect those worthy of divine consideration, indeed later on in his career, our hagiographer would even describe how he came to be known for it. In folios 44a-45a, we read once more how a young man had perished on account of the severity of his sickness, and how his parents refused to bury him until Rabban Hormizd had seen him. Hormizd, referring to himself in the third-person, would even bless them for their faith and their having done so, saying 'ye decided rightly not to bury the man until Rabban had seen him'. Hormizd had become a man known for his miraculous abilities, indeed so much so that the men and women, who had witnessed his reputed potential for themselves, sought to collect the dust from under his feet in the hope that through it, such things might be replicated. See Folios 44a-45a, pp 81-83. Hormizd would also later be asked by a local magistrate to resurrect a harlot, so that she might identify and testify against the Jacobite monks who had murdered her and who had sought to use her body and that of her newly born child to incriminate the holy man Hormizd. See Folios 49a-51b, pp.90-95.

394 The hagiographer's description of the saint turning his eyes to heaven can be assumed to represent the saint's direct appeal to the heavens, or indeed to God, through the raised face and the invocations which accompanied it. The suggestion of the saint's accompanying tears however, might have served to articulate to its readership any number of things. Indeed, perhaps the saint's tears simply represented the saint's very human response to the extent of the youth's suffering at the hands of the demon and the diabolic intent to desecrate his soul; perhaps they represented and therefore bestowed the healing properties of blessed water, though just as likely is the assumption that our hagiographer was here drawing upon gospel accounts of Jesus and his weeping for the death of Lazarus, thereby presenting a potent parallel in this account of the ascetic. See *John* 35, and *Luke* 19:41 where Jesus is reported to have wept for the city of Jerusalem.

395 The words of the saints may have been powerful, but it would seem that their efficacy was derived not merely through having been uttered, but by their articulation within a far more complex process of ritualised action- designed to appease but also to cajole those external and supernatural powers, whether benevolent or malevolent, to whom those words had been addressed. Shaul Shaked would describe a similar process within the incantation's of some Mesopotamia's other ritual specialists, describing their words and rituals as 'persuasive statements'. See S. Shaked, 'The Poetics of Spells, Language and Structure in Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity: The Divorce Formula and its Ramifications', in *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical and Interpretive Perspectives*, ed. T. Abusch and K. van der Toorn (Groningen, 1999), pp.173-195 [174].

but also of the ritualised procedures through which he had sought to do so, pose important and provocative questions, not least among which concern their depiction of Late Antique expectations of piety, and the religious environment in which these Christian texts were produced. For the moment, our immediate attention is directed towards the assumptions which underlie this excerpt's concluding details; that is to say the saint's ability not only to mediate the blessings of divine benevolence, but to actively identify and resist the diabolic efforts which lie at the heart of the youth's affliction. Having reversed the blessing of divine deliverance, resurrecting the youth in accordance with both his family's will and the divine demand for his immediate intervention, this discourse rather humorously relates how the demon and diabolic perpetrator of the youth's affliction had sought to ingratiate himself and offer gratitude to the assumed agent of his restoration; praising the saint and the 'splendour of Christ' which had 'built for me a house anew'. 'Yea, the good Providence of the Most High, in all things hath wrought according to its desire, and hath not left me a wanderer and a stranger like my companions'. In a way which perhaps reflects upon the saint's former passivity rather than the popular hagiographical sentiment of diabolic buffoonery; the diabolic assailant at the centre of our hagiographer's drama would mistake the saint and his adjurational actions as being those of a sympathetic saviour, as opposed to an ascetic aggressor. Little then did the demon know, that having grossly misinterpreted the saint's merciful motivations to resurrect the youth as an indication of his diabolic sympathies, he had reintroduced himself to the full potential of a new and divinely inspired inclination; one which sought not to bear witness to or tolerate the demon's schemes, but to prohibit his diabolic infringement, and expel his presence entirely.

'Glory be unto that splendour of Christ which hath built for me a house anew, and hath not left me [to become] a wanderer and a stranger like my companions...and the blessed man prayed with holy anxiety that [Christ] would make the Crafty One to have no effect upon either the youth or himself. And when the holy man had received upon himself power from on high, he turned to that crafty devil and spoke with him in the Persian tongue, 'O evil and wicked devil, who from the remote period of thine existence hast never felt shame, by 'Jesus Chris the Nazarene', Who drove out thy legion from him that used to dwell among the tombs, be thou silent, and hold thy peace'. Then the devil, who hearkened unto the humble words of the glorious man, was constrained by the command to him of the holy

man, and by the might of the angel who had been sent to his help, and through the holy splendour of Jesus Christ, he answered with murmurs, and said, 'hearken, O thou man, who art cunning in the business of thy Lord, although thou hast contrived a scheme craftily against the prince [of devils] by means of the mighty Sign of thy humility, thou has not overcome the two mighty ones'; and after these words that devil spoke no more.³⁹⁶

Several points might be considered from this final excerpt of our hagiographer's discourse; beyond the immediate humour of one demon's mistaken attempts to befriend the saint, having inadvertently misconstrued his efforts to resurrect the youth as an indication of his sympathy for diabolic destitution, rather than his hope for the youth's salvation. Perhaps first and foremost amongst them, is the apparent potential of the saint to offer an efficacious remedy and understanding of the condition where conventional methods had failed to diagnose or assist. Indeed, his hagiographer relates how the youth had been brought to Hormizd as an act of last resort; how his family had turned to the rumoured potential exercised by the pious where physicians had despaired and medicine had failed. Of course, his immediate prayers and those of his monastic brethren had failed conclusively, leading to the feared demise of the youth and to the offer of divine salvation through the immediate release offered by death, but having negotiated the youth's resurrection; we read how the esteem of his divine supplications; the power of his illocution; his tears and signing of the cross, had furnished him with a divine potential not only for manifesting the miraculous, but to command the demon and demand its incarceration by the jurisdiction of the angels. Hormizd was not only exceptionally and even inhumanly pious; he was not only able to negate the passions of his temptations and confront the diabolic hordes who sought to engineer the means of his demise; but to command a celestial power over the demon which extended beyond his own internal struggles and into the affairs of those overwhelmed by the diabolic intent to make the vulnerable their home. The suggestion would provide our hagiographer, and many hagiographers like him, with a powerful and effective narrative- one which would strengthen the image of Late Antiquity's holy men by portraying them as able to deliver, on occasion and for those deemed worthy, what others with respected abilities could not.³⁹⁷ Perhaps one of the pertinent points to

³⁹⁶ *Rabban Hormizd*, Folio 19b, pp.38-39

³⁹⁷ Through various techniques of blessing, prayer and articulation of other words and gestures, the Christian holy men became significant aspects of the wider Late Antique landscape of healing, both as acknowledged and acceptable alternatives to the secular, more medicinal methods of the

be taken from this narrative, however, is the assumption of how an individual's possession and the resultant need for expulsion was assumed to have been mediated- indeed the malignant and disturbing trespass of corporeal and cerebral faculties necessitated potent and effective supernal expulsion, but how was the saint perceived to have done so? In the following discourse, this chapter intends to investigate the potential of the saint's adjuration, but also the technicalities behind the saint's aptitude for the miraculous- the activities and rituals relating to supernatural possession and saintly expulsion. If men like Hormizd knew, spoke and perhaps even wrote the right words, then what words did they use and why were they significant? If they knew the potential of reciting scriptural precedents in adjuring the divine and driving out the demons, then how did they use this arsenal of effective words to enlist supernatural aid or help the necessitous? What was the role of their accompanying gestures, and precisely how did they negotiate their full cosmological potential? An insight into the saint's expertise and regimen has to some extent already been intimated by the details of this introductory excerpt, but here we examine the ritualised procedure of his exorcistic and cursory response to the diabolic entity at the centre of this excerpt's narrative; dissecting the individual components of his and other saintly adjurations of the demon, to understand them, but also to assess the suggestion of their situation within the broader contexts of Late Antique ritual practices.

The Judicial Framework of Exorcistic Adjuration

The research of this chapter has so far sought to describe the saint's affinity with the miraculous in terms of a dynamic of cosmological exchange, defined by the progress of spiritual ascendancy and measured according to corresponding denominations of miraculous capital. Acquiring the currency of spiritual labour was not only to gain proximity to the divine condition, but the repute of one suitably honed by ascetic ordeals to have received divine recognition, and the endorsement of celestial investors. Yet, it would seem that the dynamic between ascetic conscientiousness and

physician. In pointing out the ineffectiveness of doctors, the hagiographer is not so much competing as transferring the suggestion of affliction out of the arena of the physical and into the realm of the supernatural, in which forum the holy man could be appropriately depicted as ascendant. Here, the affliction was diabolic in origin, and so necessitated a supernatural rather than medicinal solution. This important aspect of the miraculous repertoire of the saint shall be considered later in this chapter, reflecting not only upon Late Antique hagiographical expectations of the Saint as miraculous healer, but upon diabolic aggression as the cause of a variety of maladies, beyond its dramatic and powerful manifestation in the form of possession. For further reading on supernatural healing and its situation within the wider framework of Late Antique healing, see 'Illness and Healing: Threats and Retaliation in a Discourse of Power' in S. Trzcionke, *Magic and the Supernatural in Fourth Century Syria*, pp121-142

supernatural prowess was defined in a number instances, according to quite a different analogy; one which would imagine the saint's piety and capacity for miraculous exchange in terms of a more technical expertise, and a somewhat more limited and undetermined response from the divine. Indeed, quite unlike the notion of immediate reciprocation implied by the model of cosmological exchange, it is by taking a closer look at the discourse of pious power and its mediation for exorcistic control, that we discern a capacity for the miraculous framed specifically, according to the mechanisms and due process of a celestial court of law.³⁹⁸ Within such as conceptual context, the special kudos and associated privileges bought by spiritual acumen would permit the saint not merely to engage and exchange with the heavens- as was so often the case in these hagiographical narratives-but to contest its occasional passivity, and to convince its inhabitants of the need for their mediated benevolence. Here, the hagiographer constructs the saint's potential not as an immediate consequence of attained status, but as a result of his rehearsal of a spectrum of techniques and ritualised efforts of entreaty with which to motivate rather than supplicate the divine towards action. Indeed, upon closer inspection, it would seem neither unfounded nor misguided to draw tentative connections between his ritualised efforts of entreaty, and the role of the modern legal representative. We might imagine how both; through the authority of their diligent training not to mention the art of their rhetorical finesse, would seem to represent and serve in the defence of the vulnerable according to a prescribed and ritualised strategy-albeit for different incentives, and certainly quite different assessments of the accused. The saint's incentive was unequivocally virtuous- a selfless act of supplication to divine judge and jury, who would seem to have been more favourably inclined towards the saintly defendant than the expectations of modern judicial objectivity might allow. Though, this should by no means undermine the legitimacy of the comparison. Both- irrespective of incentive or the privilege of courtly bias- craft a complex and convincing case for judicial intervention; delineating the injustice of the affliction and expectations for how it might satisfactorily be redressed, but also articulating with recognisably similar tools of rhetorical strategy: including the use of historical precedent, and the dynamics of moral obligation and guilt. ³⁹⁹

398 The discourse of power and control between saint and demon is particularly exemplified within this legalistic framework, with the treatment of the demon; in address; examination; judgement and sentencing strongly reinforces the ascendant role of the ascetic as both judge and executioner. For further reading in the dynamic of 'power' and 'control' between saint and demon within the hagiographical text, and it's legalistic frame of reference, See S. Trzcionke, *Magic and the Supernatural in Fourth Century Syria*, pp. 157-160.

399 As Naomi Janowitz explains, much of the training of law school has to do with moving beyond the 'semantics-interpretive orientation of earlier schooling; learning and practicing instead both the skills of oral exchange and debate, as well as grasping the notions of precedent and procedural

The saint may have been a ‘servant of his Lord’, both submissive to his command and unwavering in his endeavour to realise divine expectation, but the overwhelming weight of language in the hagiographer’s texts would seem to resonate with the expectations of a more public persona; less as a subservient and devoted ‘son’ than as a privileged recipient and mediator of divine patronage. For many hagiographers, this depiction involved far more than an unthinking projection on the invisible world something of the claimed abilities of the pious, and was in fact driven by the assumption that the saints could be prevailed upon precisely because of his favoured position in proximity to the Divine, and the ritualised model of his intercession. The language and motifs of ascetically sought privilege would seem to have had its limits when describing the invisible world in these hagiographical texts, and was often supplemented with a sense of wider expectation, both of the saint’s ability to intercede and his propensity for the miraculous. Recalling an aforementioned account of one youth’s resurrection and exorcism in the *Life of Hormizd*, the saint’s capacity for intercession was defined as much by the saint’s craft as his credentials, drawing upon the innate privilege of his celestial standing but also his ability and inclination to cajole, as much as appeal to the benevolence of a divine judiciary. Within that narrative’s framework, there is a sense that Hormizd was not only an important component in the terrestrial mediation of divine blessings, but a powerful orchestrator of its potential; perhaps even an underlying friction concerning the extent to which the youth’s resurrection was a result of a divine demand for the saint to be involved, or as a result of the efficacy and power of saintly coercion. Indeed, viewing the narrative from a distance, we might wonder why, if the Lord had indeed been inclined to act on the youth’s behalf as his hagiographer implies, Hormizd had been required to present the case for divine action in the first place, let alone why he would need to forcefully coerce the Lord into action with statements like: ‘O our Lord, thou didst say unto thy disciples in Thy Holy gospel, ask and it shall be given unto you, and whatsoever ye shall ask my Father in my name, on earth shall be given unto you from my Father who is in heaven, so open Thou the door unto the voice of me thy servant’.⁴⁰⁰ Underlying these accounts of saintly intervention and practice was what might be considered as a kind of ritualised passive-aggression; at once adamant to

history. All these are meta-level concepts that determine what can be done with the words of law, indeed as Elizabeth Mertz explains: ‘a legal reading of case law focus on the metapragmatics of the text, in which lies the key to its authority’. A direct comparison might be sought in the saint’s use of scriptural/historical precedent to justify the nature and expectation of his request, presented and articulated before the Lord and divine authority as part of a ritualised performance seeking and forcing divine resolution. See N. Janowitz, *Icons of Power: Ritual Practices in Late Antiquity*, pp.xx-xxv and E. Mertz, ‘Contextualisation as Socialization: Text and Pragmatics in the Law School Classroom’ in *Natural Histories of Discourse*, (ed. by) M. Silverstein and G. Urban (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), pp.229-249 [236].

400 *Rabban Hormizd*, folio 18b pp.36-37

maintain the image of virtuous simplicity and pious passivity, but only too keen to accredit a paradoxical sense of the saint's ritualised power and supernatural panache—a speculation both beguiling, but also abrasive to the often idealised perception of the saint in pious and passive supplication to the divine will.⁴⁰¹

The same judicial framework and ritual of legalistic proceedings can be found underlying successive accounts of the same hagiographical discourse, describing overwhelming demonic assault against the faculties of the vulnerable, and the saint's efforts to coordinate a divine interest in its malicious infringements. Though, rather than directing his efforts towards a sympathetic judiciary, what is perhaps in many way most interesting about these successive excerpts is the emergence of an ever-more pervasive theme of the saint enforcing the authority of his own status; calling upon the divine to not only compensate the afflicted with a package of miraculous reparation, but to enforce punitive proceedings against the demon for his violations. Hormizd had already argued that the Lord should act in his client's favour to 'lift up the gates' of his Holy Church, and 'exalt on high the boasting of Her that hath been brought low'—now before the Lord and a host of angelic hordes, he would call for divine retribution and justice; for the demon's trial, its incarceration and total expulsion. In what resembles perhaps the most clichéd interpretation of judicial procedure, akin to the popular and stylised format of those televised proceedings of American small-claims courts, these excerpts would imagine the saint deploying a variety of cunning tools and rhetorical strategies so as to undermine the negligible legal legitimacy of the demon's defence. Indeed, consummate as a consequence of his own experience of diabolic delinquency, Hormizd addressed the demon not only in the diabolic tongue of the 'Persians' but with disparaging remarks of his 'evil' disposition and consistently 'wicked' inclination, suggesting: 'from the remote period of thine existence [thou] hast never felt shame and who up the end of time and to all eternity wilt never [do so]'. These words sought not only to compromise but further besmirch an already tarnished reputation, reminding the judiciary of the accused's disposition and the historical precedent of his depravity, but his words would also delineate both the nature, and indeed the demon's responsibility for those crimes committed. Whether incapable of feeling 'shame' or

401 The saint would at once stand in awe of the supreme judicial authority and powerful potential of the Lord and his cosmological consorts, whilst seeming to engage them and wrestle with them, both verbally and through ritual action, so as to manipulate them to his will. The dynamic between the saint and the supreme authority of the Lord and his cosmological council would seem to impute an al conflicting sense of reciprocal admiration and endearment, alongside a saintly inclination and a divine expectation for him to manoeuvre in a way, which would both coerce the divine and force them to legally act in his favour. It was a conflict loaded with potential ramifications for our interpretation of the saint, the hagiographer, his narrative and the wider religious environment within which such a narrative was written. Such a narrative would lend itself at once to the suggestion of idealised piety, but also to the suggestion of ritualised power and the potential of such procedures, to both engage and orchestrate the Divine.

disinclined ever to do so- the demon's violations were proposed to have been both consciously committed and irrefutably intended. It was for this reason; having levelled his accusation and provided the foundation for his indictment, that Hormizd would carefully manoeuvre to coax the divine and prompt divine justice to be served- invoking the name of 'Jesus Christ the Nazarene' and the glory of those former scriptural precedents which depicted Christ driving 'legions from him that used to dwell among the tombs'.⁴⁰² The authority and efficacy of the saint's case was built upon the foundations of personal virtue and clever rhetorical strategy, but there was an implicit understanding here which assumed that the saint's words, specifically his articulation of the name of 'Jesus Christ the Nazarene' and those pertaining to scriptural precedent, played a significant and even crucial role in mechanically facilitating divine intervention.⁴⁰³ Refining the locus of our enquiry, the following discourse diverts its focus to consider less about the general conceptual framework of the saint's ritualised performance, and more about the specific modes of its implied efficacy: initially by unpacking something of the pragmatic implications attributed to the Divine Name, and other efficacious words, when ritually rehearsed by the pious. Here, we discern how the efficacy of words spoken by the deity-primarily those derived from the scriptural

402 Mathew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20. Discussion on the role of exorcism in the synoptic gospels is extensive, and in recent years has been increasing. For further reading see E. Eve, *The Jewish Context of Jesus' Miracles* (London and New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002); T. E. Klutz, *The Exorcism Stories in Luke-Acts: A Socio-stylistic Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); E. Sorenson, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002); C. Wahlen, *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Synoptic Gospels* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004). Part of the extensive discussion concerning the role of exorcism within the Synoptic gospels is concerned with the seemingly significant anomalies embedded in the literary legacy of the early Christian movement. On the one hand Mathew and Luke would portray Jesus not only spending a great deal of time performing exorcisms but report that he saw his exorcisms as encapsulating his mission as no other aspect of his ministry was able. On the other hand however, al nothing is written within the canonical Johanne literature, or within the letters of Paul, concerning either exorcism or Jesus being an exorcist. The puzzle of this divergence, and the effect of its impact in shaping scholastic interpretation of the role of exorcism within the early Christian movement and the early Christian Church, is outlined and extensively referenced in G. Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism Among Early Christians*, pp.25-35.

403In a way which will become familiar to us as we further investigate the theme of the saint's orchestration of divine power and miraculous outcomes, Hormizd is depicted here as having constructed his divine petition according to an established formula of incantation, one which he had found to be efficacious in his own dealings with the demon and diabolic schemes. The basic premise of its constituent parts were invariably similar, firstly and perhaps obviously, identifying the divine body to whom the request was orientated, followed by biblical precedents of similar intervention, quotation and exegesis of divine promises related to the problem at hand, and recitation of the names and formulae through which the request was to be made unequivocally efficacious. Though Hormizd, or rather the hagiographer behind these tales of the miraculous, is careful not to over-step the mark in terms of his understanding of the dynamic between the holy man and the divine, by tactfully mentioning the precedent of divine blessings upon those who went before him, how could God respond in any other way than to comply with the Holy man's petition? By placing his faith in the power of his name, how could God refuse this blatant example of spiritual righteousness amongst so many Christian petitioners of divine aid? Perhaps the divine was inclined to perform miracles on behalf of Holy man like Hormizd, but it would seem that the divine was often left with little choice but to work on the Holy man's behalf as a result of his passive aggression. This interesting and delicate dynamic poses many questions for our understanding of the role of the Holy man in Late Antique Christian society, the power which 'holy men' like Hormizd supposedly wielded, and perhaps more importantly the popular inclination to believe in the suggestion of his power and the following he received as a consequence. For further examples of the saint's alluding to scriptural precedent as part of their prosecutorial craft, one might consult a veritable cornucopia of narratives within the *Book of Governors*; the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd and the 'Life' of Simeon Stylites. See especially, 'Book VI, Chapter XVII' in *Book of Governors*, p.665, where the saint commands specifically according to the scriptural precedent of Mathew, 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39: 'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who cast out legions from him who dwelt among the tombs, I command you to come forth from these boys'. Also, see Book VI, Chapter VI' in *Book of Governors*, p.605

precedent of God's articulated name-lead to the efficacy of words spoken by the human pious, words which in turn derived power from their original divine source.

Command of the Name:

'God is called in the sacred Books; good, love, knowledge, wise, just, light, ray, brightness, word and life, so that our name may be joined with His and enhanced by His, and so that we may desire the love of the One who loved us and came down from the height of His goodness to the lowliness of our humility'.

Works of Simeon Taibutheh, Folio 167a

Our investigation into assumptions of effective words and saintly elocution begins by mapping out something of the seemingly unusual and even nonsensical notions surrounding Late Antique concepts of language and syntax; indeed, much of what defined our hagiographers' assumption of the elocuted word, especially those uttered by the saint, would seem to defy much of our more pragmatic approach to language and linguistic semantics. Where the function and potential of language is constrained by the framework of its modern application; often limited to offering a sense of or reference to the object with which it is associated, within these narratives, language and its illocution assumed a more extensive and practical repertoire, relating both to the context of its use but also to the implications of its projection.⁴⁰⁴ Here, the more familiar function of words as referential was supplemented with the oddities of Late Antique linguistic theory: a plurality of linguistic function which, though unusual, is by no means beyond any mode of contemporary comparison or analysis. To use language is to know that at certain times and in certain contexts, words carry not only a sense of their intended application, but also the authority to manifest change and thereby do things.⁴⁰⁵ One particularly well-known and influential formulation of this concept is J. L. Austin's *How to do Things with Words*, in which Austin draws upon the recital of 'I now pronounce you man and wife' to show how formulated words, when ritually recited, are

⁴⁰⁴ For further reading on the referential impetus of linguistic theory, see M. Silverstein, 'Shifters: Linguistic Categories and Cultural Descriptions' in *Meaning in Anthropology*, ed. K. Basso and H. Selby (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1976), pp. 11-55

⁴⁰⁵ Silverstein offers an extensive discussion on the many distinct functions of language and its illocution, see M. Silverstein, 'Metapragmatic Discourse and Metapragmatic Function' in *Reflexive Language: Reported Speech and Metapragmatics*, ed. J. Lucy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.33-58

assumed to change the context in which they are uttered and in this case, authorise and initiate the status of marriage.⁴⁰⁶ These assumptions of linguistic multi-functionality and potential have also shaped the research of S. J. Tambiah, whose article on the 'Magical Power of Words' would point to the practical applications of words rehearsed not only by religious ritual, but by more general illocution.⁴⁰⁷ One way in which we might begin to start thinking about these broader functions of language, is to consider its careful adaptation within legal contexts. In certain social contexts, for example, certain words are understood to affect and authorise contracts. These functions of language are culturally specific, and necessitate a code of rules that clarify and delineate how, and more especially when, those words are applicable. In the contexts of a contemporary Law school, for example, training is directed towards moving beyond the semantic-interpretive approach to words acquired in previous schooling, and instead to focus upon the art and pragmatics of articulating the special words of a legalistic vocabulary. The students practice oral exchange and debate, thereby learning the rules for the special functions associated with that vocabulary, and grasping the notion of potential attributed to precedent and procedural history. All these notions, including the inherent potential of particular words and their formulaic combination within codes of legalistic case study, determine what can be done with words of law. To quote Elizabeth Mertz, 'a legal reading of case law focuses on the metapragmatics of the text, in which lies the key to its authority'.⁴⁰⁸

Within examples of religious ritual and the lawyer's legalistic craft, but also within the politician's carefully considered and expertly articulated rhetoric, we are reminded that semantics are by no means the only or indeed, even the most significant aspect of words or of what is said. Much as the intended function of the lawyer's legalistic craft is cloaked by the necessity of reciting procedural precedent and historical case study, the immediate function of political oratory is not always simply what the political speech proclaims to be about. As one example among a potential great many, Richard Parmentier's study of 'Semiotic Anthropology' would relate how one high-ranking official in the German village of Belau sought to bring resolution to communal crisis, not so much by talking about the means of resolution, but by enacting

⁴⁰⁶ See Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, 1962. Austin's study distinguishes between several types of verbal acts, including 'illocutionary' and 'perlocutionary'; the latter referring to those instances in which the act is achieved by the utterance itself. His notion of linguistic function raises questions of the relationship between words; linguistic formulas and the contexts of their use, and when applied to the Late Antique contexts of the hagiography, demands a systematic observation of these relationships.

⁴⁰⁷ S. J. Tambiah, 'The Magical Power of Words' in *Man* 3 (1968), pp.175-208.

⁴⁰⁸ E. Mertz, 'Recontextualisation as Socialisation: Text and Pragmatics in the Law School Classroom', in *Natural Histories of Discourse*, ed. by M. Silverstein and G. Urban, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), pp.229-249 [236].

it in his very performance. The skill of his rhetorical acumen, and more specifically the insinuation of traditional knowledge implied by proverbial citations, accomplished the resolution which its words seemingly sought to negotiate.⁴⁰⁹ Indeed, upon closer inspection, the general notion that words passively stand for the objects they describe- the basis of linguistic semantics- fails to describe the intricacies attributed to language in these contemporary contexts. This two-dimensional approach to the function of language offers but a limited insight into what is in reality, a far more complex spectrum of contemporary theory concerning words and their linguistic potential, and within the Late Antique framework of this study, it simply does not begin to account for the bewildering array of uses attributed to the words of the faithful.⁴¹⁰ To approach the Late Antique hagiographical text or more specifically, to approach an understanding of the saint's ritualised illocution, we must have ways of describing the rules by which words and objects stand for other things: how the recital of a divine name 'stands' not merely for semantic reference but for the divine presence; how the saint's quotation of scriptural heritage 'stands for' the mechanics rather than the mere hope of divine intervention; and how his rehearsal of certain formulae was deemed to 'stand' for the implied potential of saintly investment. If we are to do anything other than guess at the meaning of the saint's words and the processes behind his adjuration, then we need to articulate exactly how these various 'standings for' work and how they differ among themselves.

It is perhaps by considering the contemporary sense of what is conveyed by the notion of 'symbol' that we penetrate something of the hagiographical perception of words, their potential and function: a notion which conceptualises 'words', 'signs' and other 'marks' as being not only representative of the object with which they are associated, but imbued with the character that make them significant.⁴¹¹ A sense of this model of linguistic symbology is ascertained from the inherent and fundamental principles underlying personal signature; indeed in the American legal system

409 This excerpt from Richard Parmentier's study demands far more discussion than the confines of this study permit. For further reading, see R. Parmentier, 'The Political Function of Reported Speech' in *Signs in Society: Studies in Semiotic Anthropology*, (Indianapolis, University of Indiana Press, 1994), pp.70-97[96]

410 'His prayers alone could open the gates of heaven to the timorous believer', see P. Brown 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man', p.81. Also see comments in, N. H. Baynes and S. Dawes, *The Byzantine Saints* Contemporary biographies of Saint Daniel the Stylite, Saint Theodore of Sykeon and Saint John the Almsgiver. Important documents for the social history of the Byzantine Empire (New York: t. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), pp.xx-xii; D. Kalleres, 'Exorcising the Devil to Silence Christ's Enemies: Ritualised Speech Practices in Late Antique Christianity', (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, Providence R. I., 2002) and E. A. Clark, 'Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History, and the "Linguistic Turn"' in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, no. 3 (1998), pp.413-430

411 For further reading on the concept of 'symbol' and other delineated modes of linguistic and conceptual representation, see C. S. Peirce, 'Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs' in *The Philosophical Writings of Charles Peirce* (New York: Dover Press, 1940), pp.98-114. The specific terms which Peirce uses for what he perceives to be the three modes of representation, were 'icon', 'sign' and 'symbol', each of which were perceived to represent their object in different ways depending upon the dynamics of its relationship to the notion expressed.

especially, one establishes a written signature by signing a signature guarantee- a record of authenticity confirming the individual's identity through linguistic representation. Once established, it is a legally binding representation of that person just as specific words and divine epithets serve in the hagiographer's texts as symbolic representations of the deity.⁴¹² The Divine and the damned, angels and demons, were all equally represented in the saint's rituals by means of culturally specific notions of what might loosely be described as, signature guarantees.⁴¹³ Indeed, having acquired a gnosis of divine names and celestial secrets, these narratives would imagine how the saints sought to ritually evoke and thereby forcefully establish the presence of divinity through the authority of iconic representation- that is to say that the deity was not simply referred to through the name's illocution, but cosmologically obliged to be present through this symbol of its divine essence.⁴¹⁴ Divine words, therefore, were not completely arbitrary. Based upon different modes of 'standing' for divinity, they were deemed by the saint and hagiographer alike to have been linguistic snippets of an efficacious and potentially miraculous speech.⁴¹⁵ Here, through this specifically semiotic framework of 'symbols' and 'icons', we begin to acquire a sense of both the premise and practice of the saint's illocution, how it was considered in these texts to have been an effective mode of divine interaction and social action in the Late Antique period. Abstracted from their context, we might be inclined to view these uses of names and words as ultimately misguided and even nonsensical, just as a legal text and its application within law might seem like useless jargon to the uninitiated. But, however this manipulation of language seems to us, what is immediately and unavoidably apparent is how this assumption of linguistic function had nevertheless captivated the Late Antique hagiographical imagination. Our investigation into the premise of the saints' effective language begins by looking at perhaps the most obvious of all efficacious words: divine epithets, and by noting the precedent of this linguistic association with the Divine within several small but nevertheless significant areas of biblical exegesis. A prime locus of Late Antique discussion about divine speech and the efficacy of divine language was exegesis of both the creation story of Genesis and the divine revelations of God's names in Exodus- two stories which would imply to Late

412 See N. Janowitz, *Icons of Power*, p.XXIII

413 See Bulgakov discussions on the name as an incarnation of divine energy, in S. Bulgakov, *Icons and the Name of God*, trans. B. Jakim, (Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012).

414 See, W. Alston, *Divine Nature and Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology*. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989); P. L. Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) and Idem. 'Divine Command Ethics: A Causal Theory', in *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. by Janine Idziak. (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), pp. 305-325

415 N. Janowitz offers some excellent discussion on this topic, see 'Thinking with the Divine Name: Theories of Language in Christian Exegesis' in, *Icons of Power*, pp.33-45

Antique readers that words could create literal reality, but also that those words were, in fact, nothing less than permutations of the names of the divinity.⁴¹⁶

Capturing the Creative Power of the Name through scriptural exegesis

To paraphrase Stanley Tambiah's influential study on 'Ritual thought and Action', it is hard to imagine a comprehensive scholastic study on religion or the origins of language, which fails to consider the ancient and almost universally prevalent belief in the creative power of the word.⁴¹⁷ Almost irrespective of geographical or cultural context, Tambiah would relate how the narratives of a plethora of classical texts attributed a special significance both to the essence of words and more especially to the potential of their articulation. The ancient Vedic hymns composed in India would speculate on *Vac* or the efficacy of 'the word', and assumed that a Hindu hierarchy of gods ruled the world through its ritual incantation; the Parsi religion of Iran imagined that it was through the spoken word that chaos was transformed into cosmos; the various faiths of Semites and Sumerians would assume that the world and its objects were created by the word of God, and the Chalcedonian definition of 'Logos' would assert that the essence or 'soul' of things resided within a name. But this comprehensive and incredibly complex sense of the efficacy of verbal forms has to a large extent entangled scholars with questions concerning the precise properties and practice of effective language and its illocution: whether such ideas asserted the innate power of certain words or a linguistic efficacy dependent upon its articulation by God's anointed. What has not often been considered is that multiple values might be assigned to the character and potential function of sacred language, and that these multiple aspects of sacred linguistics might exist in mutual tension. It is by paying particular attention to scriptural accounts of Genesis that we discern a sense of this multiplicity of ideas surrounding Hebrew, and later Christian hermeneutics, concerning the power of sacred words and the contexts of their practice. First and perhaps foremost among this multiplicity of motifs is the notion that God created the world by assigning names to those various aspects of his design, calling light 'day'; darkness 'night'; the dry ground

⁴¹⁶ Various authors have discussed this theme. For a recent discussion which also intersects with the broader arguments of this chapter, see S. J. Tambiah, *Culture, Thought and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp.17-59

⁴¹⁷ See Tambiah's suggestions in , S. J. Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words" in *Culture, Thought and Social Action*, (Cambridge, MS.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp.17-59

'land' and the gathered waters 'sea'.⁴¹⁸ To this, the scriptural traditions of Genesis also assert the directly opposite idea that having designed the essentials for life, it was man who assumed this naming function through speech: 'Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name'.⁴¹⁹ Just as the process of the Lord's illocution of 'day' and 'night' was assumed to have manifested the reality of the Lord's intention for periodic light and darkness, so mankind's illocution of the names he used to denote all aspects of creation, were deemed imperative to the realisation of their intended state. A third character was also assigned to the word in these early scriptures however, as an entity which was able to create literal reality in its own right. Hence, we read in texts such as Isaiah 55:11: 'as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it'.⁴²⁰

Upon closer inspection, it is apparent that in our consideration of the character of sacred language within the Hebrew Old Testament and later Christian scriptures, we are in fact dealing with three distinct notions forming a complex and interrelated set: God had instituted speech and initiated the classifying act; man became a user of this propensity and a creator in his own right; and language as such had an independent existence beyond Divine illocution, and an independent power to create literal reality. It is by starting to unpack the implications of these scriptural hermeneutics; by identifying what was in fact the multiplicity of ideas surrounding the potential of sacred linguistics, that we might begin to approach an understanding of later exegetical attempts to both capture something of the creativity of the deity's words, and employ these pragmatics for their own contemporary contexts. Indeed, the dramatic way in which both divine and primordial human illocution was deemed to be an effective ordering force within the cosmos, was considered by exegetes to have been central to the message of the Genesis text, and it is by taking a closer look at the fabric of some of their hagiographical narratives that we discern how the characteristics of sacred linguistics were often effectively reworked and rewoven to become an integral

⁴¹⁸ *Genesis*, 1:1-2:3

⁴¹⁹ *Genesis*, 2:19

⁴²⁰ These scriptural excerpts express concepts which in many ways would come together in the earliest excerpts of the Gospel according to John: 'the word was in the beginning with God, the word was made flesh in Jesus Christ, and those who received Christ became the sons of God and the word dwelt with them'. See, *John*, 1:1

component of the saint's own illocution. Here, scriptural assumptions of the efficacy of words spoken by the deity lead us to exegetical speculations of the efficacy of those words when spoken by humans, but the particular hermeneutical stance which should interest us about this emerging idea of effective language, is the suggestion that words uttered by the Lord of creation were in fact not merely words, but various fragments and complex amalgams of the names of divinity. Indeed, for the exegetes of Late Antiquity, the scriptural designation of the Lord's name as 'YHWH' represented not only a means of distinguishing the creator from other deities in the biblical texts, notably Baal; El and Asherah, nor merely an uncontroversial object of nascent Hebrew devotion, but the linguistic embodiment of the Lord's presence and the root of creative speech.⁴²¹

A significant account of Syriac Christian contemplation on the theme of linguistic pragmatics can be discerned from the fourth Century literary discourses written, or at least attributed, to Ephrem the Syrian.⁴²² Indeed, echoing the sentiments of a relatively widespread Late Antique linguistic theory, Ephrem would assume that language and indeed the rules which governed its use as designation were natural and therefore meaningful; that names and the objects to which they refer possessed a natural relationship to each other, rather than one born of mere convention. Ephrem summarises his stance with an excerpt taken from his *Hymns on Faith*, where he would imply: 'By the name alone, [a name's] meaning can be perceived'.⁴²³ Drawing upon the shared root of certain terms and the implied semantic connotations, Ephrem would propose that the fundamental components of linguistic signs themselves imply what it signifies: "the thing made' [suggests] its maker, that which is 'created' its creator/ 'fashioned' its fashioner and the 'begotten' its begetter'.⁴²⁴ Each pair of nouns according to this linguistic/semantic framework has a single verbal root, and indeed share

421 Notions of the deity's name were extravagantly reworked and developed as one small part of the exegetical system of both Late Antique Christianity and nascent rabbinic Judaism, both of which were founded on intricate systems of scriptural interpretation. These textual interpretations ranged from explicating the meaning of obscure words to reading entire scriptural excerpts as allegory. The underlying process in all of these cases was using language to understand, define and make explicit the inherent but hidden meaning of the text. Scriptural interpretation is full of explications clarifying the meaning of archaic words, as well the etymology of certain names. In addition to suggestions of the meaning of words, some exegetes would also contemplate something of the function of words, or more specifically, the function of names and more especially divine names. For further reading on Late Antique Christian exegesis and hermeneutics on the Divine name, N. Janowitz, 'The Divine Name as Effective Language' in *Icons of Power: Ritual Practice in Late Antiquity*, pp.19-31 [20]

422 Ephrem's exegetical theories on the practical nature of the divine name and its role in creation have been the subject of extensive scholastic consideration. For further reading, see especially T. Koonammakkal, 'The Theology of Divine Names in the Genuine Works of Ephraem', (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1991); idem. 'Divine Names and Theological Language in Ephrem', *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993): 318-323 and idem. 'Ephrem on the Name of Jesus', *Studia Patristica* 33 (1997): 548-552 and idem. "Ephrem on the Name of Jesus", *Studia Patristica* 33 (1997): 548-552.

423 See Ephrem, 'The Hymns on Faith, 62:4' (trans. by) J. T. Wickes in, D. G. Hunter (ed.), *The Fathers of the Church : St. Ephrem the Syrian, The Hymns on Faith* (Washington D.C., Catholic University of America Press, 2015)

424 "Bādā" 'thing-made' and 'ābūdā' 'maker', both of which derive from 'abad' 'to make.' The others are brītā 'created' and bārūyā 'creator', both of which derive from brā, 'to create'; gbīlā 'fashioned' and gābūlā 'fashioner', from gbal, 'to fashion'; and yaldā 'begotten' and yālūdā 'begetter', from iled, 'to beget.' See also Ephrem, *Hymns on Faith*, 60:7-9 where Ephrem uses human (albeit scriptural) examples to demonstrate this phenomenon.

meaning from that common linguistic premise. Ephrem's suggestion of the semantic connotations of names and the thing for which they stand, would imply that each name resembled something of a mini-text waiting to be explained, that their compositions were both indicative of and integral to the thing described. In the case of the Lord's revelation of the meaning of his name to Moses as *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh'* (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה), we note a scriptural and later exegetical speculation of connection between the Lord's name *YHWH* (יְהוָה) and the root of the verb 'to be' (הוּה); that the divine name, therefore, revealed something essential about the God's divine nature, as the one who not only exists but as the primordial source of all that was, all that is and all that will be. Thus, if meaning is to be assumed from the semantics of linguistic and denominational structure, then the simplest way to refer to God and explain who he is, is to describe his unique role as the one who was, who spoke and accordingly created. The deity's creative act was transformed by Late Antique exegetical speculation to become his proper name, and while this form might apprise us with an understanding of what the name is and even with an insight into the function of its syntactic parts, we already know that the meaning of names were by no means limited to semantics. The name was also assumed to have pragmatic implications because the deity's name is context related speech, which is to say that the definitional form of the Lord's name was not only assumed to be a designation but a linguistic and terrestrial substitute for the divine essence.⁴²⁵

Returning to the literary corpus and linguistic theory of Ephrem the Syrian, it is possible to discern at least similar sentiments of those less familiar and more pragmatic implications of the divine name's definitional form. Indeed, from Ephrem's perspective, the concept and principles underlying the divine name within the Christian Old Testament had involved a fundamental crossing of a categorical border- between that which makes and that which is made- and as such, he begins his initial treatment of the Divine name within his *Hymns on Faith* (5: 5-6) with a general statement of the necessary distinction between the maker (سَاطِر) and what he has 'made' (مَعْمُول), indeed: 'the maker cannot be compared to what he has made'. What then is perhaps particularly striking about Ephrem's explication, is that within the same breath, his treatises consciously imply that the 'Maker' had accepted this apparently impossible comparison; that the cosmological distance between God 'the maker' and man 'the

425 For similar Late Antique Syriac theories of the etymology and potential of the divine name, see G. Mushayabasa, 'The Effect of Etymology on the Rendering of the Divine Epithet (El) Shaddai in the Peshitta Version', in *Journal for Semitics* 19:1 (2010), pp. 19-35, but also E. Nestle, 'Jakob von Edessa über den Schem hammephorasch und andere Gottesnamen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Tetragrammaton', in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 32 (1878), pp. 465-508.

created' had been overcome by love, leading Ephrem to draw the following and rather interesting conclusion: 'the Lord in his love, had sought to confer his names upon that which he had made'. According to Ephrem, the Lord's creation of humanity had been entirely dependent upon a process of articulating his divine name as 'creator', yet the suggestion of mankind's primordial manifestation through the illocution of divine names would also imply another, more significant implication: indeed, humanity may have been furnished through the names of God but more significantly, it had also been granted the opportunity of knowing those words and their performative function, as the linguistic source of all creation.⁴²⁶ Ephrem's explication of Old Testament tradition implies an understanding of God's name not only as a word spoken in the primordial past, but as a linguistic embodiment of the divine presence with a contemporary relevance for creation. The act of speaking the divine name had created the world, but it had also introduced thereby the very possibility of speaking the divine name to the world.⁴²⁷ Indeed, just as the primordial illocution of holy names were assumed to have represented the essence and divine function of the Lord as creator of the cosmos, so its contemporary illocution was deemed to potentially command a similar pragmatic repertoire in the midst of the Late Antique Christian community. Turning our attention away from the limited insight of Late Antique scriptural hermeneutics, it is within the following hagiographical excerpts that we discern how the premise of exegetical sentiments surrounding the Divine name within scripture, seem also to have extended to inform linguistic theories of the saint's own illocutionary practice; how the creativity of the Lord's name at the moment of mankind's primordial inception, had been equally captured by the ritual recitals of the Christian pious.⁴²⁸ The iconic status of the divine name as a linguistic substitute for the divine presence as much as a linguistic designation was not only further established but also largely embellished by these tales of saintly ritual exploits, and it is upon closer inspection of these accounts that we can begin to map out the pragmatic implications of its recital, not only as a linguistic summons of the Lord's presence but as a cosmological guarantee of the Lord's compliance.

⁴²⁶ For further reading see, A. Palmer, 'St Ephrem of Syria's Hymn on Faith 7: An Ode on His Own Name', in *Sobornost / Eastern Churches Review* 17:1 (1995), pp. 28-40, and C. Molenberg, 'An Invincible Weapon: Names in the Christological Passages in Ephrem's "Hymns on Faith" XLIV-LXV', in *V Symposium Syriacum*, (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1990), pp.135-142

⁴²⁷ Silverstein, 1976 and 1981

⁴²⁸ See, M. Lugmayr, 'The Name of God in Syriac Anaphoras', *The Harp* 20 (2006), pp.221-234.

The Interpreted Name: Hagiographical Speculations of Articulating the Divine Name and Exercising its Creativity against the Demon

‘Then the devil, who hearkened unto the humble words of the glorious man, was constrained by the command to him of the holy man... he answered and said, ‘Hearken, O thou man, who art cunning in the business of thy Lord, although thou hast contrived a scheme craftily against the prince [of devils], and against death, who is my yoke-fellow, by means of the mighty sign of thy humility of the pure things which appertain thereunto, thou hast not overcome the two mighty ones’; and after these words that devil spake no more’.

The Life of Rabban Hormizd, Folio 19b

If a command of the divine name ensured something approaching a cosmological judicial hearing of the saint’s particular grievance, and if its ritualised adjuration enforced divine compliance according to notions resembling the signature guarantee, then it is perhaps not far-fetched to consider the saint’s expectations of its potential within the contexts of diabolic aggression, as the enforcement of cosmological contract. Drawing upon Late Antique hermeneutical theory of the Divine epithet; its underlying semantics and suggested function, this chapter has so far sought to offer an insight into hagiographical speculation of the divine name’s illocution; both as a rudimentary designation but also as a linguistic and terrestrial representation of the divinity in question. Indeed, to have known and recited the syllables of divine names was not only to have engaged but ritually commanded the attention of the divinity to whom it belonged; to have summoned its presence and demanded its observation of the situational contexts in which it was adjured. Yet, discussion of the underlying mechanics and implications of divine epithets alluded to by hermeneutical theory, in many ways all but fails to account for that most important component of the hagiographical genre- namely, the saint’s illocution of the divine epithet not only as the instrument to ensure the divine presence but as the source of that power which he was trying to activate. Here, the divine name was by no means spoken in isolation as the means to mechanically manifest divine consideration, nor was the divine presence the

only objective of the saint's illocution- on the contrary. The articulation of the name was one, albeit fundamental component, within a far larger conversation: crafted according to the emotive and cunning stratagems of a carefully constructed rhetorical discourse, both justifying his resort to the spoken name and committing the divinity in question to act in accordance with the situational context of its summons. Within the hagiographer's excerpts, we discern how the saint's adjurational craft contributed to a discourse of contextualised utterances around the premise of the name's assumed potential; defined by the historical/scriptural basis of its precedence as a primeval catalyst of creation, but also by an expectation of its efficacy to influence contemporary situations of its illocution. Hermeneutical discourse would assume that the illocution of the name had literally moved mountains at the moment of creation, indeed it was the primeval force upon which all of creation was based, and it was with an implicit and sometimes rather more explicit reference to this precedent, that the saint's supplications sought to hold the Lord and a celestial hierarchy to account.

Capturing the Divine name and seeking to exercise its creativity in these contexts, was not merely a passive entreaty of divine cooperation. It was instead, a rather more calculated and confident process of procedure towards binding the Divine to the terms of a saintly legislation; defined by a Gnosis and illocution of the celestial epithets, but also by the authority of a spiritual acumen which legitimised his doing so.⁴²⁹ Without intending to over-burden the premise of an apt and serviceable analogy, it seems not entirely self-serving to extend the assumption of resonance between a saintly and contemporary legalistic craft, to their respective proponents. Indeed, like the legalistic acumen of modern legal representatives and the judicial authority which that awareness of the Law is assumed to bestow, the spiritual acumen acquired by the saints' ascetic endeavours were assumed to have commanded a similar, if rather more divine authority and jurisdiction.⁴³⁰ Analogies of contract and comparisons to

⁴²⁹For further reading on the role and authority of the speaker, rather than the supernatural powers invoked within the ritualised adjurations of the saints and other contemporary ritual experts, see D. Frankfurter's discussions in D. Frankfurter, 'Curses, Blessings, and Ritual Authority: Egyptian Magic in Comparative Perspective' in *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 5:1 (2005), pp.157-185 [159-162] and idem., 'Dynamics of Ritual Expertise in Antiquity and Beyond: Towards a New Taxonomy of "Magicians"' in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp.158-178. Frankfurter proposes that underlying the accounts of the saint's miraculous curse and blessing, was an assumption of the ritual authority and expertise of the speaker, as one whose prior status afforded the ability to know and indeed to utter correct words of power.

⁴³⁰ With the power of their status, the saints captured an understanding of the fundamental details of the divine name, but they also acquired the qualifying credentials with which to exercise their concerns for terrestrial grievances, and ritually negotiate their resolution according to its invocation and the subsequent proceedings of a divine hearing. The saint's treatment of the divine but more significantly his treatment of the demon, in address, examination, judgement and sentencing, strongly enforces the role of the saint as lawyer. Though, it is also interesting to note that his choice of wording would sometimes also point to an enhanced role; as a lawyer but also as a judge and executioner. In these case scenario's it is the divine rather than the saint which adopts a passive stance in the deliverance of divine justice, seemingly bound to act in accordance with the decisions of a saint whose authority demands compliance. For further reading on the almost legalistic framework and judicial authority

contemporary legal practice provide some of the framework with which to begin examining the saint's negotiation of the miraculous, but it would seem upon closer inspection that the means of his mediations were defined by a more complex combination of factors than can be explained simply, by the suggestion of legalistic expertise and contractual obligation. Indeed, perhaps one of the important aspects of this dynamic between the divine and the spiritually astute, are the moral dimensions of a relationship often described as 'like that between a father and his son'. To have denied or indeed ignored the contexts of the saint's adjuration, therefore, was in many cases not only a renunciation and abject denial of legitimate supplicatory contract, nor the rejection of the saint's spiritual acumen and subsequent cosmological jurisdiction, but an emotional affront to the dynamic of a personal relationship. The expectation of Divine cooperation in these hagiographical narratives, therefore, was assumed not only to be governed by the legal threat of potential reprisal but perhaps in many ways ensured, by the underlying and implicit sense of what we might refer to as a sort of emotional blackmail.⁴³¹ Whatever the case; whether mediated through rhetorical stratagem or by its combination with the manoeuvres of a moral exploitation, what is apparent is how the saint's adjurational craft negotiated a handle upon the divine; one which would not only forcefully manoeuvre divine consideration, but manipulated a process of its intervention against another, rather important but hitherto unmentioned component of this tripartite dynamic of adjuration.

The analogy of contract has been used here to describe the dynamic of the saint's adjurational craft both in the sense of its carefully orchestrated command of the Divine, but also in terms of its undertaking to identify and thwart the intent of another, rather important component of the saint's adjurational practice. Indeed, it is perhaps not entirely ill-conceived to think of the saint's adjurational practice as having being composed of essentially two separate processes of contract; the first orchestrated entirely against the Divine so as to enlist and even enforce both its consideration and cooperation, but secondly and perhaps importantly, against the demon as the *raison-d'être* of the saint's initial resort to supplication and adjurational endeavours. As the inherent source of nearly every kind and eventuality of human misery and malaise, it is perhaps unsurprising that the demon was bound to the injunctions of the saint in a

commanded by the saint, see particularly Trzcionka's comments on the discourse of power and control demonstrated by the saint's command of the divine, in S. Trzcionka, 'Demonic Possession and Expulsion' in *Magic and the Supernatural*, pp146-147; 158-159

⁴³¹ The suggestion here is that the efficacy of the saint's utterances was derived not just by the mere fact that they were uttered: they were addressed to certain powers, both benevolent and malevolent, whose action was not manifest mechanically as an outcome of the saint's words. Rather, to achieve his aim, the saint had to implicitly and sometimes explicitly employ a variety of techniques, including appeasement but also more importantly, the cajoling of what has been termed here as the rhetoric of emotional blackmail.

different way than to the divine: indeed, the demon was not compelled to give consideration to the saint's supplications on account of the illocution of its name, for often the name was little more than a vulgar and rudimentary designation of those least refined aspects of his nature. Nor, indeed was he bound in the same way by the recital of scriptural precedents, or even by the moral parameters of the kind of intimate friendship reportedly shared by the Divine and the spiritually virtuous. Indeed, quite unlike the divine, who had been summoned by the saint's articulation of the name and even obliged to act in accordance with the broader terms of its illocution, the demon was imagined to have observed the new legal situation enforced by those terms according to the ramifications of defying that legislation. Ritual adjurations of the names of God were assumed to have exerted an immediate legalistic and potentially physical constraint over the demon; imposed by the saint's jurisdiction, but also by the immediate threat of punishing reprisal from the Lord and his angelic jailers for disobedience. Though far from enforcing retribution, it would seem that the philosophy of articulating the Lord's name within the contexts of vast swathes of the hagiographical genre, sought settlement with the demon rather than reprisal: one which promised to contractually bind and legalistically thwart diabolic schemes according to the legalistic authority of divine sanction and the deterrent of potential reprimand, rather than eliminate their diabolic perpetrator entirely. Nowhere is this hagiographical motif of contractual accord more evident than within the very excerpt which opened this current discourse: an account from the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd, which would imply that despite the irrefutable implication of the saint's spiritual authority, indeed despite the devastating potential attributed to his adjurational craft- men like Rabban Hormizd exercised a distinct but limited jurisdiction over the demon and its unceasing endeavours.⁴³² To use the words of that excerpt's particular diabolic assailant, the saints may have 'contrived a scheme craftily against the prince [of devils] by means of the mighty sign of thy humility and of the pure things which appertain thereunto', but that was by no means to assume that they might, therefore: 'overcome the mighty ones' entirely. As the modern legal contract is assumed to operate within the parameters of a highly circumscribed arena; prescribed both to delineate and ensure compliance to a highly specific set of agreed terms and conditions, so the pragmatics of divine speech would seem equally limited to the immediate terms and specific contexts of its divinely

⁴³² For suggestions of the saint's irrefutable but altogether limited jurisdiction over the demon, see especially 'Folios 19b-20a' in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, pp. 38-40. One might just as easily discern this repeated motif throughout the hagiographical genre, where the hagiographer is almost universally conscious of the need not only to limit the suggestion of the saint's potential, but to allude to something of the demonological right to torment humanity within the parameters of a primordial agreement between the divine and demonic. One can get a sense of this celestial agreement to the demon's right to existence, and to the limitations of the blessed in interfering with this dynamic, from the scriptural accounts of Job 1:12, 2:5.

endorsed directive. Hormizd then, on this occasion, may indeed have engaged and evicted the demon from its human habitation by the terms and authority of his adjurational craft, yet it is apparent that he had been altogether powerless to prevent it from relapsing into further transgressions against those beyond the parameters of its distinct jurisdiction.

Echoing the sentiments of these diabolic taunts, this inability of the saint to 'overcome' or overwhelmingly thwart the demon's broader diabolic enterprise, would indeed form the basis for an extensive catalogue of successive diabolic episodes: each alluding to a complex web of demonic schemes to entrap mankind and feed the aspirations of its malevolent makers. Though, perhaps in many ways more interesting than either demonic suggestions of the limitations which governed the saint's adjurational craft or indeed, a subsequent catalogue of largely repetitious accounts of that adjurational craft in action, is the demon's insinuation of what that ritualised practice of speaking with the name and evoking divine power, had truly implied. Indeed, returning to context of those demonic remarks espoused in the 'Life' of Hormizd at the moment of its apparent eviction; we read how the demon's damning indictment of the saint's adjurational practice was limited not only to speculation about its inadequacies, but to questions of the philosophical underpinning of the saint's entitlement to both engage and invoke the Divine name to help manifest and expedite his intent. Through the carefully crafted suggestion of his own malicious rhetoric, the denigratory remarks of a humiliated and homeless demonic evictee had surmised how the saint had bound him to terms, not merely having mediated the doting benevolence of Divine power, but having carefully contrived a somewhat more coerced intervention through 'cunning artifice'. It was a perception of the saint and his ritualised practice which, though unequivocally rebuffed by Hormizd and all but washed over by the text, would nevertheless underline an important if somewhat implicit aspect of Late Antique Christian piety, and perhaps even encourage some potentially compromising questions not only about Christian expectations of what is was to be pious, but about the wider socio/religious and cultural milieus within which those expectations belonged. Indeed, the demon's albeit denigratory remarks invite the reader to momentarily step back from the hagiographer's narrow focus on the monk's struggle, and even from the narrative of his ascetic triumph over the Demon, and instead to look at this particular depiction of the saint and Christian piety within the wider perspective of Late Antique religiosity and ritual practice. The suggestion here was that the saint had a handle upon both those divine and diabolic mechanics which had fundamentally shaped the human

experience; that he had used his cosmological position in the dynamic of human-divine interaction, to mediate but also to more forcefully negotiate with the Divine through the procedures of a ritualised and legalistic coercion. It was an implication which, not only exceeded scriptural precedents of piety, but brought distinct comparisons to those within Late Antique society who likewise offered themselves as orchestrators of a ritualised power.

The discussions of this chapter have sought to penetrate something of the theology and philosophy of divine epithets; of their inherent potential as the primordial force through which all creation had been uttered into existence; and their surmised status as linguistic icons of the divine and the divine presence. It has also sought, albeit in a somewhat limited capacity, to articulate something of a Late Antique exegetical and hagiographical speculation of their illocution, as one of the many aspects captured and interpreted by the saint from an otherwise hidden, celestial gnosis. Indeed, an articulation of the Divine name was assumed to have created the world, and so the potential of speaking with the divine name to the world; and certainly more than a few scriptural and later hagiographical narratives would testify to its harnessed potential.⁴³³ Though, what this study has yet to more fully come to terms with is not so much ideas of the divine name's potential but the extent to which such ideas assumed an innate, rather than activated efficacy: whether the name was powerful in its own right, or depended upon the agency of the saint's illocution. Returning to the account of one demon's condemnation and rhetorical discourse against Rabban Hormizd helps us to bridge the gap between what were in reality two postulates in relatively mutual tension- at once defined by a diabolic appreciation for the potential of the divine name, yet willing to concede to the fundamental necessity of the saint's adjuration craft in the manifestation of its potential. In fact, the demon in this narrative would concede that Hormizd had been 'cunning' in the business of contrived schemes; that the act of his illocution had been integral to forcing the divine to act in accordance with the terms of his intent and against the 'schemes of the prince of devils'. But, while these

433 Accounts of diabolic confrontation in the ascetic career of Rabban Hormizd proves to be far from the only occasion of exorcistic battle with the demon for the sake of the salvation of the vulnerable other, indeed as David Brakke research has so eloquently proposed: diabolic resistance would to a significant extent, define the process of the saint's progress towards achieving virtue, by providing the resistance that men like Hormizd had themselves to overcome. To attain to the divine presence and to integrate oneself to it was as much about fulfilling a social role on behalf of the necessitous as it was about being an exceptionally virtuous individual. Cleansing human society and human individuals from demonic elements would seem in these narratives to have been partly a preparation for that goal, and partly an outcome of it. See, D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p.13. Jeffrey Burton Russell also frames his study of beliefs about Satan and demons in this period, including amongst monks, in terms of theodicy. See J. B. Russell, *Satan: the Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca: N. Y., 1981). For suggestions that the saint plays a role in society based upon his power, See P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man', p. 87. As Brown would imply, the miracle story was often no more than a pointer to the many ore occasions on which the holy man had already used his position in society.

suggestions had sought to denigrate rather than congratulate the saint; to criticise and cast aspersion upon rather than acclaim the processes of the saint's expertise, it would seem from variable hagiographical excerpts that similar assumptions were embraced by the saints themselves. To take a by no means exceptional account of exorcistic engagement between Simeon Stylites and 'the demon of plague', we discern the rite of his ritualised intervention articulated distinctly within the first person: 'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I command thee to be still and not talk'.⁴³⁴ Even though it was the power of the Lord's name being invoked here, Simeon would assume-or rather his hagiographer would imply- that he, like other examples of his contemporary brethren, had been fundamental in manifesting the miraculous, and in imposing the Lord's jurisdiction. It was he who had prayed to God and besought the power of the Lord's authority on his supplicant's behalf, and it was he who had commanded the demon to be silent through his sanctioned illocution of the Divine name. For better or worse, the saint was by no means a passive bystander or even just a catalyst to the process and manifestation of divine benevolence, but an active and integral component of its negotiation. Though upon closer inspection, it was not just the saint's specific command of the word which had granted him the potential of his spiritual status and acumen. Indeed, to more fully understand the active involvement of the saint in this tripartite dynamic, we must understand not only the efficacy of his recitation of the divine name and verbal formulas, but their illocution in concert with a series of actions- some familiar and some rather exotic. Just as we have found that words can 'do things', especially when articulated by the right mouths, the combined use of objects is here specifically assumed to relate to notions of effective action.

Combining the Ritualised Power of Words and Deeds

434 Lent, p.139; Syriac, p.552 The catalogue of miraculous examples, where Simeon's ritualised practice was assumed and indeed emphasised as having played an essential part in the mediation of subversive power against the demon, is not only extensive but quite typically repetitious. Repeating them all therefore is not only beyond the scope of this study but unnecessary, so I shall here resort to referencing a few notable examples: see Lent, p.143; Syriac, p.558 for Simeon's intervention in suppressing the diabolic element behind one man's partial paralysis; Lent, p.143; Syriac p. 558 for Simeon's intervention in exorcising the demons of leprosy from three 'Easterners'; Lent, p.145; Syriac, p.561 for account of the saint thwarting a demon who had attacked the military commander Dionysus and struck him so that his face was paralysed and Lent, p.151; Syriac p.570 for an account of the saint's intervention in curing a man possessed by a demon with the Lord's permission, for desecrating a number of Christian churches. It is worth noting that while a number of examples elsewhere allude to the saint's own assumption of his role in process of divine intervention; describing the rite of his ritual adjuration in the first person, typically were somewhat more implicit in their suggestions of the saint's intervention. For further examples of first-person commands of the demon, see Book VI, Chapter XVII' in *Book of Governors*, p.665, *ibid*, 'Book III, Chapter V', p.314

Few accounts would imagine the saint's adjurational craft to have consisted entirely of the recitation of words and formulae. Though this chapter's discussion has sought to emphasise the power of particular words and to further elucidate theories of their practical influence within the contexts in which they are spoken, it would seem that the saint's illocutionary act was only part of a more complex composite of ritualised action. The inclusion, as well as an understanding of how to employ the specific efficacy of particular objects, was evidently integral to the design but also to the function of the adjurational act, and will be considered here in combination with the saint's verbal recourse as part of the ritual recipe of the 'rite'. Just as the verbal components of these composite recipes were defined by a number of persuasive devices; including philosophies of the divine epithet as symbolic representation of the divine presence, and theories of its accountability to the contexts in which it is invoked, so the ritual use of objects would seem throughout the hagiographical genre to have been multi-layered in its motivations and efficacy. Here, we shall explore their presence but also the assumption of their capacity within the saint's adjurational rite according to two distinct notions of effective action; both as constructed analogies or exact models of the goals to which the rituals are directed, and as practical expressions of sympathetic accord between elements of the rite and other dimensions of the cosmos. This latter assumption, put more succinctly, would assume that the heavenly world could not only be found within earthly objects, but that objects might represent specific cosmic forces on earth in ritual settings. Indeed, it was a principle which would motivate a diverse array of complicated actions within the saint's adjurational craft, each defined by the premise that the element employed was interconnected and related to the divine in its own distinct manner. From the prescription of Henana as a substance both enriched by the saint's semi-celestial personage, and thereby endowed with a special interconnectedness with the divine world; to the anointment of oil as a traditional vehicle for bestowing the privilege of celestial connection: concepts of sympathy would seem to have cultivated innumerable ways of using particular objects of the material world to engage, but also specifically influence a world which was both unseen and immaterial. But whilst concepts of sympathy would explain the saint's motivation to use certain objects, and the reason the divine was assumed to respond as it did, it was the underlying notion of the saint's act as analogy which would define the particular character of that response; and it is to the saint's adjurational craft as a formal representation of its goals that I would like to devote my attention.

Our investigations have already discerned how exegetical assumptions would attribute far more than mere semantic meaning to Divine epithets; how scriptural notions of the deity's name were often recast according to extravagant theories of its creative function, continued relevance and pragmatic potential in the mouths of pious as linguistic icons of divinity. What is interesting about these assumptions within the current framework of our discussion is how elements of those theories of the name's iconic signification and practical function would also underlie fundamental assumptions of the saint's broader ritual practice. Upon closer inspection, the composite of words and actions within the saint's adjuration craft would seem to have been defined by an understanding of their shared ability to function iconically, as models of the goals to which they are directed. Turning to an excerpt from the 'Life' or Rabban Bar Idta, we discern how the saint sought to summon the divine according to an illocution of the name, but also to re-enact the efficacious precedent of apostolic procedures detailed in Acts 9:36.⁴³⁵ Indeed, this scriptural precedent of resurrection was assumed to imply that Simon Peter 'brought life to Tabitha' not only on account of the power of his words but as a consequence of his actions; reportedly bestowed by 'his hands' as much as the supplicatory terms of his illocution. By anointing a monk therefore with the 'oil of prayer' and by uttering the supplicatory terms of his subsequent prayer; this excerpt would imagine how Rabban Bar Idta had not only implicitly alluded to his immediate comparison to the apostle and his procedural precedents of resurrection, but how he established an analogy and exact mapping for the desired end of the rite.⁴³⁶ Without a verbal formula, indeed even entirely bereft of the saint's explicit instruction implied by the saint's spoken adjuration, his anointment of the deceased incorporates a specific instance of the intended action into the structure of the ritual. In addition to the iconic signification of anointing with oil, we similarly discern from excerpts across the hagiographical genre how the manipulation of a variety of objects had been integral both to the saint's effective communication,

435 This excerpt from the 'Life' of Rabban Bar Idta would combine a complex array of different theological and philosophical ideas about the power and broader semantics of the divine name; its status as an iconic representation of divinity; its potential when combined with equally iconic ritual acts, and the legal framework within which it was potentially exercised. The limitations of this study prevents a further examination of this particular excerpt, but it promises great potential to those seeking further insight into the ideas which would define both the hagiographical genre and the identity attributed to the saint. See 'Section XXXIII' in *The Life of Rabban Bar Idta* (trans.) by E. A. Wallis Budge (London: Luzac and Co., 1902).

436 Of course R. Bar-Idta was by no means unique in his ritualised prescription of oil. For further hagiographical examples of the anointment of oil, both as an imitation of the divine anointment of celestial blessings and therefore as an analogous model of the goals to which the act was intended, see especially 'Book 6, Chapter 6', p.601; 'Chapter 17, Book 6', p.669 in *The Book of Governors*, 'Lent, p.125; Syriac, p.530, Lent, p.148; Syriac, p. 565' in *The Life of Simeon Stylites*. For further reading on the motif of anointment and as a vehicle of the miraculous in Syriac Christian hagiography, see S. P. Brock, 'Anointing in the Syriac Tradition', in M. Dudley and G. Rowell (ed.), *The Oil of Gladness: Anointing in the Christian Tradition*, (London: Liturgical Press, 1993), pp.92-100; 'The Christian Body: Ritually Fashioned Experience', pp.57-83 and 'Olfactory Analogies as Theological Tools', pp.114-125 in S. Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (California, L.A.: University of California, 2006).

and manifestation of the rite's intent. Echoing a frequent motif, an excerpt from the 'Life' of Hormizd relates how the saint sought to resurrect through the power of his prayer but more specifically, through the supplication of 'sad and bitter tears': as though the careful manipulation of grief was assumed either by himself or by the hagiographical author, to have summoned a similarly sympathetic response from his Lord.⁴³⁷ To this, we might also add his use of *henana*, not as an immediate model of the desired action perhaps but as a somewhat more subtle insinuation of the saint's expectation. Though no specific instruction is encoded in the bestowal of blessed particulates, as a substance enriched by contact with the saint's enlightened being, the saint's *Henana* was a conduit of divine/ terrestrial interaction- establishing its locale as a site of special celestial consideration. These types of iconic actions would appear extensively throughout the hagiographical genre, and it is with an eye to the various constraints imposed upon this study, that I shall not explore their inclusion in any greater detail. Instead, it seems important to point to another important aspect of the saint's use of objects within his ritual praxis, not as analogies of the goals to which those rituals are directed, but as expressions of a material world intimately connected in various ways to other dimensions of the cosmos. The saint's gestures were not merely defined by assumptions of ritualised analogy, but were also supplemented by notions of sympathy- that is to say by an understanding of the saint's use of objects not only as instructions or a template for divine reciprocity, but as powerful vehicles of effective action.

'And in those same days, again, there came to him a certain man from Halab, who brought his son with him bound with chains, because an evil spirit had

⁴³⁷ The kind of ritual technique underlying 'The Life of Rabban Hormizd, folio 44b', and its particular emphasis as an analogous act for both divine consideration and reciprocation, is worth quoting here in full: 'And as soon as they had brought the dead man and set him before him, Rabban Hormizd stood up straight away before our Lord in prayer, and made supplication with sad and bitter tears that, peradventure, the soul of that dead man might come to life again'. The dynamic described here between the illocution of divine words and the particular enactment of expressing grief as an analogous gesture, is frequently expressed throughout the hagiographical genre. Indeed, we read more specifically in one excerpt from the Book of Governors, how having seen 'the prayer and tears which were offered to Him, [the Lord] restored the soul of the young man to its body and rejoiced his servant'. See, 'A Metrical Homily Upon Maran- Ammeh by Thomas' in the Book of Governors, p.335. Weeping in the context of manifesting the miraculous may have served to tell the audience any number of things. Perhaps it was indicative of a genuine feeling of pity, or perhaps the tears represented a rather more direct medium of healing in the form of blessed water expressed by means of the saint. Hagiographers may also have been drawing upon the Gospel accounts of Jesus and his weeping, both for the death of Lazarus (John 11:35) and for Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), thereby presenting a parallel in this account of the ascetic. For further examples of the expression of tears and ritual illocutions, see especially 'Folios 14b; 16b; 44b; 62a; 74b in *The Life of Hormizd*, 'Chapter 19, Book 4; Book 6, Chapter 6 and Book 6, chapter 18 ' in the *Book of Governors* and 'Lent, p.180; Syriac, p.615' in the *Life of Simeon Stylites*. For further reading on the motif of saintly tears and its miraculous consequences, see E. M. Cioran, *Tears and Saints: Translated with an Introduction by Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); A. E. Bailey, 'Lamentation Motifs in Medieval Hagiography' in *Gender and History Journal*, 25:3 (2013), pp.529-544; D.A. Lichter, 'Tears and Contemplation in Isaac of Nineveh', *Diakonia* 11 (1976), pp.239-258; H. M. Hunt, 'Spiritual Tears and penthos (Compunction) in the Writings of Early Syrian and Byzantine Fathers', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Leeds, 1999.

suddenly come upon him. He would stone his parents with stones, his reason was completely taken away, and he wore no clothing at all, and was continually chewing his tongue and biting his arms. And when his father came, he entered and threw himself down before the Blessed One (because up to this time he stood on the ground), and with tears and bitter groans he besought him. And the blessed One answered and said to the father, 'weep not, but loose from him those bonds'. And when his father loosed him, the saint called the boy, and immediately he answered him with joy. And he said to him, 'In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, take some of this dust which is before thee, and anoint all thy body'. And the boy himself took it in his hands and anointed all his body. Then he commanded, and they brought water, and he blessed it and took it and caused him to drink and threw some in his face. At once his reason returned, and he knew his father, and ran and went and kissed the garments of the saint, and was blessed by him'.⁴³⁸

The textual traditions surrounding the 'Lives' of Late Antiquity's Christian Holy men are replete with varying references to the efficacy of particulates which had come into contact with his person. We are so often told how his *Henana* was integral to the saint's miraculous function;⁴³⁹ how others sought to appropriate it, and even dispense it according to the contexts of a variety of individual and communal concerns,⁴⁴⁰ but what was it about the bestowal of dust which was assumed to motivate and even force the divine towards miraculous action? Notions of iconic signification are seemingly not at play here- at least, not in the same way that the saint's careful orchestration of grief and tears were assumed to prompt reciprocal expressions of remorse from the Divine.

438 *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, Lent, p.127; Syriac, p.533.

439 'Oh how many instances of help arose from the martyrs' dust which people took from him': an often repeated and concise way of describing the sheer quantity of accounts pertaining to the saint's usually direct, but also occasionally indirect ritualised use of *Henana*. For statements of the overarching potential of the saints' *Henana*, see especially 'Section LIX' in *The Life of Rabban Bar Idta*, p.291 and 'Book V, Chapter XVII' in *The Book of Governors*, p.560.

440 A particularly interesting example of this appropriation is offered within the 'Life' of Simeon Stylites, where one man was reported to have used a little of the *henana* he had acquired from the saint's person to deliver his ship from a diabolically conjured storm. To have used a little of the *henana* he had acquired from the saint's person to deliver his ship from a diabolically conjured storm. By making the sign of the cross with it, and by rubbing handfuls of it onto both sides of the ship's mast, the individual would seemingly not only exercise the potential attributed to the saint's *henana* but even evoke the immediate intervention of the saint himself. 'Immediately the saint appeared, holding a scourge in his right hand. And he went up and stood on the top of the mast and seized the Indian by his hair and held him out and whipped him with the scourge, while the sound of his howling echoed over all the sea. And when he had scourged him severely and let him go, he fled still howling, as though many were pursuing him.' It was an understanding which would have a profound effect upon concepts of the potential of Simeon's piety as well as the potential of its application, not only across the boundaries and divide of geographical distance, but also across the chronological expanse of time. See, 'Lent, p.172; Syriac, p.603' in, *The Life of Simeon Stylites*. For further reading on the remote potential of the saint's piety, as a means of intervention between the miraculous and the necessitous, see P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saint*, (1992).

Indeed, especially not when we consider how Henena was often used surreptitiously, both beyond the immediate contexts of the saint and the situation for which it had initially been approved.⁴⁴¹ So far, this chapter has sought to explain how blessed particles may have served as an analogy of the goal to which its use was intended, though assumptions of its efficacy; whether in the hands of the saint or otherwise, would seem to have been defined by those quite different notions first articulated by James Frazer as ‘sympathy’ - that is to say by an understanding of the complex interconnections between the element employed, in this case the saint’s henana, and other dimensions of the cosmos. Deciphering what possible connections could exist between dust of the terrestrial realm and the motivations of forces within other celestial dimensions, is to appreciate the theoretical principles which defined the saint’s pursuit of the ascetic ideal, and the special qualities attributed to his status. Though the efficacy of Henana was not always directly exercised by the hands of the saint, it was undoubtedly derived from the special privilege afforded by his unique status; both as an individual who had sought to ascetically negotiate and even momentarily traverse the parameters of mankind’s former primordial condition in the celestial realm. In these narratives, the saint was like the terrestrial end of a conduit between dimensions otherwise entirely distinct and utterly divided by humanity’s primordial corruption; with the dust around his feet translating a small but nevertheless significant fraction of that celestial realm into terrestrial contexts. It was a notion which would motivate its use within a diverse array of ritual practice; including the prescription of Henana as an ointment to be absorbed, but also its preparation into something to be consumed. Indeed, an excerpt from the ‘History’ of Rabban Bar Idta describes how the saint offered henena in the form of cakes to a woman ‘deprived of the blessing of children’; how she consumed a cake of those blessed particles daily for an entire year and consolidated sufficient capital to thereby become a beneficiary of

441 An excerpt from the ‘Life’ of Rabban Hormizd would describe on one occasion, how the saint had devoted himself to an hour of devoted entreaty and supplication on behalf of a deceased youth, and in that time how an apparent ‘multitude’ of men and women had taken advantage of the holy old man, by kissing his hands and his feet so as to be blessed by his involuntary touch and by collecting the dust which was around his feet and carrying it away as a ‘henana’ and ‘heavenly gift’. That this lust for salvation was deemed reprehensible is emphasised by his response upon gaining consciousness: ‘If ye Shew yourselves unto me in this wise I will depart from you, and ye shall never again see me here’. Yet, his rebuke would also therefore emphasise another, rather interesting aspect of henana- that its potential could indeed be transferred not only beyond the saint but beyond the sanctioned contexts of its immediate use. See, ‘Folio 45a’ in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, p.83. Elsewhere, we read how a community from the village of Al- Kosh had swept the cave dwelling of the saint until it was free of dust, having witnessed a miracle performed by its agency. See, ‘Folio 51 a’ in *Ibid.* p.95. For similar accounts of the misappropriation of Henana, see also ‘Section XIII’ in *The History of Rabban Bar Idta*, p.217. We might also note here that the appropriation of Henana beyond the immediate contexts of the saint’s ritual was not always deemed reprehensible, but on occasion even sanctioned as can be discerned from the account of one excerpt in the Book of Governors, which would relate how little holes or channels were left in the coffins or saints so that the sweet odours and dust of their decomposition could be collected and utilised for mighty deeds. See, ‘Book 6. Chapter 1’ in *The Book of Governors*, p.577.

celestial consideration.⁴⁴² Elsewhere, we read how Bar Idta and others had mixed Henena with oil or water as a concoction to be drunk, infusing the individual this time with a celestial essence sufficient to have manifested a more immediate translation of divine benevolence. Whatever the vehicle; whether concoctions of henena or the bestowal of blessed ointments; the act of abstinence or the burning of incense, notions of sympathy would establish a set of relationships in these narratives between what is seen and unseen, opening up innumerable ways of using the material world to not only influence immaterial realms, but represent specific cosmic forces in ritual contexts. These unseen forces could attract but also repel, influencing the world in ways that were otherwise entirely inconceivable; but precisely what conclusions are to be drawn from these assumptions of the saint's illocutionary and ritualised potential?

The discourse of this chapter has so far sought to consider the illocutionary and practical components of the saint's ritualised potential; how each aspect of his craft would act in situ so as to interact with the Divine, and manifest the force of its celestial intent within terrestrial contexts. What is decisive but also puzzling about these assumptions of the saint's articulation of the miraculous, is that his performative use of language and ritual action, though entirely extraordinary, was also almost entirely exclusive. The saint's illocution of divine names summoned the divine within terrestrial contexts in a way which was otherwise inconceivable; whilst his carefully choreographed rites instructed a celestial hierarchy only too eager to express specifically cosmological forces on earth, within the confines of the saint's specifically ritualised settings. Though, to look at this situation another way, the apparent necessity of ritual acts and verbal formulae to the communication of divine benevolence, increasingly placed the power of a miraculous discourse between mankind and his Lord- one formerly preserved by society at large-almost entirely in the hands of those who professed to know the right words and the required actions. It was perhaps an unsurprising distinction, considering the genre within which these accounts were couched and its broader *raison d'être*- both to champion the saint's ascetic regimen and the triumph of a nascent Christian faith to which those abilities pertained. Though, lurking behind these hagiographical expectations of the pious were not only the

⁴⁴² See, 'Section XXXVII' in *The Histories of Rabban Bar-Idta*. It is interesting that this widespread notion of consuming the saint's henena as a terrestrial extension of cosmological blessings would also extend to define theories of diabolic influence within the world. The 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd, for example, would describe how the demons entertained by the 'sorcerer' Ignatius had equally communicated their designs through the production of the 'bread-cake of the deceiver'; how the governor of Mawsel was placed under subjection of the bread-cake having consumed it, and thereby 'led captive by the devils of the deceiver'. See 'Folios 78b-79b' in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, pp.145-148. 'Book IV, Chapter XI' in *The Book of Governors* would even describe an account of one man having witnessed Satan eating his own bread that he had prepared on the man's oven, see *ibid.*, pp.405. For further reading on the production and consumption of cakes for the sake of communicating divine as well as demonic will; see 'Folios 59b-60b and 76a-78b' in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, pp.109-112 and pp.141-145.

motives of Christian triumphalism, but the influence of a broader spiritual ecology- one which had shaped common ideas of efficacy but also other expressions of Late antique ritual performance. In the following discourse, this chapter intends to explore how the premise of those ideas expressed here in terms of the saint's potential to curse the demon and contractually bind the Divine, would also extend to the ritualised potential of mediating blessings. That is to say, how concepts of the efficacy of speech and theories of performative action, would serve to mediate celestial benevolence as much as subversive strategies against the demonic. This chapter so far has sought to emphasise how the acquisition of spiritual acumen steadily bestowed an understanding upon the saint of both the illocutionary and performative potential to ritually instruct the divine, and thereby potentially bind the demon; so it is interesting therefore that within each of the following accounts of the saint's blessing, these apparent pre-requisites of ritualised negotiation should seem to have become steadily more muted details. That is not to say of course that they were no longer present, but that the officiant had insinuated himself into the cosmic order to such a degree, that both his spiritual acumen and subsequent status had increasingly alleviated many of the former complexities which had hitherto governed much of the saint's ritual practice. What had formerly been consciously supplicatory in its extensive array of ritualised craft was increasingly shaped not only by the relative ease of a simpler regimen, but by the confidence of an ever-more consummate spiritual athlete: by the sense that what the saint had sought to negotiate for the necessitous was not merely requested but expected-whatever the means of purchase. Here then, we devote our attention to the ever-increasing status of the saint, and to those assumptions of his ever-increasing authority within the discourse of mankind's suffering and the bounty of celestial healing; questioning what the attributed status of the saint might tell us about both the hagiographical expectation of piety, and the place of these assumptions and the wider hagiographical genre, within the broader spiritual ecology of Late Antique Mesopotamia.

Sickness and Ritualised Blessing among the Masses

“Therefore my friend, when the Holy Spirit departs from a person who has received it, Satan attacks that person to make him stumble, so that the Holy Spirit might abandon him altogether. For as long as the Spirit is with a person, Satan fears to come near him [...] This is the way that things are for

a person: in the hour in which he perceives in his soul that he is not fervent in the Spirit and his heart is falling into attachment to this world, let him understand that the Spirit is not with him, and let him rise up and pray and keep vigil, so that the Spirit of God might come back to him and he might not be conquered by the Adversary..

Aphrahat, Demonstration 6:17

If the ascetic aspiration for spiritual purity was assumed to largely limit the saints' susceptibility to the schemes of the demon and the corporeal manifestations of its corruptive presence, then it is little wonder that so much of the hagiographical genre is devoted to detailing human suffering as a consequence of spiritual vulnerability and susceptibility to the ravages of sin. Indeed, the various vices of spiritual corruption and a wide array of physical maladies appear together and are often related to each other: with the human inclination for spiritual immorality deemed to lie at the heart of mankind's visible and invisible pains; corporeal and cognitive sicknesses; and numerous potential injuries.⁴⁴³ Looking more broadly to the theological discourses of Aphrahat and Ephrem; the Christian faithful were described as defendants in a 'war' against the spiritual assaults of Satan: all variably entrenched according to the determination of their repentance, and in their endeavours against the powerful allure of Satan's suggestion. This hard-fought battle of wills between the intent of the righteous and the unceasing endeavour of the demon, resulted in many of its combatants being 'wounded', 'stricken' and even 'scattered' and 'lost' by their engagement, with a great many becoming slowly subdued with spiritual sepsis, and deluded with the ease of revisiting some of the more base tendencies of the human

443 The human predisposition to every form of pain and sicknesses; to manifest expressions of suffering, affliction and torment, as well as the inevitable predicament of an eventual demise towards death, was assumed within a great many of the theological treatises of the Syriac Orient and its innumerable accounts of the 'lives' of the pious, to have been symptomatic of a primordial but also ongoing capitulation to the corrupting presence of the demon. The inhabitants of Eden had not, and indeed could not suffer any of the pains or experiences of sickness, for knowledge of the real meaning of sickness was missing. In their good health, Adam and Eve did not possess a 'discernment of what suffering is' nor indeed did they have an awareness therefore of the blessing of the good health which they were created, but were rather assumed to have been made conscious of both by their pride and subsequent transgression of the Lord's commandment; their primordial immaturity and spiritual vulnerability exposing them to the physical harms and eternal pains of a fallen state and primordial existence. Sin enslaved Adam and Eve to the binds of an 'accursed land' and to a knowledge of the pain and suffering of living outside of their former paradisiacal abode, yet far from being an exclusively primordial punishment, the predicament of their exposure to pain and suffering was also the curse of their descendants, bequeathed and directly inherited on account of their living on the earth and not in the Garden of Eden. For further reading on the early Christian tradition of illness, bodily decline and decay as direct consequences of primordial man's ejection from Eden, and God's curse upon their descendants, see the scholarship of E. Scarry and T. Shaw, especially: E. Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) and T. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998). For Ephrem's comments on Adam and Eve's demise as a largely shared predicament among all mankind, see Ephrem's Soghyatha 1:28 in *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syres Hymnen de Nativitate (Epiphania)* edited and translated by E. Beck, (Louvain, 1959).

condition.⁴⁴⁴ 'Greed' and 'jealousy' and deceit' and 'hatred', 'haughtiness' and 'pride' but also 'wrath' and 'anger', not to mention 'lust' and 'fornication', 'mocking', 'blasphemy' and 'abuse': all were expressions of mankind's innate potential for depravity, indeed all were symptoms of an individual's eventual subjugation to the toxic accumulation of spiritual corruption and sepsis. Yet, these expressions of man's spiritual corruption were not only indications of the demon's hold and of a subsequent spiritual disorder. The discourses of Ephrem and Aphrahat would suggest that they were also indications of a gradual and inevitable trajectory towards a state of corporeal degradation and physical malfunction: of a toxicity within the body which, if untreated, might manifest into an array of disturbing and variably destructive defects.⁴⁴⁵ Drawing upon the scriptural precedent of *1 Samuel* 16:14, Aphrahat's *Demonstration* 6:17 relates how the spiritual wounds inflicted upon the soul of King Saul festered to such an extent, that the Holy Spirit not only sought to abandon him but gave divine sanction to his further corporeal affliction, permitting the Devil to overwhelm the body and the passions which governed his mind. He was assumed to have grown fretful; peevish; and discontented; acting like a man disturbed by the terrors of cognitive corruption and intellectual impairment, and corporeally compromised like a long line of scriptural forebears: indeed 'for this reason, my friend, may it be firmly settled in your mind that the Evil One lives in each person who puts on jealousy, and that unclean spirit that lived in Saul lives in him also'.⁴⁴⁶ Clearly, the predicament of spiritual demise and its corporeal consequences was by no means merely the stuff of scriptural precedent. Indeed, for Aphrahat and Ephrem, and an array of Late Antique Syriac Christian theologians, the errors of scriptural forebears though comfortingly distant examples of individual misdemeanour, were aspects of a more general human propensity for deviation: of a shared and innate disposition towards realising the full expression of mankind's postlapsarian degradation; and indeed it was with precisely this same sentiment, that a great many of the Syriac Christian hagiographer's would frame the

444 Aphrahat would suggest that: 'there has been no person among the descendants of Adam who, when he went into the struggle, was not beaten and struck, for sin reigned from the time that Adam transgressed the commandment', see. Aphrahat, *Demonstration 7:1in* in A. Letho, *The Demonstrations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage*, (Gorgias Press, 2010). Though Aphrahat reports the blessings of engaging in spiritual combat against the assaults of the 'Evil One', he also warns against the haste of those whose relative spiritual immaturity, might render them susceptible to spiritual 'wounds' and capitulation. Those who have made a covenant with God, those who have vowed themselves to virginity and holiness, are warned to return to the state of the ordinary human condition if he is afraid of conflict, 'lest he fall in the struggle and be killed'. To turn his back upon the cause of his spiritual perfection before donning his armour are not blamed, but there is only shame and ridicule for those who do so upon the frontline. See Aphrahat, *Demonstration 7:20*.

445 The Syriac Christian connection between spiritual demise and its manifestation in corporeal sickness has been identified and discussed comprehensively in A. Shemunkasho, *Healing in the Theology of Saint Ephrem* (Piscataway, N.J., Gorgias Press, 2004), which in addition to examining the literary legacy of Ephrem, has also explored the connection in a variety of historically contemporary texts, including the 'Acts of Judas Thomas the Apostle', the 'Odes of Solomon' and Aphrahat's 'Demonstrations'.

446 Aphrahat, *Demonstration* 6:17

special juxtaposition of the untarnished saint, as one both largely impervious to the corporeal corruptions of diabolic degradations and capable of mediating its alleviation in others.⁴⁴⁷

The image of the saint as one who brutally punishes his body and who in turn is rewarded with a healthy constitution and long life is- in the words of one historian- 'a necessary postulate of hagiography'; a seemingly paradoxical assumption intimately intertwined with the complexities of Christian spiritual theory and with the premise of man's perfect, primordial immateriality.⁴⁴⁸ Though of course, the saint was an exception. One of the consistent themes which underlie the hagiographical genre articulates the opposite of this ascetic ideal- not necessarily a contradiction, but instead the rather more ordinary state of the non-ascetic laity and its pursuit of that mistakenly perceived to be of benefit to both its material and spiritual integrity. Indeed, in all of its various forms and spiritual dispositions; at different times to varying degrees and indeed according to an array of quite different reasons, the various descendants of Adam were assumed to momentarily or rather more permanently capitulate to the erroneous allure of their forefather's disposition, to the temptations of his sin and so to the various vices of 'greed', 'jealousy', 'haughtiness' and 'pride'. The 'breath of lust', to borrow a phrase from one of Aphrahat's *Demonstrations*, or the lure of a wanton desire for the evils of wealth; promiscuity; debauchery; or indeed any other forbidden object, was just one amongst a number of different expressions of human inadequacies

447 The image of the saint as one who brutally punishes his body, and who in turn is rewarded with a healthy constitution and long life is- in the words of one historian- 'a necessary postulate of hagiography'; a seemingly paradoxical assumption, intimately intertwined with the complexities of Christian spiritual theory and with the premise of man's original, perfect, and primordial immateriality. Though of course, one of the consistent themes which underlies the hagiographical genre articulates the very opposite of this ascetic ideal- the rather more ordinary state of the non-ascetic laity, and its pursuit of that which is mistakenly perceived to be of benefit to both its material and spiritual welfare. Quite unlike the occasional predicament of saintly and monastic illness, which would seem to have posed some quite significant problems of meaning and function within the hagiographer's discourse, it is interesting to note how those hagiographical sources were somewhat less ambiguous in their consideration of disease, disability, general malaise and its meaning, among the ordinary pious. Indeed, a complex and varied array of influential hagiographical narratives from the Syriac Orient allude frequently to the seriously ill and to the injured, to the cognitively and corporeally disabled, with the harshly judgemental terms of a literary culture which had considered their afflictions according to the parameters of that same framework which had defined ascetic endeavour and salvation. To put it another way, those ascetic writers and theorists had made meaning of the afflictions of the ordinary, by considering them as a measure of both their spiritual failings, and of their distance from the spiritual refinement and subsequent corporeal wellbeing, pursued and enjoyed by the saint. For the authors of the hagiographical discourses with which we are here concerned, the creation of the natural or material world in which all humanity now dwells, was effectively pedagogic. Through ethical action and theological contemplation in the material world, all were assumed able; at least to variable and defined extents, to gain an understanding of divine and natural matters, and to thereby repent of the sinful ways of their postlapsarian predicament; to shed their wicked passions for the material and thus anticipate the second coming of Christ. The laity were certainly not expected to reach the excellence achieved by the anchorite or ascetic saint, a perspective alluded to succinctly by the theological discourses of the Book of Steps, but in the distance which separated the spiritual purity, perfection and corporeal wellbeing of the saint, and the spiritual debasement and subsequent malaise of the sick and afflicted laity, was a range of potential spiritual aptitudes with corresponding degrees of risk to spiritual and corporeal demise. One's position on its spectrum, and thus one's susceptibility to the rancour of those corporeal afflictions suffered by the masses, was determined solely by an individual's determination for ascetic recuperation- or indeed, to put it another way, by the extent of their compulsion and the strength of their postlapsarian instinct, to both revel in the errors of sin and reject the emendatory lessons of ascetic and spiritual realignment.

448 O. Temkin, *Hippocrates in a World of Pagans and Christians*, (Baltimore, M.A.: John Hopkins University Press, 1995) p. 154

assumed to have driven the 'hateful habits' of the fallen, leading to the state of sickness which disturbs the mind but also injures the body. Consciously reminiscent of Eve's primordial desire for the forbidden fruit of Eden, the *Life* of Simeon Stylites describes how one soldier's desire for the forbidden fruit of a certain 'virgin maiden' led him to selfishly seize the object of his carnal desire, and how it subjected his body and mind to new state of depravity and damnation.⁴⁴⁹ Indeed, by lusting after the fruit of his particular temptation, and capitulating to the demonic suggestion of acquiring it; the soldier's rebellion against his intrinsic sense of moral alignment had resulted in sin and so in sickness: becoming 'withered like wood', neither able to move, talk or even to recognise or engage with anyone in any way. Corporeal desire and sensory satisfaction were assumed in this excerpt to have resulted not in the fulfilment but rather in the deadened potential for perception; his once soldierly command and self-assured sexual prowess all but extinguished, to reveal a man whose moral and spiritual depravity had condemned him to the status of the repugnant. To this account of a soldier's carnal lust we might also add that same hagiographer's account of a woman who became a prostitute: a predicament similarly attributed to the corrupted spiritual disposition of one captured by the lures of Satan's suggestion, and to a similar corruption of both her body and more importantly in this case, to the tools of her trade.⁴⁵⁰ Alongside stories of carnal desire and corporeal corruption, an equally important aspect of the degradation expressed by lust would relate how a sense of material value had helped to manifest those most depraved and deplorable aspects of an individual's character and potential. Recalling an aforementioned excerpt from the *Life* of Simeon Stylites, we read how a fishermen's daughter and her innate instinct both for material priority, had not only denied the evidently impoverished saint a part of her father's catch, but manifested an array of striking corporeal consequences. Her evident greed, or to put it another way, her apparent spiritual corruption through a lust for material advantage; was assumed

449 See *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, Lent, p.126; Syriac, p.530. A similar story of frustrated male lust can also be found in *ibid.* pp.176-177. The account relates how one Persian official had lusted after a Christian woman 'both beautiful to see and of comely appearance'. More than her physical appearance, her mind was beautiful 'and acceptable to god' and it was precisely for this reason that she denied his advances as a 'man who worships fire'. Forced to wed him by the 'King of Kings', she repeatedly denied the rights of a husband and was ordered to be killed for the slight; pushed into the river Euphrates where Simeon is reported to have caught her. For the sin of the Persian official's lust, jealousy and murder, Simeon promises the affliction of an incurable disease. The narrative relates how the official 'never spoke another sentence, but lay in great affliction, tortured, suffering, and worn out, prostrate like a dried-up tree, and he became a source of terror to those who beheld him'.

450 '...again how many harlots came there and from afar saw him, the Holy One, and renounced and left their places and the cities in which they had lived, and surrendered themselves to the Christ, and entering dwelt in convents and became vessels of honour, and with their tears they served their Lord and blotted out the list of their debts'. See *Ibid.* Lent, p.135; Syriac, p.546. To these examples of specifically sexually orientated lust, we might also add comparable excerpts from *The Book of Governors*, especially Book 6, Chapter 16', where the saint is reported to have been confronted with the temptations of a harlot. For sins of harlotry as well as her endeavours to lure the saint into lust, Thomas of Marga suggests she 'immediately down upon her face', and in great pain how she was dragged outside, and 'on the morning of the morrow she was buried and reserved for a judgement more bitter than death'. See *The Book of Governors*, Book 6, Chapter 16', p.673. *The Life* of Rabban Bar Idta, 'Section 38' also would describe how the lust of one woman, upon being perceived by the saint, became the cause of her downfall, as she was torn to pieces by what the hagiographer images to have been the very demons to whom she sacrificed. See *Ibid.* p.265.

to have found immediate corporal expression, causing her to not only convulse and contort involuntarily but gnash her teeth uncontrollably.⁴⁵¹ Indeed, greed was a weakness all too often succumbed to by the laity. 'Book Six, Chapter Six' in *The Book of Governors* would relate how hunger drove one man to trespass within a monastery's garden, so as to gather its figs for consumption, though in so doing he was assumed not only to have subjugated himself to the passions and indictment of spiritual corruption, but also rather fittingly, to the corporeal corruption of those senses which had incentivised his lust and yearning for the unobtainable.⁴⁵²

Sin and the source of mankind's original corruption may have been defeated on the cross through Jesus' crucifixion, but in its nakedness, humanity remained both exposed and vulnerable to the intoxicating and corrupting venom of its powerful and destructive sting.⁴⁵³ Ephrem's Hymns on 'Fidelity' (5:19) would use the vocabulary of the physician to describe its: 'bruises on our bodies', its 'scars on our souls and marks on our spirits', as well as the way in which the body's mortality had subjected the human condition to the 'afflictions of pains and sickness', how it was able to be

451 'on a sudden, something entered the girl and the fish and carried them to the street before all the people; the girl herself leaping and gnashing her teeth and smiting her head and crying out at the Blessed Mar Simeon, while the fish also were leaping toward him'. See this aforementioned account in *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, Lent, p.116; Syriac, p.515

452 See, 'Book Six, Chapter Six' in *The Book of Governors*, p.611.

453 This reality is emphasised in one excerpt from the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd in particular, where the motif of unintentionally consuming serpentine poison is used to describe not only the corporeal demise and premature death of an unsuspecting shepherd, but a conscious juxtaposition to mankind's original spiritual corruption in the primordial accounts of Genesis. Indeed, having poured some milk into a basin, we read how the shepherd had been distracted by concerns for his flock, and how an 'evil and deadly poisonous snake' had fallen into that basin, contaminating its contents with its venom. Unwittingly subjected to the malice of his ancestor's primordial enemy, the shepherd had consumed and indeed to a certain extent thereby been consumed, by the corrupting effects of the snake's debilitating and terrestrial toxins: being at first physically impaired and then overwhelmed entirely, by the devastation of its disturbance to his corporeal and cognitive function. Upon closer inspection, our hagiographer would appear to have consciously drawn from the framework of the Genesis tradition to describe the shepherd's initial distraction from that commonly alluded to symbol of bodily and spiritual nourishment- a bowl of milk; how he had become anxious for a discernment of his terrestrial interests like his primordial ancestors before him, and in turn, how he had exposed the initial purity of his otherwise simple diet to the contaminants of a serpent's corrupting and malicious intent. By receiving its corrupted sustenance; by permitting himself to be even momentarily distracted by the diabolic imposition of other terrestrial demands and carefully constructed schemes, this otherwise archetypal model of Christian virtue had exposed himself to the demise of a corporeal death, one which in the contexts of a conscious juxtaposition to the predicament of Genesis, had echoed the pollution and spiritual demise of the human condition by Adam and Eve before him. See, *Rabban Hormizd*, Folio 40a, pp.74-75. For further reading on the simple sustenance of milk as a motif frequently alluded to through the literary treatises of the Syriac Christian Church, alluding both to the figure of the Holy Spirit and occasionally to Christ himself as the spiritual wet-nurse of the spiritually immature and vulnerable, see Ephrem, Hymns on the Church, 25:18, Liber Graduum, 1:2, Ode 8:16 and 35:5 and Aphrahat 'Demonstration 10:6'. For scriptural precedence of this motif, see 1 Peter, 2:2; 1 Corinthians, 3:2; Hebrews, 5:13. The motif of becoming intoxicated " or poisoned by the contamination of food, is frequently used within the discourse of Ephrem the Syrian to describe the corrupting affects and gradual sickness induced by the demon's presence. The evil one had seduced Adam and Eve by the poison of the forbidden fruit: 'as a false friend he pleased him [by offering him poison in his food]', and as it is related to the Evil One, Ephrem would also often make mention of the 'poison of death'. See *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syres Hymnen de Nativitate*, ed. and trans. by E. Beck, (Louvain: 1959), 26.9. Because of the evil one, the fruit and the paradisiacal tree served as the poison of death for Adam and Eve. Along with primordial man, the poison of death entered the world and continued, as is made apparent in this excerpt, as a means by which the Evil One is still able to poison mankind. Ephrem would describe the advice of the serpent as: 'pouring venom into Eve's ears, the evil one himself as having 'mixed his cup and showed his venom to everyone', so that the free will- or in particular greed and worldly care, became a cause of poison and venom'. See *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syres Hymnen de Paradiso und contra Julianum*, ed. and trans. by E. Beck, (Louvain: 1957), 7:6-7:14; 9:2 [henceforth: *Parad*]. For further reading on this motif, see in particular A. Shemunkasho, *Healing in the Theology of Saint Ephrem*, (Piscataway, N. J.: Gorgias Press, 2004), pp.307-309.

rendered 'dumb' and 'blind', but also 'diseased' and 'leprous'. The human mind and the power of its intellect would not escape the predicament of damnation either, being both susceptible to and potentially fractured by the demon's presence.⁴⁵⁴ Just as the human spirit was assumed to have gone astray and to have been harmed with the 'marks' of its terrestrial chastisement, Ephrem would describe how the human intellect might be disturbed and the mind all but 'broken'; embittered by the toxins of diabolic suggestion and impaired by a cognitive blindness akin to the visual imparity of cataract.⁴⁵⁵ Indeed, man's nature was weak and therefore liable to produce puss; a metaphorical denotation of its susceptibility to corruption, with those including the 'leper' and the 'deaf', the 'crippled' and the 'dumb', the 'blind' and 'paralysed', all pointing to the weakness and continued deficiency of mankind's postlapsarian condition. Though, it is perhaps from the suggestion of the saint's relative freedom from its expressions; from both corporeal contagion and cognitive disability, that we discern an understanding of these predicaments as something ultimately defined by degrees of exposure to the presence and suggestion of the demon.⁴⁵⁶ Indeed, protected at least to some degree by the intent and duration of his ascetic endeavour, the hagiographer's narratives would consider the saint to have been not only relatively more prepared, and even well-poised against the potential of diabolic proximity, but even well-placed to discern and intercept the diabolic maladies of Christ's more

454 Frustrated aspirations and unfulfilled lusts were assumed by the hagiographers to have also been the cause of an overwhelming sense of jealousy and even hatred for those perceived to have realised what others could only aspire towards. Indeed, a number of hagiographical narratives would allude to monastic resentment amongst ascetic brethren; to an ascetic susceptibility to the spiritual corruption and sickness of envy, precipitated by weakened dispositions but also to a significant extent expedited, by the inherent acumen and instinctive proficiency of those ardent devotees. In the 'Life' of Simeon Stylites, we read how the ascetic rigour of one devotee had led him to pursue a unusual expression of devotion; digging himself a hole and burying himself up to his breast, so as to be forced to remain in situ, and to therefore be free from material distraction. Having committed himself to the sufferance of such an ascetic feat for two years, we read how his evident ascetic excellence had inspired hatred and jealousy rather than amazement and inspiration; how those envious of Simeon's ascetic aptitude had accused him of hypocrisy rather than heroism; of being a fake and a liar, intent upon monastic kudos rather than ascetic salvation. The opposition of one monk to the manipulative exploitation of Simeon's ascetic tricks, is said to have convinced him to stand over and thereby mock the efforts of his spiritual brother in protest, yet his misguided hostility to the righteous pursuits of the saint, a guise for what in reality had been the manifestation of his spiritual corruption by the sickness of envy, had resulted not in monastic or divine recognition but rather in corporeal destruction, as the sickness of envy and the toxins of spiritual degradation took hold. 'In that very hour, he fell and became dumb...vomiting blood, and after three days he died', or so the hagiographer of this narrative would like us to believe. For this excerpt, see 'Lent, p.119; Syriac, p.519' in *The Life of Simeon Stylites*. For similar accounts of monastic scheme against the spiritually gifted, see 'Book 4, Chapter 19' in *The Book of Governors*, where we read how the spiritual integrity of one monastic brother was compromised by demonic proximity to the extent that he had learned to loathe the successes of an elderly monastic member, and how the jealousy, pride and haughtiness which had informed his repugnance of the wizened ascetic, was reciprocated with overwhelming corporeal persecution.

455 *Fid.* 45:1-2, 38-17.

456 Despite Ephrem's suggestion of how 'our wickedness is the source of all harms: its thoughts are hidden pains, and its deeds are visible pains', evidently not everyone is so badly harmed. Even though Satan had affected some of the biblical kings and prophets, he does not have power over those he describes as 'just' and 'upright', see *Nis.* 53:6; 53:24. Ephrem's Hymn 53 and 57 on *Nisibis* allude to those significant scriptural figures whom; like Aaron, David, Solomon, Samson and Ezekiel, were all affected by Satan, yet Ephrem would also give a list of those who were 'just' and 'upright', including Joseph, Moses, Elijah, Job and John, who were all victorious over the Evil One. It is within the context of that continuing tradition of the 'just' and 'upright', that we can begin to approach the hagiographer's treatment of the Late Antique Saint; his esteemed position against the demon and his relative immunity to diabolic afflictions, but also the privilege of his potential to negotiate divine blessings on behalf of those weakened by the diabolic advance.

vulnerable human flock. Here, in the following discourse of this chapter; having identified the particular disposition of the laity to an incessant diabolic presence and the subsequent corporeal manifestations of their capitulation, attention is drawn to the way in which the Saint was assumed to have negotiated the position of his relative sanctity so as to not only avoid the demon himself, but to ritually mediate the blessings of a miraculous cure for others. Of course, to do so, risks retelling a story which this chapter has already told before; describing in separate accounts the same ritualised regimens and strategies which had defined his initial ascetic endeavour and eventual prescription of curses against the diabolic possession. Indeed, the same principles and ritualised responses which underlie excerpts of ritual cursing were certainly at play here, though as I intend to demonstrate through a discussion of the following excerpts; with one increasingly apparent and potentially significant difference- the role and authority attributed to saintly status.

The Role and Authority of Saintly Status

‘Master, I know not what similitudes I can liken and compare thee this day. [Shall I say thou] art like the angel of God? But why should I say [thou art like] the angels? Nay, thou resembles the Lord of the angels through thy divine and triumphant works...thou hast made to live my son who was dead, and thou hast made him to come back from the devouring Sheol, and he has again seen the light of life. And with what can I recompense thee for the great goodness which thou hast wrought for me, and for my son [who was] dead which thou didst bring back to life by thy prayers? Even if I were to give thee all of my kingdom and my possessions, what, I say, would the doing this be for thee in return for that which thou hast done for me?’⁴⁵⁷

How to unpack the ramifications of an excerpt like this? Indeed, though the discourse of this study has perhaps gone some way towards offering an insight into the privilege attributed to the saints as a consequence of their ascetic regimen and subsequent spiritual acumen, nothing hitherto has perhaps prepared us for the suggestions, or indeed the ramifications of those suggestions, which are implied here. Before dissecting the details and implications of such a statement of appraisal, it is perhaps as

⁴⁵⁷ *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, Folio 55b, p.102.

well to begin by providing something of the situational context in which those terms of veneration had been uttered. Indeed, taken from the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd, this significant but by no means unique reflection upon the authority and status of the saint, represents but a snippet within a broader discourse of saintly intervention on behalf of the necessitous- in this case, assumed to have been mediated not for the dismissal of unwelcome occupying demons, but for the healing of one who had been subjected to the corruption of their proximity. Echoing sentiments of the complex set of ideas which had defined Late Antique hagiographical perceptions of the demon's presence; its corruption of the spiritual integrity of the soul and indirect physiological potential upon individual well-being, our excerpt relates how diabolic deceit had not only disturbed the spiritual well-being of the individual in question, but the state of equilibrium between mind and body integral to standard functioning of the human condition. Indeed, the human spirit, far from being perceived as an abstract or numinous entity, was considered here and indeed throughout the wider discourse of a variety of Syriac Christian theological treatises, as having had not only a definite tangible existence within the human body, but a discernable impact upon the function and well-being of perhaps nearly every aspect and process of the human physiology.⁴⁵⁸ St. Ephrem, for example, would describe the idealised and intended state of the human condition as one defined by the harmony between body and spirit; both being individual but nevertheless mutually dependent aspects of mankind's creation, actively combined and made effective through the choice of the righteously orientated. Indeed, though the human spirit was assumed to have been undoubtedly 'great and perfect', as the remaining vestige of mankind's former divinity and primordial existence, without the body it was all but mute and blind- lacking the corporeal and sensory means of its discernment and potential expression.⁴⁵⁹ The same could not be said of the terrestrial body, which perceived and expressed itself effectively without either the spiritual cooperation or intervention of the soul. Indeed, as Ephrem would imply: 'it does not exist by means of it' nor does it 'hang onto it when it is weary', but interacts and partakes in its own sensory satisfaction. This, of course, was precisely the reason why Ephrem would formulate that the body could not, or perhaps rather should not exist in isolation from the direction of its spiritual companion, with the corporeal consequences of a body lacking the soul's spiritual guidance made only too apparent by

458 The Syriac Christian connection between spiritual demise and its manifestation in corporeal sickness has been identified and discussed comprehensively in A. Shemunkasho, *Healing in the Theology of Saint Ephrem* (Piscataway, N.J., Gorgias Press, 2004), which in addition to examining the literary legacy of Ephrem, has also explored the connection in a variety of historically contemporary texts, including the 'Acts of Judas Thomas the Apostle', the 'Odes of Solomon' and Aphrahat's 'Demonstrations'.

459 Ephrem's letter to Hypatius, in C. Mitchel, *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan* vol. I (Oxford: Williams and Norgate, 1912), p.xiv.

the afflictions suffered by subject underlying this excerpt.⁴⁶⁰ The wholeness of the human's being was dependent upon a body-soul unity; upon the ideal that one should be like a mirror of the other.⁴⁶¹ Indeed life, or at least salvation from the condemnation of eternal death and damnation, was predicated by it; with their conscious separation or the corruption of one by the other, constituting the route to if not the state of an individual's physical demise and spiritual damnation.⁴⁶²

Through a gradual discourse of spiritual corruption and corporeal degradation, the narrative of this excerpt would relate how sickness had eventually 'waxed exceedingly sore and grievous' within the Governor's son, how it eluded the various treatments of his physicians and 'gained more and more of a hold', until he 'convulsed with his sickness and died'.⁴⁶³ It was a premise fairly typical of the hagiographical genre, not only in terms of its contextualising of the corporeal destruction inflicted by the powerful allure of sinful indulgence, but also in its subsequent presentation of the saint as one not only triumphant over his own mortal degradations but in the alleviation of corporeal demise in others. Indeed, couched within the lamentations of those exasperated physicians who had hitherto failed to identify the spiritual corruption at the heart of the individual's demise, the hagiographer alludes to the *raison d'être* of his narrative and indeed to that of the wider hagiographical genre, describing the physicians counsel to Amir Ukbe to: 'carry his son gently in a litter and take him to the holy man Rabban Hormizd', as well as the expectation that 'when he hath laid his right hand upon him, he will be healed completely of whatever sickness he hath upon him'.⁴⁶⁴ Just as we might expect from the hagiographer's discourse, Rabban's reputation for spiritual acumen and supernatural prowess was assumed not only to have preceded him, but to have identified him among other contemporary ritual practitioners as a healer - and evidently, as a superior healer at that.⁴⁶⁵ Their comments

460 For Ephrem, the wholeness of the human's being was dependent upon a body-soul unity; upon the ideal that one should be like a mirror of the other. Ibid, p.civ.

461 Ibid, p.cv

462 Ephrem considered there to have been two agents involved in the process of spiritual degradation through sin and subsequent sickness: one of them being external to the human being, namely Satan, and the other internal, namely, man's individual free will. Thus, sickness is the result of the influence of the diabolic, and the misuse of man's free will to decide the course of his spiritual direction, an ongoing process which had continued to shape mankind's existence since Eden. For further reading on Ephrem's consideration of life in Paradise as essentially healthy and disease free, their subjection to disease as one of the many symptoms of their exposure to Satan and a discernment acquired from the 'tree of knowledge', see Ephrem's exegetical chapter on creation, in *Parad* 3:10-5-13.

463 'Folio 52b', in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, p.96

464 Ibid.

465 It is a general assertion among modern scholarship that supernatural healing was sought as a last resort. Such an argument would seem at first to be supported by excerpts such as this, in which it is made apparent that the intervention of the saint was sought only when physicians were unable to assist in providing a remedy for the particular ailment. Though, as already implied within the context of the physician's statements, surely such a suggestion within the hagiographical narrative has something to do with the hagiographer's intention to highlight the superiority of Christian supernatural healing over and above other popular and conventional methods. In other words, by emphasising the failings of the physicians in this

would identify the limitations of medicinal methods of mediation, but also transfer the illness entirely out of the arena of the physical and into the realm of the supernatural- a forum in which the saint was assumed to have been ascendant, and a consummate alternative to their more limited secular repertoire. Though it was also within this framework that his hagiographer would convey not only a sense of the saint's supernatural authority and efficacy, but how he was assumed to have done so. Indeed, perhaps in contrast to convention, there was a suggestion here that what the saint was assumed to have mediated so effectively was determined not so much by the supplicatory illocution of words and the practice of accompanying actions, but by the specific immediacy of his person. Whether indicative of a broader perception of Christian piety, or as is perhaps more likely, an insight into how the hagiographical genre intended for the saint to be seen; the suggestion here was that the saint was not only able to mediate a miraculous healing but that his touch was in fact both integral and even essential to its manifestation. The saint was not merely an instrument through whom the Lord was assumed to have wrought the miraculous, but rather a conductor of the Lord's potential- indeed, what he did was not only conducive to divine compliance but entirely essential to the realisation of what was increasingly deemed within these narratives, to have been his prerogative.

Despite suggestions to the contrary, it is perhaps pertinent at this point to clarify what was, in fact, the complexity of ritual action concealed by suggestions of the holy man's touch, with the saint reliant upon an extensive array rather than an absence of ritual gestures. 'Fixing his mind upon God', we read alongside details of various techniques and devices of illocution; including the recital of divine names, the recollection of scriptural precedents and verbal constructs of contractual obligation, how he had gestured the shape of the cross with his right hand three times over the deceased body of the governor's son and produced 'a washing' of the henena from his cross for him to drink.⁴⁶⁶ To this, the preparation of a cake of henena was also deemed essential to the efficacy of his regimen, not to mention the rhythmic repetition of instruction whispered in his supplicant's ear. Whilst this array of ritualised expertise might seem to point to the saint's extensive command over the supernatural, upon closer inspection, the extent of his resort to ritual might equally have undermined

context, I would argue that the author sought to highlight the exceptional ability of holy men like Hormizd, rather than their undesirability or failings- that to seek the saint may have been a last resort precisely because of the implications involved in having done so. For further reading on scholastic assertions that the supernatural interventions of the saints were sought as a last resort, see especially B Baldwin, 'Beyond the House Call: Doctors in Early Byzantine History and Politics' in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 38 (1984), p.19. Also see 'Illness and Healing: Threats and Retaliation' in S. Trionke, *Magic and the Supernatural in Fourth Century Syria*, pp133-136.

⁴⁶⁶ See, 'Folios 54b-55b' in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, p.100-101

suggestions of the saint's accrued authority and spiritual status. What is striking about this excerpt, therefore, and indeed in many ways the principle reason for why it has been chosen to introduce the role and authority of the saint's mediation of the miraculous, is the way in which the governor was assumed to respond to those complex procedures of ritualised practice. Indeed, despite the relative complexity of the saint's adjurational craft, the governor would attribute its potential as much to a sense of the saint's instinct as his expertise, claiming: 'I know not with what similitudes I can liken and compare thee this day. Like the angel of God? But why should I say the angels? Nay, thou resemble the Lord of the angels through thy divine and triumphant works'. The governor's suggestion would emphasise his assumption of proximity between the saint and divinity; going so far as to suggest the saint not only resembled divinity in the ease of his ritualised orchestration of the miraculous, but that his miraculous potential perhaps pointed to his own divine status. Indeed, 'his works', rather than those of the Lord, were 'triumphant' and in their magnitude could only have been 'divine', with the insinuation implied by such a suggestion made only too apparent. Whether our author would have liked us to believe that Hormizd had somehow been transformed into a semi-celestial being as a consequence of his earlier ascent on high is perhaps open for further discussion, indeed from his frequent use of the epithets 'seraphic watchman' and 'earthly cherubim' to denote Hormizd and holy brethren, we might certainly be forgiven for thinking so.⁴⁶⁷ This apparent grey area negotiated by the governor's logic, defined by a certain ambiguity of the saint's role in the mediation of the miraculous, would seem to have been indicative of a broader perception of the saint's adjurational craft. Indeed, turning our attention momentarily away from the insight offered by this excerpt, the following hagiographical discourse would relate how the saint was not only forced to clarify his role as a specifically mortal mediator of divine blessings and ritual practice, but also how the hagiographical author of the text felt evidently compelled to draw and emphasise that distinction.

'A governor of a certain city of the land of Palestine, who was a heathen,
had his head bent and his neck placed on his breast so that he could not lift
his head up. But he came to the man of God, borne by two on a litter. And

⁴⁶⁷ Sebastian Brock has pointed out how an interpretation of the Gospel of Luke 20:35–36 was developed in the Syriac tradition, which translated these verses as 'Those who have become worthy to receive that world (i.e. the kingdom) and that resurrection from the dead, do not marry, nor can they die, for they have been made equal with the angels, [and being] the sons of the resurrection [they are] like the sons of God'. In alienating themselves from this world, the Christian ascetic was assumed to have made himself at home in another, that is, within the company of angels, as followers of the angelic life. See S. Brock, 'Early Syrian Asceticism' *Numen*, 20: 1 (1973), pp. 1-19 [5-6]. On this topic of the angelic life, also see S. Frank, *Aggelikos Bios* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1964).

they presented a request that he would ask mercy from God upon him, while he informed him that many physicians had given up, and he had spent much money on account of his sickness with sorcerers and magicians... he cried out and said before him, as he clasped his feet and supplicated him, 'from thee I will not depart, and from the door of thy God I will not remove, and my hands from thy feet I will not lift and the prayer thou dost offer to God I will not allow thee, until thou dost place thy hands upon my head'. And while he was thus speaking, he did not allow the man of God to pray. But the blessed saint answered him, saying, 'I am a sinful man and least of all men, and my hands are not like those of all the rest of the bishops and monks which they placed upon thee. And one thing I say to thee, that for a man to heal a man without the will of God is impossible. But I will commit thee to the hands of the living God, he who made the world in his mercy and his grace, he who can heal thee from the terrible affliction which thou hast'.⁴⁶⁸

The rather limited parameters of this narrative from the 'Life' of Simeon Stylites provides a rich seam of opportunity for enquiry, alluding not only to the saint's perception of his role in mediating the miraculous but more tellingly, to the judgments of unrelated outsiders. It is perhaps worth noting at the outset of our analysis that the supplicant of Simeon's intervention was 'a heathen' rather than a Christian, and so understood and sought the saint's potential not as mediation of divine benevolence as such, but as a ritualised potential attributed to performative practice. Indeed, the excerpt relates how he had already sought the intervention of 'sorcerers' and 'magicians' to no avail; a detail demonstrating the inferiority of their craft, but also the framework within which the governor had approached and even sought to coerce the saint into action. Just as he had sought to purchase the attentions of other ritual specialists, we read how he would attempt to acquire the attention of the saint, albeit according to a different currency- threatening to corrupt the immediate environs of the saint with his presence, and hence to deny the saint the necessary conditions for prayer. The currency with which he'd hoped to mediate this exchange was measured here in various denominations of emotional blackmail, but what is perhaps particularly interesting about this desperate resort of a non-believing governor is the inherent assumption that the saint could mediate the potential which he sought, without the God to whom it was typically attributed. To put it another way, the governor's assumption

⁴⁶⁸ *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, Lent, p.140; Syriac, p.533.

of the saint's reputation as a healer was determined not by concepts of faith, ascetic acumen and supplicatory mediation, but by technical expertise and a personal inclination, manifest simply by the gesture of his touch. The saint's response to the governor's declarations was characteristically dismissive of those flattering suggestions of his position within the dynamic of manifesting the miraculous, belittling his spiritual status as a 'sinful man and least of all men', incomparable to those other monks who were assumed to have blessed through proximity. Nevertheless, this was far more than merely a declaration of humility. Indeed, though largely characteristic of saintly diffidence, Simeon's response would serve here as an important literary device: one which would allow the saint's hagiographer to dismiss what was evidently an assumption of the saint's authority and status harboured by more than just the governor of his prose. Indeed, alongside suggestions of spiritual failings, Simeon qualified his denial of the governor's insinuations in no uncertain terms, declaring the arrogance of any man who thinks he might heal without the will of God: 'for a man to heal without the will of God is impossible'. To heal was to commit a patient to the hands of God rather than his own, though this did not remove Simeon from the equation of effective healing entirely, in fact quite the contrary. Indeed, the excerpt is clear in its understanding that the saint's prayer and other ritual devices were integral to the manifestation of the miraculous. What we discern here is the tentative hagiographical negotiation of defining the saint's role according to the real concerns of its potential appearance; of tempering the kind of speculative conjecture about the saints in the dynamic of mediating the miraculous, without dismissing its significance to the point of an unjustified and self-defeating obscurity. The saint's potential to communicate blessing was a sanctioned and significant expression of his ascetic rigour and spiritual acumen- a sign and measure of his proximity to the divine and the subsequent transformation of his authority and status. But, underlying a hagiographical inclination to celebrate this evident demonstration of the saint's trajectory towards perfection was also a conscious concern for the ramifications of doing so. The excerpts explored by this discourse identify the fine line negotiated by the hagiographer's accounts of saintly status and ritualised potential; conscious of an apparent friction between the *raison d'être* of the genre, and concerns for the connotations of those signs of his ascetic privilege. Echoing the premise of those concerns, the remainder of this chapter looks towards what conclusions might be drawn from the relative ease of the saint's manifestation of the miraculous, as well as the economy of phrase used by his hagiographer to describe them.

‘Then the Rabban went out of the city of Mawsel in unspeakable triumph, and by his means Divine Grace wrought many wonderful triumphs, besides the healing of the son of the governor of Mawsel, and many other similar healings which can neither be described nor written down in this history lest it become [too] long and the writer thereof become exhausted’.⁴⁶⁹

Comments such as these almost define the hagiographer’s narrative; alluding to the extent of the saint’s miraculous mediation on behalf of the necessitous, and the self-confessed inability of the humble hagiographer to even begin to do justice to the ‘wonder’ and ‘glory’ of what the saint was assumed to have achieved.⁴⁷⁰ Despite these tedious suggestions of the hagiographer’s failings, we are often presented with large catalogues of his successive attempts to do so anyway. Often deprived of the detail hitherto attributed to the saint’s ritual praxis, numerous and often emaciated accounts of the saint’s blessings define vast swathes of the hagiographer’s literary efforts; with an economy of phrase attributed to a concern for the repetition of aforementioned details. Indeed, we read, therefore, after a long succession of stories relating those details of Rabban Hormizd’s ritual praxis, how he increasingly: ‘laid his right hand upon them, and pronounced over them ‘Jesus Christ’’, and even how his odour alone ‘healed every kind of sickness and disease’.⁴⁷¹ Elsewhere, we read how Mar Narsai treated a man abhorred by his parents for becoming sick with ‘palsy’ simply by proximity; how he raised a murdered eight-year-old boy to life with a mere statement of instruction.⁴⁷² Indeed, after a quick succession of brief accounts, all alluding to the saint’s healing with an increasing irregularity of detail, the ‘Life’ of Simeon Stylites would ask: ‘how many thousands and myriads of the unclean were sanctified through his hands [alone]... how much deliverance and benefit came to those in servitude of the fiend through his prayer’.⁴⁷³ From the struggle of an elaborate and often complex praxis of illocution and gesture, to the apparent ease of expressing the miraculous almost as a natural and even involuntary attribute of spiritual endeavour; a paradoxical circle of saintly inaction and

469 ‘Folio 83a’ in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, p. 154

470 For similar references of the hagiographer’s inability to describe to full array of the saint’s miraculous repertoire, see. ‘Book V, Chapter XI’, ‘Book II, Chapter XXXIX’, p.263, ‘Book IV, Chapter XVI’, ‘Book V; Chapter XI’ in *The Book of Governors*; ‘Section LVII’ in *The History Rabban Bar Idta*, p.289.

471 This represents quite a contrast to the former complexity of the saints’ ritualised practice, but this transition from heavy reliance upon overt and public displays of ritual action to increasingly silent and less visible expressions of the same miraculous ends, would seem to al universally underline the hagiographical genre of Late Antique Mesopotamia. For this example, see ‘Folio 45b’ in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, p.84

472 ‘Book V, Chapter XVI’ in *The Book of Governors*, pp.549-550.

473 ‘Lent, p.136; Syriac, p.547’ in *The Life of Simeon Stylites*.

subsequent achievement would run throughout these narratives, framed in terms of an authority acquired through ascetic regimen, but also in terms of a potential which had transcended the necessity of such visual displays of ritual action. Those performative processes which formerly defined the saint's mediation of the miraculous, were neither ignored nor necessarily silenced as an irrelevant detail, but rather superseded with a discreet potential increasingly communicated by the saint's personal being. The development behind this transition is clear. Monks demonstrated the acquisition of virtue by performing curses and blessings according to the precedent established by Jesus Christ, yet the increasing sense of the saint's capacity to mediate through his presence what had formerly required an elaborate array of ritualised gestures, appears to allude to a concern and indeed to a strategy for differentiating the monk from a range of other ritual specialists, both within and without the monastic fold. His power over the demonic was increasingly attributed to the overall effect of the monastic lifestyle as opposed to an understanding of the right words and actions, acquired from either mystical or more deviantly motivated experience. Indeed, the tightrope negotiated in these narratives between demonstrations of piety and accusations of deviant practice would lead many of Mesopotamia's hagiographer's to consciously direct the attention of their readership away from possible comparisons to disavowed religious cognates, and to suggestions of saintly superiority mediated by the potential of his presence alone. The more profound the piety, the less they would have to resort to ritual manipulation of words and actions acquired through gnosis. Their virtue alone, accrued through the exertions of an ascetic regimen, was deemed not only sufficient but superior in its capacity to both repel demonic malevolence, and thereby bless the various and complex wants of the necessitous.⁴⁷⁴

Here, we have traced the contours of theme within the hagiographer's text which would seem to have been barely negotiated by the hagiographer's themselves. Indeed, reading suggestions of the role and authority entertained by saintly status, it is possible to discern what we might phrase as a certain literary 'friction' within the hagiographer's prose- a discord and contention between suggestions of saintly potential: defined at once by the expertise of a gnosis orchestrated by ritual practice, and by the suggestion of a privilege accrued through the virtue of humility. This

⁴⁷⁴ David Brakke discusses this paradoxical cycle of inactivity and increasing miraculous potential in the 'Lives' of the saints, and attributes it not only to the significance of humility within Christian asceticism and hence the dangers of miraculous potential as an occasion for pride, but also as a hagiographical strategy to differentiate the saint from ritual competitors. For Brakke, these saints were similar but superior to other ritual specialists, by increasingly expressing the power of their ascetic virtues by means of their person rather than resorting to words and actions. See D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p.238

apparent conflict, running throughout the hagiographical genre and at times, even underlying the same hagiographer's text, would seem to be clarified at least to some extent by the suggestion of spiritual maturity; with the saint relying less upon the terrestrial elements of his acquired gnosis and more upon the divinity of his gradually perfected spiritual status. Indeed, we have begun to discern this albeit, largely sporadic process of transition towards the saint's status as an ever-more consummate spiritual athlete, though it is often evidently punctuated with moments of unapologetic ritual practice. This coexisting and abrasive system of explanation was informed by a concern to at once inform and enrich the status of the saint with the immediate suggestion of independent potential; bought and orchestrated as a terrestrial expression of his divine favour without compromising his image of ascetic humility with connotations of coercive ritual practice, and it is what we see the hagiographer negotiating, not always successfully, in these narratives. Here, rather than pursuing hagiographical sentiments of the divergence of ritual and spiritual humility, I would like to conclude here with thoughts of the paradox of saints embracing the power and ritual strategies of the identities they denounced and derided as impotent and diabolically informed: how connotations of the ritual practitioner were ironically emphasised rather than silenced by the absence of ritual. In the context of our current discourse, these monks were largely superior to other mediators of the divine by the qualities of their persons- in fact, so much so, that they no longer had to ritually perform exorcisms and blessings but simply express a desire of intent to that end. Indeed, no longer needing to say any particular words or to perform and required gestures- these men were by no means ritual specialists: they were simply monks, or so hagiographers would like us to assume. The reality was that the dichotomy between ritual practising and the asceticism of the monk in monastic literature, especially in his mediation of the blessing, masked a far more fluid range of saintly behaviour: modelled upon the apparent paradox of embracing the practices of loathed ritual specialists. In the following discourse, I'd like to think of the saint in terms of his proximity to other ritual experts, to use a phrase coined in this context by Brakke as 'impresarios' or rather as directors of the divine and demonic upon the stage of human life: of their co-existence within an environment of alive with the presence of invisible powers and beliefs of the ability to control them. Here, rather than discerning their dissimilarity as a consequence of hagiographical efforts to distinguish the saint's potential as instinctual and divinely determined, the final thoughts of this chapter shall consider the fluidity of identities which the hagiographer sought to conceal; perhaps gauging thereby

something of influence of Mesopotamia's wider spiritual ecology upon the hagiographer and the hagiographical traditions he produced.

Monks among Other Ritual Experts

'In the case of the Godhead, what created being is able to investigate him? For there is a great chasm between him and the Creator. In the case of the Godhead, it is not that He is distant from His possessions, for there exists love between Him and creation. None of those who investigate God has ever drawn near to Him- yet He is close to those who have discernment...a person who seeks after truth with a grudging spirit cannot gain knowledge even if he actually encounters it, for envy has clouded his mind and he does not get any wiser, even if he grabs at that knowledge'.

Hymn on Faith, LXIX: Brock, 1990, 67

We divert our attention momentarily to the thoughts of one of Mesopotamian Christianity's outstanding representatives; the poet and theologian Mar Ephrem, whose contemplation of the divine and its presence in the lives of the pious, would seem at first glance to have been defined according to an underlying and perpetual sense of tension. For Ephrem, the 'being' of the Creator was at once both utterly hidden to his creation, existing in a transcendent state beyond the range of conventional human experience; yet owing to his immense love for humanity, also immediately imminent to those with the right frame of mind. What Ephrem attempted to articulate in these three verses will perhaps be somewhat familiar to us by now, having teased various similar strands from the fabric of albeit far later hagiographical traditions. Indeed, in those texts, as in the thought and spiritual vision of this fourth-century church father; the human potential for celestial discernment was assumed to have dulled since its primordial acquaintance with sin, with humanity both unable to cross the ontological gap dividing creation from its creator, or realise the full potential of its intended primordial state. Though, that was not to say that damnation and sensory acuity by default was not the inevitable predicament of all Adam's progeny. Indeed, echoing the sentiment of perhaps that most important tenant of Christian doctrine;

Ephrem and a host of Late Antique hagiographer's would emphasise how the Lord bridged the chasm dividing him from his creation through the sacrifice of his Son, and out of love for his creation. He would only be experienced as having done so, however, by those who sought the LORD in the right way- those who understood the love and sacrifice of the LORD, and who had in turn been willing to reciprocate it through varying degrees of spiritual perfection, and through their commitments to ascetic sacrifice.

In other words, to experience the love and presence of the divine, one had to embrace, nurture and personally perfect the qualities expected of divinity- to adopt the attitude of faith, openness and love with which Christ had so affectionately approached humanity. Ephrem's discourse and a catalogue of hagiographical anecdotes would communicate an important theme for the Late Antique Christian believer: God was close to those who honed the perception of their cognitive faculties through the sacrifices of spiritual realignment. Those who attempted to seize understanding of divine truths, just as the primitive minds of Adam and Eve had once sought to do by eating forbidden heavenly fruits, were not only ill-informed about how to acquire mystical understanding but subsequently blinded to its truths by the ignorance of an attempt to grab at its gnosis. These theological treatises and hagiographical speculations also invite the reader to step back from the narrow focus on individual asceticism, celestial understanding and spiritual proximity. They place the ascetic within the wider perspective offered by Late Antique Mesopotamia; an environment alive with the presence of invisible powers in which the lines between the good and the bad- between those who see through asceticism and those who strive to do so through deviant devices of investigation, is perhaps not as sharply drawn as Ephrem would imply.⁴⁷⁵

To borrow a phrase from Ephrem's discourse: God was: 'close to those who have discernment'. Indeed, the pursuit of asceticism was assumed not only to have rehabilitated the individual's primordial capacity for divine cognition but to have reaffirmed the proximity formerly enjoyed by primordial man and potentially extended to his descendants. It was a suggestion of affiliation, but also one of divine patronage, which would cast the saint into the mould of an 'impresario' of the divine and demonic; placing him among other figures in Late Antique Mesopotamia who also offered

⁴⁷⁵ For further reading on the syncretism between the rituals of Christian holy men and other forms of religious ritual action, see D. Frankfurter, 'Syncretism and the Holy Man in Late Antique Egypt' in *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 1:3 (2003), pp. 339-385. Also see Brown's comments, in P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred*, p.68 and D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk* pp. 227-228

themselves as specialists in dealing with divine and demonic power- specifically those whose practices spoke of 'magic'. Folios 76a- 83b from the 'Life' of Rabban Hormizd offer an almost unprecedented insight into the hagiographical consciousness of and friction posed by this proximity; with its hagiographer seeming at once to both acknowledge the implied fluidity of their identities, and define their dichotomy according to the juxtaposition of their divine and demonic patronage. Indeed, couched within what is a far larger framework of Nestorian rhetoric against Jacobite theological error, this particular excerpt relates how a certain Ignatius, a Jacobite, had gained the renown of a 'holy man': able 'to triumph before kings and governors' and manifest an array of the benefits otherwise typically attributed to the spiritual currency of the Nestorian saints. Quite Unlike the saints, however; this Jacobite 'Sorcerer' was presumed to have done so not as a consequence of his devoted diligence and gradual ascetic mastery over the demon, but precisely because of his devotion to those demons who were in fact, his collaborators. Simplifying for the sake of brevity what is in fact a more sophisticated hagiographical discourse; this account of religious animosity would culminate in Ignatius' extensive efforts to label Hormizd with precisely those same designations which our hagiographer attributes to his own diabolic affiliations and deviance:

'In as much as the Governor of the city of Mawsel was a friend of Ignatius, his servants went in and informed him concerning [his arrival]... when Ignatius had gone in the governor gave him the salutation of peace, and gave the order, and made him to sit down by his side in honour . Then Ignatius set the bread, which was still hot before him, saying, "I have brought this bread as a blessing for thee from my monastery"; and the governor said to him "Give me a little of that bread of thy monastery... and behold, the bread was hot like the oven it came from, and he cried out and said "oh! This bread is still hot", and the governor wondered at this thing; now several times Ignatius had made him to wonder at his sorceries, and the governor was want to declare that he was a holy man. Then, having come to the matter of his sorceries, Ignatius made bitter complaints against the holy man Rabban Hormizd, and calumniated him, saying, "His sorceries are more in number than those of all the sorcerers who have ever lived or now live, and he hath wrought many evil things upon our monastery, and committed many thefts, and we ask thee to have mercy upon thy servants,

and to avenge the cause of thy servant Ignatius. And because the governor was led captive by the devils of the deceiver, and was under subjection, he hearkened unto the devil and unto the evil things which he sowed in his heart; and the governor burned with desire for the destruction of the Rabban.⁴⁷⁶

In a conscious echo of the saint's frequent prescription of bread, henena, oil and other blessed substances for the righteous mediation of the miraculous, the power of Jacobite sorcery is imagined here to have been made manifest on account of Ignatius' uncomfortably similar deeds and ritualised gestures. Consuming the bread, just like applying or equally consuming the blessed oil of the saint, was assumed to have made its recipient receptive; though on this occasion not to the word of God, but instead to the evil intent and various machinations for which it had been made. The resonance of their regimen is palpable; perhaps even purposefully so, with Ignatius' series of carefully constructed reports upon the saint's manifestation of the miraculous, serving to further assumptions of the proximity of Nestorian piety with practices of diabolic deviance. Though, as we might expect from a Nestorian narrative of Christian triumph, having hinted at the resonance of Saint and sorcerer; a conscious and conclusive effort towards differentiation would describe how Hormizd would eventually prevail against Ignatius' accusations on account of his divine rather than diabolic affiliations. What is in many ways intriguing then about this account and its hagiographer's efforts of differentiation, is how the saint was supposed to have triumphed and defined his legitimacy, by engaging in precisely those same ritualised machinations which had allegedly defined the deviance of Ignatius' Jacobite sorcery.

'And by his crafty devices he [Ignatius] used to strike wonder into the governor day after day by his sorceries, and he would make his devils to fly about in the air upon seats of fire which emitted sparks of light. And for this reason he worked in this wide by the crafts and wiles of his devils, and said to the governor, "Gather together unto me the multitudes of thy city tomorrow, and tomorrow I will show my glory... and when the day had dawned and the light had become bright, Rabban [Hormizd] and his companions entered into the city of Mawsel and the governor commanded that they should come in before him; and as soon as Rabban entered and gave the salutation of peace to him, the governor was greatly moved... and

476 'Folio, 79a', in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, p.146

when Rabban made answer to him, he greatly marvelled at his wisdom, and gentleness, and humility, and self-restraint, and serene disposition. And the governors answered and said unto the crowds, “Verily this man is the faithful servant of God, for his service unto his Lord is well known from the appearance of his face”. And behold, the phantoms of darkness of Ignatius had been evoked in the air, and whilst he was seeking to make a display of himself with his evil spirits and fiends- now he was want to say that he was carried aloft through the air by the holy angels...then suddenly, Rabban transfixes the iniquitous one and his legions, saying: “It is not for you, O ye deceivers, to deliver your wills unto the souls desire of the iniquitous one, nay by Jesus Christ the Nazarene, I set a bond upon you, and ye shall remain in the air in the positions in which ye now are, until I set you free from the bond wherewith I have bound you.”⁴⁷⁷

Here, Hormizd would triumph over ‘the wheels of the course of his [Ignatius]’ sorcery’; demonstrate the righteousness of his faith; as well as the superiority of Nestorian Christianity, on account of both the power of his rhetoric, but perhaps more importantly, by demonstrating his proficiency in those practices which defined the ‘sorcery’ of the diabolically inclined and affiliated. What differentiated ‘the arrow of deliverance’; the means by which he was assumed to transfix Ignatius and his legions’, was precisely that- little more than an assumption; a hagiographer’s sense of the righteous identity of those entities through whom the ‘miraculous’, rather than the ‘sorcery’, was assumed to have been set.⁴⁷⁸ Hormizd, like all of the saints alluded to in this chapter’s broader discourse, were neither above dealing with the demonic nor indeed were they ignorant, on account of their piety, of the precise mechanisms through which to engage and command them according to the supposedly more righteous inclinations of their intent. The saints were fellow adepts; individuals whose identities would negotiate expectations of what piety should look like, whilst

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid, ‘Folio 81b’

⁴⁷⁸ In many ways this excerpt provides an excellent example of the kind of arguments made by Peter Brown and an increasing number of contemporary scholars about the surprising proximity of the saint’s ritualised authority, and the practices of those who he sought to condemn. See Peter Brown’s sentiments in, P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred*, p.68. What differentiated Hormizd as a ‘faithful servant of God’ as opposed to a ‘diabolic sorcerer’, was evidently not a clearly distinguishable ritual practice or potential, but a rather more subjective sense of who acted in accordance to the divine will- who had strung their bow and shot the arrow of their supernatural potential, according to the gifts ‘given by grace’. See, ‘Folio, 81b’, in *The Life of Hormizd*, p.151

attempting to maintain uncompromised boundaries between sanctified Christian piety, and diabolic deviance.⁴⁷⁹

The fluidity and over-lap of identities alluded to in sources such as these creates problems for the modern scholar who wishes to speak precisely about persons whose identities were seemingly not so distinct. It is relatively unproblematic to the use the term 'holy man' or 'saint' to describe the Christian ascetic whose piety was attributed to an affinity with divinity, but the term 'sorcerer' or 'magician' - bounced around here to distinguish both individuals within a dynamic of juxtaposition - is rightly the subject of extensive scholarly discussion, and my point is precisely the deep resonance between these identities as impresarios of the divine and demonic by means of the use of efficacious words, gestures and substances.⁴⁸⁰ In a way which largely

479 This excerpt from the 'Life' of Hormizd was by no means unique in describing the friction of proximity between these passionately differentiated identities, nor indeed was it unique in hinting at how such frictions could cause the delicate boundaries of their difference to give way and lead to occasional osmosis. The Syriac translation of the legend of Cyprian of Antioch relates how a priest of Apollo, described as a 'sorcerer' initiated into the deepest mysteries of Egyptian adyta, had renounced his experience of the occult and converted to Christianity, having witnessed the superiority of Christian ritual. The Legend of this initiate into the occult and his conversion to Christianity, describes the failings of his renowned demonic charms and erotic magic against a certain Christian virgin; how the methodologies and tactics of his trade, including a variety of demons, a dragon, and even the devil himself, were constantly and convincingly thwarted by the power of Justa's Christian piety, and the power of the cross signed in every confrontation. Having recognised the power of the cross when in the hands of the pious, and more significantly, upon seeing the Devil's failure to conjure against the righteousness of the virgin, Cyprian rejected the Devil, choosing to be baptised, to burn the magical books and repent. What's potentially most interesting about Cyprian and his confession to a familiarity with the Dark arts is not only the ease with which the sorcerer became saint within this Christian narrative, but the framework within which Cyprian seemingly saw Christianity and those most pious Men and Women. The legend tells us how Cyprian converted specifically after being convinced by the power associated with Christian piety and the sign of the cross, not as one might imagine by the doctrine or the message of the Christian faith. Cyprian's confession to sorcery and his conversion to Christianity allude to the thought process not necessarily of a genuine convert, but of an individual who drew comparisons between his former preoccupation as a practitioner and those Christian virtuosos whose piety and power had bested the skills he had hitherto acquired. The Christian God and the methodology of signing the cross were shown to be more powerful, more efficacious than the sorcery of the incantation practitioner and this interpretation, or at least the presentation of Christianity within this framework of the occult, perhaps tells us something of the character of Christianity in Late Antiquity. For further reading on this tradition, see P. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum Syriace*, 7 (Leipzig, 1897). For further scholastic discussion of this excerpt as an insight into the coexistence of saint and sorcerer as constantly interacting forms of religiosity, see R. Macmullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); A. D. Lee, *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2000); G. Marasco, 'Pagani e Christiani di Fronte alle Arte Magiche nel IV Secolo D.C.: Il caso di Atanasio', *Quaderni Catanesi di Cultura Classica e Medievale* 3, (1991), pp111-134.

480 Increasingly, scholarship of Late Antique practices have sought to move away from traditional and pejorative views of 'magic', and its dichotomy with those practices designated as belonging to 'religion'. A. Jeffers for example, has argued that a distinction between the 'religion' of Christian Holy men and the 'magic' of those they attempt to differentiate is not only untenable but often reflective of ethnocentric distinctions. See A. Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), pp.6-7. Segal equally argues that we are often misled by our own cultural assumptions into making too strict a distinction between magic and religion, see A. F. Segal, 'Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition' in R. Van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (eds), *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), pp.350-51. Whilst Gager and his fellow contributors to *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells* extend this point, proposing that magic as a definable and consistent category of human experience, 'simply does not exist', see J. G. Gager (ed.), *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.24-25. Graf, in his work on *Magic in the Ancient World*, has even shown how even the utilisation of antique definitions of differentiation are troublesome, see F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, (trans.by) F. Phillip, (Mass. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1997), p.18. For a useful oversight of the scholarship on this issue of religious syncretism between magician and Christian holy man, see, S. Trzcionke, *Magic and the Supernatural in Fourth-Century Syria*, pp.5-11.

responds to the apparent fluidity of identities alluded to by the hagiographer's discourse', my practice will be to use 'magician' only to indicate the perspective of normative monastic ideology, as a term for anyone engaged in ritual practices to gain power over the divine or demonic, who had not taken on the more particular identity of the Christian monk- an identity and role which perhaps would have given his 'sorcery' or 'magical' activities legitimacy in the eyes of those who defined that identity. Within a spiritual ecology inhabited by a variety of religious virtuosi, authoritative monastic authors sought to define and legitimate the identity of the Christian monk as both different from and superior to those who would proclaim ritualised expertise to engage the supernatural, which they labelled as 'sorcerers' or as diabolically affiliated deviants. But, to use a phrase from David Frankfurter: 'the dichotomy between sorcerer and monk in the monastic literature, where the one removes through Christ what the other sets through magic, masks a much more fluid range of ritual experts both within and without the monastic fold.'⁴⁸¹ Indeed, as we discern from the 'Life' of Hormizd and from excerpts depicted throughout this chapter's discourse, the Christian monk was just as likely to command the demon for his own ends as the Jacobite heretic, and he was by no means above resorting to the various manipulations of rhetorical gestures and emotional blackmail to ritually coerce rather than simply supplicate the divine in the manner of Mesopotamia's other ritual practitioners. As Peter Brown and a host of subsequent scholars have implied, it was a paradox found throughout the monastic literature: the 'holy men' of the hagiographies would embrace the powers and praxis of the identities they derided and denounced as impotent and diabolic. Indeed, the Christian ascetic would fashion himself, at least in part, through a simultaneous acknowledgement and denial of those religious cognates who comprised the broader spiritual ecology of Late Antique Mesopotamia- those they labelled 'sorcerers' and 'magicians'.⁴⁸²

A complex array of Mesopotamian ritual specialists proclaimed to have been able to make their needs, and indeed the needs of others, known in heaven. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter One; the various 'revelation adjurations' of the Hekhalot literature were assumed to have furnished the 'Yored Merkavah' with an insight into the celestial realm but also an insight into the future; into the meaning of one's dreams; into the full

⁴⁸¹ Though written in reference to the monks of Coptic Egypt, I believe Frankfurter's comments are equally relevant here. See, D. Frankfurter, 'The Perils of Love: Magic and Countermagic in Coptic Egypt' in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 10:3-4 (2001), pp.480-500 One might also consult P. Brown's suggestions, in P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred*, pp.66-67. According to Brown, 'Long and intimate duels with the local sorcerer were almost *de rigueur* in the life of the successful saint. Sometimes one even senses that the one is a doublet, rather than an enemy, of the other, [67].

⁴⁸² See D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, p.239

complexities of Torah; and even into various aspects of healing and exorcism.⁴⁸³ To this we might add the expertise of those who produced an array of adjurational devices so as to adjure the divine and curse enemies; to enrich with fertility; to instil desire; convince judges and manifest every kind of conceivable solution to man's manifest problems. Likewise, non-monastic persons, Christian or otherwise, would turn to monks for an array of supernatural solutions, including adjurations for revelations of the future, healing, and exorcisms. The universal apologia of an array of hagiographers, relating the inadequacies of their efforts to describe the range and extent of the saint's miraculous repertoire, would in many ways illustrate the level of expectation attributed to Christian piety and the concerns which adjurations could address: 'If I were to write down all his acts, how many sick he healed, how many evil devils he drove out, I think that much time would not be sufficient for this, and that many volumes would not contain the multitude of might deeds and wonders...'⁴⁸⁴ As other ritual specialists sought to employ a veritable smorgasbord of notably efficacious substances to manifest the desired end of their adjurations, so a number of narratives explored here have described how the saints would dispense blessed oil and henena, and various other substances to communicate the saint's blessing via proxy. According to Rabban Sergius, one monk gave a woman 'deprived of the blessing of children' three 'little cakes of martyr's dust' saying to her: 'My daughter, take these and go to thy house in faith, and each day take one little cake, and you shall have two sons', whilst other monks would equally prescribe different concoctions based upon the saint's henena for the sake of mediating various blessings upon the necessitous.⁴⁸⁵ The monks of Late Antiquity may have pursued the disciplines of their gruelling ascetic regime to achieve the overall goal of ultimate salvation, but it would seem that they and others saw more limited and immediate pay-offs to their ascetic labours- a notion articulated here in terms of a kind of practical mysticism, expressed according to a ritualised potential of performative gestures and verbal acumen through which to potentially curse and to bless.

Some would seem to have underplayed or even glossed over the ability of the saint's to engage with the divine and manifest the miraculous entirely, rejecting the perceptions of those who sought their relief as ultimately misguided, and the otherwise

483 For a discussion on the exoteric character of the Hekhalot literature and its instruction to introduce ascender's to the potential of adjurational means of celestial insight, see I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, pp.122-23; 137; 143; 156-157, and Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, pp.37-, 375, 385-86.

484 'Book V, Chapter XVII' in *The Book of Governors*, p.560 is just one albeit largely characteristic example of this al universal component of the hagiographical apologia.

485 'Folio 49b', *The Life of Rabban Hormisd*, p.262.

legitimate practices of miraculous healing as inappropriate for the truly ascetic monk. We might at this point recall an excerpt already formerly alluded to in this chapter, which would relate how a governor sought the miraculous intervention of Simeon Stylites for an abnormal and seemingly untreatable curvature of the spine.⁴⁸⁶ Simeon had said to him: 'I am a sinful man and least of all men, and my hands are not like those of all the rest of the bishops and monks which they lay upon thee. Moreover, one thing I say to thee, that for a man to heal a man without the will of God is impossible. I will commit thee to the hands of the living God... he who can heal thee from the terrible affliction which thou hast'.⁴⁸⁷ In his view, illness, pain, poverty and other afflictions of the human condition were trials to be endured for the sake of spiritual well-being, and evidently, he deemed himself insufficient in his sufferance to warrant divine disposal of the potential he attributes to other, more experienced bishops and monks. Simeon in this excerpt would seem to have seen his role as a spiritual rather than physical healer; correcting the governor's understanding of healing as something to be sought through the Lord's blessing rather than demanded of the saint and his mediation, thus flatly rejecting the saint's attested role within the hagiographer's discourse as ritual specialist. Still, whatever the underlying purpose of this largely anomalous detail, it would seem that Simeon's hagiographer by no means sought to maintain this position, with his broader discourse pointing instead to its hero as a conventional miracle-working holy man, whose sanctity was demonstrated rather than undermined by the spiritual gifts that he manifest. Simeon, may himself have claimed that he was no ritual specialist, but his biographer would henceforth depict him as in fact being precisely one of those who profess to 'who lay their hand upon thee', and mediate the ritualised potential of their innate sanctity. Whether Simeon would have liked it or not, indeed despite his efforts to emphasise the contrary, people believed or rather hagiographer's liked those people to believe that the holy man had a special relationship with God and thus could provide divine aid through ritualised means. He was a person who lived with, talked to, and even negotiated with the divine and the demonic; indeed he knew how to communicate with and persuade beings that others could neither see nor hear, they knew the right words to say and the correct gestures to perform, and invested power over the supernatural friend and foe by doing so.

In this respect, the Christian ascetic would resemble other ritual experts who professed to enjoy an intimate contact with higher beings- indeed, sometimes even

⁴⁸⁶ 'Lent, p.140; Syriac, p.522' in *The Life of Simeon Stylites*.

⁴⁸⁷ 'Ibid.

uncomfortably so. Examining a story from the 'Histories of Mar Qardagh' serves to make this comparison all too explicit; with the identity of the saint as an individual intimate with the god he serves, but also proficient in the ritualised means of manifesting its potential, assumed from an uninitiated Zoroastrian perspective to have had less to do with a carefully nurtured relationship with the divine, than deviant sorcery.⁴⁸⁸ Considered within its broader literary framework, it was a suggestion which we might contextualise in terms of the prejudices of a Zoroastrian elite against the beliefs of a persecuted Christian minority.⁴⁸⁹ But, one might wonder whether this account of one Zoroastrian's assessment of the demeanour and practices of the Christian Holy man, would in fact, reveal something other than an indoctrinated bigotry; indeed might his response have eluded to an alternative, and even broader perception of the piety and practice of Christian Holy men, from beyond the perspective of normative monastic ideology? The excerpt with which this discourse is primarily concerned revolves around a particular episode of encounter between the ascetic monk and the Zoroastrian world of Qardagh the Marzbān; one which would take place not only in that Zoroastrian of spaces but also to the detriment of the

488 'The Life of Mar Qardagh', is a seventh century source perhaps best known for its depiction of the 'Life' of just one of the many 'Christian heroes', whose martyrdoms would punctuate a period of profound and sustained persecution for Mesopotamia's Christian minority, during the reign of Shapur II in the Fourth Century (309-379 C.E), Bahram V (420-438), Yazdegird III (438-457) and Khusrō (531-579). Its texts are just one example of the burgeoning corpus of East Syrian martyr literature, which would bear witness to the generations of intermittent oppression and intimidation which had largely characterised the Christian experience of Late Antique Sassanian rule, but look beyond the narratives of persecution, and the 'Life of Qardagh' offers the historian of Late Antique Christianity much more than just another hagiographer's account of pious fiction. Written anonymously and some two-three centuries after the hero at the centre of the legend (590-628 C.E), the 'life of Mar Qardagh' offers an extraordinary window from which to discern something, not only of the socio-political contexts of the Fourth Century in which Qardagh and many other Christian Holy Men like him had been persecuted and martyred, but also rather interestingly, something of the imaginative world of seventh century Christian literature. To adapt a phrase by Freya Stark, the story of Mar Qardagh enables one to 'breathe' the climate of northern Iraq on the eve of Islamic conquest, to understand something of that which had shaped the mind and words of its hagiographer. Of course in this respect, the 'Life of Qardagh' was anything but exceptional, indeed this study hinges on the premise that the 'Lives' of those holy men hitherto discussed, might equally claim to offer a superb platform from which to examine the culture and society of that saint's hagiographer. What is distinctive then about this particular 'pious fiction', is how the same rhetorical strategies and literary themes employed elsewhere to depict both the sanctity and potential of the saint, would here, highlight a complex and still relatively unexplored dimension of Late Antique Mesopotamian spirituality. In a small but significant episode of the narrative, the historian is offered an unusual and incredibly valuable insight not only into Christian expectations of the pious, but into Zoroastrian interpretations of the precise nature of their potential, which in this case was deemed emphatically to have had less to do with carefully nurtured relationships with the divine, than the deviant sorcery of a "magician". All quotations are taken from J. W. Walker's (trans.), 'The History of the Heroic Deeds of Mar Qardagh the Victorious Martyr' in *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), pp 19-19-69.

489 The persecution of Persian Christianity under Sassanian rule had been the subject of significant study over recent years, see in particular S. P. Brock, 'Christians in the Sassanian Empire. A Case of Divided Loyalties' in *Studies in Church History* 18, 1982, pp. 1-19 & S. P. Brock, *The History of the Holy Mar Ma'in with a Guide to the Persian Martyr Acts*, (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008). For various explanations for the outbreak of persecution under Shapur II, including the standard view on the connection between Constantine's conversion and the outbreak of war, see. F. Decret, "Les Conséquences sur le Christianisme en Perse de L'affrontement des Empires Romain et Sassanide", in *Recherches Augustiniennes* 14 (1979), p.140; J. P. Asmussen, "Christians in Iran" in *The Cambridge History of Iran: The Seleucid, Parthian and Sassanid Periods* 3[2] (1983), pp. 924-48, who also cites the role of the Magi in spurring the persecutions. The argument is taken further by P. McKenzie and J. A. Crook, "Roman Law and the Law of the Medes and Persians: Decius's and Valerian's Persecution of Christianity" in P. McKenzie (ed.), *Thinking Like a Lawyer: Essays on Legal History and General History for John Crook on his Eightieth Birthday*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002), pp. 253-269. J. Rist meanwhile would suggest that Shapur's anger in the wake of his failure at the start of hostilities with Rome, may equally have played a significant part in Shapur's persecution of the Christians, see J. Rist, "Die Verfolgung der Christen in Spätantiken Sasanidenreich: Ursachen, Verlauf und Folgen", in *Oriens Christianus* 80, (1996), pp.17-42 [30].

Marzbān's pursuit of that most Zoroastrian expression of elite recreation.⁴⁹⁰ Indeed, in an adroit recasting of the Sassanian narrative models behind epic traditions such as the *Shahnama* of Firdowsi, Qardagh's hagiographer artfully combines Sassanian epic motifs alongside hagiographical models of Christian triumph to portray a moment of Christian subversion of Zoroastrian elitism; describing their first encounter not at a moment or location linked to Zoroastrian devotion but rather to the preparation of athletic performance. The hermit arrives in Arbela just as the *Marzban* is 'going out to the stadium to play ball'.⁴⁹¹

'And one day when Qardagh was going out to the stadium to play ball, behold, holy Abdiso came to meet him, cut off his path, and crossed before him. And when Qardagh saw that Abdiso had crossed before him, he burned with anger; and said to those accompanying him, 'this man is an evil omen'. And he ordered two soldiers to strike the holy one upon his face... Qardagh then returned to his house, and after staying there a little while, he arose and again mounted to go to the stadium. Then holy Abdiso, burning with the zeal of God, raised his hand and traced the sign of the Cross and said, 'Mighty Lord God, show him Your Glory, and reveal to him Your power that he many know that You are the true God. And when they arrived at the stadium and begin to the strike the ball while racing along on horses, the ball stuck to the ground. And they were unable to move it from is place. And immediately [Qardagh] ordered one of his soldiers to dismount and take the ball in his hand and hurl it far away. But when he took the ball from the ground and threw it with force, the ball fell before his feet. And all of his soldiers did this one after the other, but accomplished nothing. Then they said in their astonishment, 'Surely that man who encountered us is a sorcerer, and by his enchantments he had bound our ball and put a stop to our pleasure', but one of them replied

490 *Marzban's* according to J. T. Walker can be translated to mean a high military official, (the title is often translated as "Lord of the Marches" in charge of a frontier zone), see J. T. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh*, p.22.

491 The premise of this excerpt strongly echoes the contours of Sassanian Epic tradition, as revealed in Zoroastrian literature and in a wide range of Sassanian art. The epic tradition is full of stories of Sassanian kings and heroes who excel on the battlefield, on the hunt, and most often of all, on the polo field. "The Chronicle of Ardashir" cites excellence in the game as a distinguishing mark of elite identity. The Princes and heroes of 'Shahnama' are avid players at both the Persian and foreign courts, with a certain Gushtasp earning the hand of Caesar's daughter by a display of polo and archery skills. See A. Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings* (Penguin Classics; Deluxe edition, 2007), and additional references in F. Wolff, *Glossar zu Firdosis Schahname* (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1935). For further reading on the significance of this conscious emulation of Shahnama and Sassanian Epic tradition, both to the identity of the Marzban and the hagiographical narrative, see Walker's discussion in J. D. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh*, pp.131-144.

and said, 'When we were getting ready to mount, I saw that man raise his right hand, and he made the shape of the cross of the Christians, and his lips were moving like someone who is murmuring an incantation'.⁴⁹²

The intentional act of 'cutting off his path', and the subsequent miracle of the frozen polo ball, would both curtail the *Marzban's* efforts to recreate in Arbela something of the aristocratic lifestyle seen at the Persian court and the pursuits attributed to the heroes of *Shahnama*. In contrast to those heroes of epic tradition, reported to have effortlessly struck the polo ball high into the sky; indeed in contrast even to those nobles whose athletic prowess and horsemanship at the Persian court was formerly described, Qardagh and his peers could barely make the ball roll- let alone demonstrate anything resembling the skills expected of their noble pedigree. Qardagh was right to identify Abdiso as 'an omen'; indeed Qardagh's soldier identifies the problem precisely when he observes that the Christian 'Abdiso' had prohibited their 'pleasure'. Though, perhaps what is particularly striking about their assessment; is how it would immediately identify the power he wielded as that of a deviant 'sorcerer' rather than devoted man of God- his means assumed to have derived less from pious prayer than from his knowledge of an incantation practitioner's powerful enchantments. Their accusations, of course, were loaded with the obvious and derogatory connotations we might expect from one whose identity had been so easily unravelled; indeed their attempt to 'other' the Christian holy man with suggestions of deviancy and dangerous practicioning would carry the full weight of early Sassanian prejudice. But, might this assessment of Abdiso's 'murmuring' and powerful ritual also allude to the difficulty of negotiating the boundaries which, according to monastic authors, had supposedly defined and differentiated the two.⁴⁹³ Paraphrasing suggestions made by E. M. Butler and a number of subsequent scholars ever since, the Syriac Christian Holy man of Late Antiquity had participated in a religious environment which he shared with a variety of other, alternative ritual specialists, which would not only blur the boundaries of their practice as Qardagh's accusations against Abdiso would imply, but lead to an inevitable

⁴⁹² Qardagh, 11 p.26

⁴⁹³ David Brakke is one of a number of scholars, including Peter Brown and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, who have sought to question and emphasise the striking similarity of the Christian Holy man's identity and role in Late Antique Mesopotamian society, to that of Mesopotamia's other ritual specialists. Brakke suggest that the Monastic authors of Late Antiquity defined and differentiated the identity and practices of the 'magician' simply upon his religious affiliation, as someone who had not taken on the more particular identity of the Christian monk. What is perhaps particularly interesting about his suggestion is that had the 'magician' of done so, his otherwise 'magical' activities, would easily have been embraced as a legitimate consequence of piety, in the eyes of the monastic authors. According to this popular line of scholarly thinking, their differences had been based on little more than semantics, and is an understanding which; having reviewed so much of the hagiographical literature produced within the Late Antique period, I am inclined to agree with. See D. Brakke, 2006, p.227.

overlap of identity.⁴⁹⁴ Indeed, as Peter Brown implies, ‘when we get close to a holy man, it is often possible to glimpse, in the penumbra of his reputation, a busy world of cultic experimentation which, though disapproved of in our sources as the work of rivals, had, in fact, incorporated crucial elements of the Christian Saint’s own thought world’.⁴⁹⁵ Suggestions of the proximity of the Christian Holy man to Mesopotamia’s other ritual specialists, and of his affiliation with the rituals of incantation rather than with God, are an interesting but also fairly typical interpretation of this most definitive example of Christian piety. Indeed, the Christian insistence upon the place of miracle within Christian Orthodoxy inspired a long catalogue of damning assessments of Christianity’s association with sorcery; and it is perhaps upon closer consideration of the vocabulary used by our own hagiographer to articulate the damning assessment and accusations of Qardagh’s soldiers, that those suggestions are perhaps in part reignited.⁴⁹⁶

By momentarily turning away from the narrative and perceptions of the Holy man, and by turning our attention instead to the vocabulary with which this excerpt and those suggestions of his identity were written, we are offered an insight not only into Late Antique perceptions of the Holy man’s practice but into the mind of the Christian hagiographer, whose familiarity with terms such as ‘ܥܠܡܐ’ (sorcerer) ‘ܥܠܡܐ’ (incanting), ‘ܥܠܡܐܝܐ’ (sorcery) and ‘ܥܠܡܐ’ (binding), presents questions about just how familiar our hagiographer as much as the Christian holy man, had been with the religiosity of Mesopotamia’s other ritual specialists.⁴⁹⁷ Of all the words used to articulate the damning assessments of Abdiso’s character and practice, perhaps the most telling is the hagiographer’s use and familiarity with the notion of ‘binding’ from the root ‘ܥܠܡܐ’, for it was a term both loaded with significance and integral to the praxis of contemporaneous incantation across the Northern Mesopotamian region.⁴⁹⁸ In this

494 E. M. Butler, *The Myth of the Magus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.87. According to Peter Brown, the Holy Man ‘belonged to a category of persons who were assumed, by their supplicants, to have access to knowledge of the Holy in all its manifestations’ and such expectations inevitably committed them to activities beyond the accepted method of prayer. See Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred*, p.69

495 Ibid, p.68

496 James Carlton Paget suggests that much of the apologetic literature surrounding early accounts of Christian miracle was essentially defensive in nature, with a keen sense of the need to defend these powerful examples of Christian piety against the suggestion that the miraculous proved their practitioners to be sorcerers. The debate about Christianity’s relationship to unorthodox praxis in many ways is as old as Christianity itself, and is perhaps only added to by a review of the vocabulary which articulated those orthodox of Syriac Christian texts- the hagiography. For further reading of sorcery accusations, see J. C. Paget, ‘Miracles in early Christianity’ in G. H. Twelfree (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 131-149.

497 For translations see C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Hildesheim, Zurich and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1995), and M. Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon. A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion and Update of C. Brockelmann’s Lexicon Syriacum* (Piscataway, NJ: Eisenbrauns and Gorgias Press, 2009).

498 Sokoloff translates this synonymous of incantatory terms as ‘binding’, in its capacity as a legalistic term to denote contractual obligation as well as physical incarceration. Sokoloff also suggests that the term might also extend to denote ‘judgement’ and ‘punishment’, in the sense of

short excerpt from the 'Life of Qardagh', we read how the term was used by Qardagh's soldiers to denote Abdiso's physical jurisdiction over the ball, so that it was no longer able to move according to the force of even the mightiest hit from the Polo mallet. Though what is interesting about this excerpt is that the term should have been used at all, for in so doing, it alluded to an understanding of Christian piety and potential, as something deriving from the deviant and dangerous world of sorcery (ܥܡܠܐ). By the power of his 'murmurings' (ܡܡܪܡܪܝܢܐ), Abdiso had not only exerted the force of invisible binds upon their ball, he had also sought to do so by exerting a command over the divine based entirely upon the recital of specific words and formulae, and by the posturing of one whose relationship to the forces he commanded had less to do with a carefully nurtured accord, than a technical know-how. Of course, though this account may have derived from the precedents of older hagiographical texts and monastic legends, the specific expressions used by Qardagh's soldiers had been placed in the mouths by none other than Qardagh's hagiographer himself, alluding to his own familiarity, not only with the words used by others to denote their understanding of the Holy man's practice, but of the underlying ideas and connotations they carried with them. In looking to the narrative of this excerpt, we discern something of the way in which the 'piety' and practices of the Christian Holy man were perceived beyond the normative perspective of monastic ideology, but look to the vocabulary with which it was articulated, and suddenly questions abound not only about the proximity and familiarity of the Christian holy man to the ritualistic practices of Mesopotamia's other ritual specialists, but about the complex cultural environment and imaginative models which contributed to our hagiographer's understanding of the potential and nature, of man's relationship to the divine.⁴⁹⁹

The apparent resemblance of identities alluded to in the 'Histories' of Mar Qardagh is only further added to by those stories which present an image of the monk, not only in disturbing proximity to those they deem to be 'sorcerers', but overlapping with the attributes of their competition. Perhaps in many ways, just as we might have come to expect from the hagiographical genre; a number of excerpts would relate how formerly pagan priests and even diabolically deluded heretics had chosen to convert,

excommunication, bound from making contact or from influencing the vulnerable. The Syriac term 'ܥܡܠܐ' has a Jewish equivalent 'אמל' and can be found along with its various inflections within Jewish Aramaic incantations. See, 'Text 1, line 12', 'Text 10, line 2' and 'Text 61, line 1' in Isbell, (1975) and 'Text M163, line 1', 'Text M164, line 1' and 'Text M103, line 4' in (Levene, 2003) for a few examples.

499 Marco Moriggi has similarly drawn upon the vocabulary of non-ritual texts to illustrate a familiarity with, and even a practice of the 'sorcery' which Church authorities otherwise sought to denounce and prohibit. See M. Moriggi, 'Amulets and Magical Practice', p.377 This study has sought to limit textual comparison and attempts to draw connections between the resonance of textual features, but Moriggi has quite convincingly shown how texts as much as ideas were broadly transmitted and translated through the ecclesiastical texts of the monks.

and henceforth lead their lives as religious virtuosi in the guise of Christian monks, having learned how the demons they served were unable to triumph against the Christian's affiliations with the Divine. Indeed, an excerpt from the 'Life' of Rabban Bar Idta relates, for example, how a certain Magian 'Yazdadh' had been convinced to convert and join the monastic community of Mar John, and under the tutelage of the holy man Teris-Isho, how he had learned to miraculously restore sight to the blind and provide healing to the necessitous, as a reformed and now distinctly Christian mediator of divine rather than diabolic favours.⁵⁰⁰ In turn, just as non-monastic and even non-Christian virtuosi were able to permeate the boundaries dividing monk from other ritual practitioners, so the monks themselves were reported to have faced the temptations of returning, and even converting, to former or newly formed pagan identities. The Book of Governors relates how a certain Sahdona was sent to a monastery of Jacobite 'sorcerers' so as to 'hold discussion' and convince them 'that the stubble of their doctrine was not able [to resist] in the smallest degree, the fire of the true wisdom and powerful demonstrations of these men of the East', this 'brilliant star', despite his success at having 'destroyed and made of none effect all the labour and care' of the Jacobite brethren, is reported to have fallen victim to the temptations of their leader's 'sorcery':

Now that wicked old man who according to what I have learned from others was a sorcerer, commanded his disciples to entreat him to come in to see him, for [he wished] more particularly to hear from them concerning the petition that he had moved...And they say that when he had gone into the monastery to the old man, he bowed his head under his right hand; and thus, they say, the understanding of became corrupted from the true faith which he held'.⁵⁰¹

The story accounts for the circumstances of Sahdona's subsequent heresy; how 'little by little with the progress of time and change' he 'wrote books for those who denied the correctness of the opinion that there are two natures and two persons in one created form', but more than that, this story was a reluctant account of the fragility and even the fluidity of those boundaries, dividing virtuous monks from deceived and in

⁵⁰⁰ 'Section XV' in *The Life of Rabban Bar-Idta*, p.219

⁵⁰¹ 'Book II, Chapter VI' in *The Book of Governors*, p.129

this case, fallen ‘sorcerers’.⁵⁰² Here, the dynamic of the relationship between monk and sorcerer is presented matter-of-factly; they are colleagues who follow two separate paths towards a relationship with the Divine, but within the cultural milieu of Late Antique Mesopotamia, sometimes those paths would not only convene but converge.

Stories of non-Christian virtuosos converting and becoming monks, and those describing the failings of monks who adopt the identities of those they had formerly deemed ‘sorcerers’, suggests not only overlap and close proximity between the two characters of this Mesopotamian drama but competition. Indeed, a number of the narratives explored in this thesis have hinted at the friction between saint and ‘sorcerer’; with a certain Ignatius almost succeeding in his attempt to condemn Rabban Hormizd as a diabolic miscreant for what was, at least according to his hagiographer, his various acts of ‘righteous’ sabotage against the institutional deviance of the Jacobite creed.⁵⁰³ Upon realising that ‘the course of his sorcery had become useless’ Ignatius had reportedly sought to repent ‘for the sinfulness in which I was held fast’, and ‘to become a sincere penitent through the Holy Hormizd’. The ‘sorcerers’, ‘magicians’, ‘deviants’ and ‘devils’ of these narratives convert when they learn that the demons they either command or worship are unable to undermine their Christian opponents, and whilst their conversion was on many occasions held up as a tangible expression of Christian triumph, in the case of Ignatius, Christian triumph was proved not with acceptance of repentance or Christian forgiveness but with divine condemnation and death.⁵⁰⁴ These stories would use the demonic to establish the sense of clear boundaries between the monk and the non-monastic virtuoso by aligning those beyond the particular identity of the Christian monk with the demons the monk fights; the monastic victory of the demonic enables the conversion of sorcerer to monk. But as David Frankfurter rightly concludes, this sense of dichotomy was precisely that- a sense, derived from the perception and in turn from the agenda of a literature which sought to distinguish itself in a cultural milieu marked by the presence and praxis of a panoply of ritual experts all offering their answers and resolutions.⁵⁰⁵ As I have sought to emphasise here and indeed throughout this chapter, the attempt to artificially dichotomise ‘saint’ and ‘sorcerer’ masks not only the reality of a far more fluid range of religious virtuosos than is implied by the suggestion of polar opposites, but of a Christian

502 This line of argument has been taken by Brakke, see D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 234

503 Folios 81b-82a’ in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, pp.151-152

504 ‘Folios 81b-82a’ in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, pp.151-152

505 Frankfurter’s comments relate to slightly different context, but his sentiment would nevertheless resonate in the current context of this chapter’s discourse. See D. Frankfurter, “The Perils of Love: Magic and Countermagic in Coptic Egypt,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10 (2001): 480–500.

identity in particular, which was not only far more complex than the image of the ‘saint at prayer’ but paradoxical in its simultaneous embrace and rejection, of the identities he derided as demonic. Perhaps nowhere is the paradoxical complexity of the saint’s image and reputation made more apparent, than in the excerpt with which I would like to conclude this chapter’s discourse: ‘The hagiography of the Honourable Bastomagh’.

The Hagiography of the Honourable Bastohmagh

‘And it came to pass that once when Bastohmagh was passing over the bridge, he saw some sorceresses washing clothes by the [village of] Zab, and they were singing to each other the songs of devils, and everything which was round about them danced as they sang. Now as he drew near to them on his way a small fragment of one of the refrains which they were singing became fixed in his mind, and when he had gone a short distance from them, he began to meditate upon what he had heard. And straightaway devils joined themselves to him openly, and required of him, saying, ‘Command us to do something which thou wishest us to do’ [...] And he drove the mule upon which he was riding along quickly until he came to the cell of the holy old man, and he said to the devils, ‘Take this mule, and watch him until I come out;’ and he went in trembling, and revealed to Mar Jacob what had happened to him. And Rabban answered and said to him, ‘repeat before me what thou hast heard’, and while Bastohmagh was repeating, Rabban wrote down upon the ground with his finger what he heard. And when he had finished it all Rabban made the sign of the cross over the writing, and said to Bastohmagh, ‘Repeat what thou hast already repeated’, and he said to him, ‘I know nothing of it whatsoever’, and Rabban answered, and said as he laughed, ‘rise up, and look after thy mule, for the devils have loosed him and gone away.’

Thomas of Marga, *The Book of Governors*, ‘Chapter XXIV, Book I

It is within his introductory remarks and apologia to ‘The Book of Governors’ that Thomas of Marga would imply how he writes to make known, and thus to glorify the triumphs of the LORD’s holy men. Surely, this was the task of hagiography: to inspire

and to instruct, but also to honour the divine without whom they had been little more than the 'tools of a craft without the craftsman, incapable of anything'.⁵⁰⁶ Though in so doing, Thomas like so many of the hagiographers of the Syriac Orient would offer a fascinating insight not only into Late Antique expectations of both the potential of profound piety, but into a variety of unusual patterns of Late Antique Christian ritual activity far beyond the exclusively Christian art of conciliatory prayer. In this final analysis of Late Antique Christian hagiography, we take a closer look at one of Thomas Marga's most interesting hagiographical dedications: an amusing account of the life of a certain 'Bastohmagh', from which we discern an imagination rooted in the traditions of a New Testament heritage, but also intricately in touch with the expectations and patterns of religiosity of his wider cultural environment.⁵⁰⁷ Of course, there was nothing new about his tales of Late Antique Christian holy men orchestrating miraculous feats like Christ and their apostolic forebears. Indeed, themes of demonic affliction and redemptive healing, and an extensive array of other extraordinary possibilities at the hands of Christianity's Holy men are prevalent themes within the literary framework of Mesopotamia's Late Antique hagiographies, as the examples explored in this chapter clearly demonstrate. Yet, it is from accounts such as that of the 'Life of Bastohmagh'; its suggestions of the demonic afflictions suffered and more importantly its suggestion of solution, that one might begin to consider how precedents of New Testament narratives, were perhaps reinforced and even enhanced by the wider Mesopotamian environment to which these hagiographical narratives belonged and were inevitably couched.⁵⁰⁸ Thus far, this chapter has theorised about how familiar Late Antique hagiographers had been with the concepts and the vocabulary of a Mesopotamian religiosity which sought to command and demand as much as placate and conciliate the supernatural, but just how familiar were the devout hands behind these hagiographical dedications, with its ritual practices?⁵⁰⁹

506 A general introduction to Syriac hagiographical literature can be found in a contribution by S. P. Brock to *Byzantine Hagiography: A Handbook*, ed. Stefanos Efthymiadis (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2008). A very useful guide to the world of specifically Syriac saints is provided by J. Fiey in *Saints syriacques*, ed. L. I. Conrad (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 2004).

507 Morony argues that the narrative which surrounded the 'Holy Man' and his engagement with a malevolent world defined by a variety of tangible Demonic adversaries, belonged to the far older religious traditions of Mesopotamia, associated with Sumerian and Babylonian concepts of redemptive healing and revelation. He suggests that the precedent of those concepts which defined and surrounded the Holy Man, can be found in the cult which surrounded the Sumerian God 'Ea', later known as 'Marduk' (the Physician) who redeemed those tormented by the demons of sickness and misfortune. See M. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Invasion* (Princeton University Press, 1984) 418-424. Geller suggests that parallels between Ancient Mesopotamian Magic and later Aramaic Incantation Bowls are the exception rather than the rule, but suggests that Ancient Babylonian religiosity most likely did shape much late patterns of Aramaic religious behaviour. See M. Geller, 'Tablets and Magic Bowls' in S. Shaked (ed.) *Officina Magica: Essays on the Practice of Magic in Antiquity* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2005) 53-73 (53).

508 Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Invasion*, p.420.

509 Only a small number of scholars have sought to investigate the relationship between the Syriac church and dealings with the supernatural in Late Antiquity. Some scholars have given particular attention to the Eastern Church Fathers and their hagiographical texts, questioning their

The excerpt begins with what one might describe as a small apologia all of its own; referring to the tendency of contemporaneous hagiographers to emit extraneous detail, and therefore to his own subjective selection of that which he chose 'to omit' and 'made ready to write down'. It was a fairly typical demonstration of the hagiographer's methodology; justifying that which he deemed worthy of inclusion and his reasoning to omit that which was not. Though, one wonders if in so doing, our hagiographer had anticipated the frustration of those to whom he attempted to justify his particular inclusions, and if so, why might it have proven so controversial? Indeed, our hagiographer had by no means felt compelled to offer the same defence for his other hagiographical dedications, especially for such a small inclusion, and least of all for those falling mid-way through his narrative. What was it about this particular excerpt, that might have inspired such a powerful aversion amongst our hagiographer's readership, and what was it about this particular tradition, which inspired our hagiographer to include it.⁵¹⁰ Cast against a backdrop of hagiographical anxiety and apologetic justification, our excerpt begins to describe something of an unusual and defining moment in what was otherwise a routine administrative tour of vast estates in the 'Country of Hidhaiyab', recounting the noble Bastomagh's arrival at the ruined village of 'Estwan', and the cacophony of raucous and discordant tones of three washerwomen whose songs disturbed the silence of an otherwise abandoned landscape. Theirs was the jovial merriment of women attempting to lessen the burden of an arduous and routine chore, or at least, so it had initially seemed. Indeed, we read how the shrieking and bellowing which Bastomagh had heard was not quite as innocent as he assumed, with the words of their songs seeming to affect the various vessels used to wash and separate their clothes, as well as the flora and fauna which had made the river's edge their home. That which had seemed inanimate, including

attitudes towards and concepts of various supernatural beliefs and practices. See D. E. Aune, 'Magic in Early Christianity' in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*. Edited by H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980) 1507-1557, N. Brox, 'Magie und Aberglaube an den Anfängen Christentums', in *Trier theologische Zeitschrift* 83 (1974), 157-80 but also Gollancz (2010).

510 David Brakke suggests that some monastic authors believed in but played down the abilities of monks to provide healings and other supernatural services, rejecting such activities as inappropriate for the monk. Whilst his example comes from the Coptic tradition, Brakke recalls how the monk Shenoute had declared to those who sought his help to uncover stolen items: 'Let no one come to me on account of this sort of thing. I am not that sort of person!' In his view, or at least in the view of his hagiographer, illness, pain, poverty and other such troubles were 'trials', usually sent by God 'for our salvation and the healing of our impieties' and thus best dealt with through endurance, prayer, and repentance. Remedies such as oil, special water, and animal parts, whether offered by 'charmers and sorcerers' or by 'the Church's presbyters and monks,' provided merely 'deceptive relief.' Shenoute believed that the monk's only tasks were to prepare himself for the final judgment and to call others to repentance, and thus he flatly rejected the role of the ritual specialist. Might this same mentality have shaped our hagiographer's anticipation of the aversion to his account of Bastomagh's affliction, and of the role of the holy man in offering a divine solution, for perhaps nowhere else is the Holy man's role as a ritual specialist, and his familiarity with the rituals of Mesopotamia's ritual specialists in particular, more clearly discerned than in this hagiographical excerpt. For further discussion of the monastic inclination to occasionally play down the role of the holy man as a man of wonders, see D. Brakke, p.228. For further discussion of Shenoute's disinclination to promote the potential of the Holy man, see Shenoute, *I See Your Eagerness* (Émile Amélineau, *Oeuvres de Shenoudi: Texte copte et traduction française* [Paris, 1907-1914], 2:69-72); *A14* (Orlandi, *Contra Origenistas*, 16-18).

rocks and pebbles but also various living things, began to dance uncontrollably to the rhythm of their chants; swaying and gyrating to what Bastomagh soon realised were the 'songs of devils'. Passing the time and lessening the burden of their toil they may have been, but they had sought their entertainment not through the merriment of singing, but through the comedic effect of the words which they sang- indeed, these women according to our hagiographer had been sorceresses. Aside from our hagiographer's recognition of the powerful, if sometimes unusual potential of Mesopotamia's other ritual specialists; what is striking about this excerpt is the particular suggestion of the potential of their song, and the powerful effect of its words upon those who heard and unwittingly recited them. The incredible scene of dancing domestic-ware was made possible not by the particular significance of the women Bastomagh had encountered, but by the inherent power of the words they articulated; words which as Bastomagh was about to find out for himself, held the power not only to command the inanimate to dance but the mischievous demonic entities which lay behind them..⁵¹¹

It is when Bastomagh began to meditate upon what he had heard and recite those words to himself that we start to get a sense of both the enhanced role of demonology within these hagiographical legends, as well as a Christian appreciation for the ritualised potential of Divine and Demonic words. With 'one of the refrains which they were singing fixed in his mind', we read: 'straightaway Devils joined themselves to him openly, and required of him, saying "Command us to do something which though wish us to do"'.⁵¹² By his illocution of the right words and formulae, and by his activation of their power through the correct ritual procedure, Bastomagh had albeit unwittingly acquired the authority to orchestrate the supernatural strength of the demonic according to his will and desire. One wonders if this was the case, why the washerwomen had not commanded the demon to wash their clothes rather than

⁵¹¹ David Brakke suggests that some monastic authors believed in but played down the abilities of monks to provide healings and other supernatural services, rejecting such activities as inappropriate for the monk. Whilst his example comes from the Coptic tradition, Brakke recalls how the monk Shenoute had declared to those who sort his help to uncover stolen items: 'Let no one come to me on account of this sort of thing. I am not that sort of person!' In his view, or at least in the view of his hagiographer, illness, pain, poverty and other such troubles were 'trials', usually sent by God 'for our salvation and the healing of our impieties' and thus best dealt with through endurance, prayer, and repentance. Remedies such as oil, special water, and animal parts, whether offered by 'charmners and sorcerers' or by 'the Church's presbyters and monks,' provided merely 'deceptive relief.' Shenoute believed that the monk's only tasks were to prepare himself for the final judgment and to call others to repentance, and thus he flatly rejected the role of the ritual specialist. Might this same mentality have shaped our hagiographer's anticipation of the aversion to his account of Bastomagh's affliction, and of the role of the holy man in offering a divine solution, for perhaps nowhere else is the Holy man's role as a ritual specialist, and his familiarity with the rituals of Mesopotamia's ritual specialists in particular, more clearly discerned than in this hagiographical except. For further discussion of the monastic inclination to occasionally play down the role of the holy man as a man of wonders, see D. Brakke, p.228. For further discussion of Shenoute's disinclination to promote the potential of the Holy man, see Shenoute, *I See Your Eagerness* (Émile Amélineau, *Oeuvres de Shenoudi: Texte copte et traduction française* [Paris, 1907-1914], 2:69-72); A14 (Orlandi, *Contra Origenistas*, 16-18).

⁵¹² *The Book of Governors*, 'Chapter XXIV, Book I', p.84

entertain them as they struggled to do so; a lack of foresight which would contrast with the enterprise of Bastomagh's initial inventive schemes for his diabolic entourage. Having 'acted craftily with them', commanding them to perform rudimentary labours as well as other demeaning tasks such as gathering rocks for what seems no apparent reason; our excerpt relates that Bastomagh commanded the demons to 'follow me where I am going'. Far from leading his overly-attentive demonic servants to their next possible exploit, however; our excerpt relates how Bastomagh's intent was not to further profit from their servitude, but in fact, to remove them from their yoke according to the command of the saint, and the authority of his affiliation with the Divine. Leading them to his cell and to their inevitable humiliation, our narrative relates how Bastomagh commanded his overly-attentive demons to the rudimentary and purposefully demeaning chore of caring for his donkey, whilst he sought to reveal to the holy Rabban Mar Jacob all the unusual circumstances which had brought him to the ascetic's retreat. It was a small detail which was nevertheless an interesting insight in itself, alluding to the administrator's but also to a broader Mesopotamian expectation of the potential and repertoire of Christian piety, not to mention something of the identity of the holy man himself. Though, what is perhaps most striking about this hagiographical scenario, is the Holy Rabban's understanding of both the predicament which Bastomagh now faced and his familiarity with the techniques and procedures which Bastomagh had inadvertently followed, to produce this unexpected, if entirely unwanted authority over the demonic hordes.

Rabban Mar Jacob's response to Bastomagh's diabolic predicament raises some interesting questions about both the religious environment of the holy men whose lives these hagiographies attempt to recall, but also the patterns of behaviour which helped shape the full expression of our hagiographer's religiosity.⁵¹³ Not only would Mar Jacob identify the power of these 'demonic words' as the cause of Bastomagh's affliction, but recognise the potential of their reproduction in the form of a written incantation, which he would write in the dirt floor and prescribe as an appropriate remedy. Indeed, one might assume that Mar Jacob had perhaps dealt with the unwelcome attention of demons before or perhaps that our hagiographer, Thomas of Marga, was himself fluent in the language and familiar with the rituals of Mesopotamia's 'Sorcerers', and other ritual specialists. Yet, there was one aspect of the

⁵¹³ The recent work of Derek Krueger on the Hagiographer and his writing has emphasised the importance of the hagiographical text in understanding the real 'flesh and blood' community and author which lurk behind their words, thoughts and motifs. The task of the historian is not only to sort out and make sense of their stories, but to ascertain their value in helping us to understand the social and cultural contexts in which they were written. See D. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East: Rereading Late Antique Religion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

holy man's ritual which, though it may have resembled the ritualistic means and techniques of Mesopotamia's other ritual specialists, would nevertheless define and distinguish the righteousness of his behaviour, and save the image of the Rabban's respectability in the eyes of its monastic readership. Having so effectively reproduced the praxis of the incantation practitioner, we read how the Rabban 'made the sign of the cross over those words and said to Bastomagh 'repeat once more what thou hast repeated' and Bastomagh replied, 'I know nothing of it whatsoever'.⁵¹⁴ It was an incredible feat, recognising and reversing the technology which had made Bastomagh a leader of demons, though perhaps more interestingly; it was also an unimaginable admission of the efficacy of the rituals and incantations of Mesopotamia's other ritual practitioners. By signing the cross over the written incantation, Mar Jacob made a technology and set of ritual practices otherwise deemed too contrary to the practices of the truly pious, both righteous and legitimate, and had employed its techniques to an effective end. Here, Thomas of Marga revealed his own familiarity with the practices of incantation and the legends of those who had also allegedly recognised and exercised its potential, but he had also openly endorsed it as an effective and powerful component in the Holy Man's toolkit. In what would prove to be a comedic end to this account of the power of demonic words and their invocation; our excerpt relates how no sooner had the words been undone by the Rabban's invocation the entire horde of subservient demons had fled, including those instructed to hold the reigns of his donkey. Bastomagh may eventually have found his wandering donkey, but not before having travelled a considerable distance to do so: no doubt, a justified punishment for having been subjected to the company of the demon because of his master's naivety.

Even though the Christian hagiographers of the excerpts explored in this chapter attempted to stylise the identity of the holy man in contradistinction to the 'magical activities' of Mesopotamia's other ritual specialists, there is much with which to point to a Christian familiarity, and even a Christian resort to their magico-charismatic approach to the supernatural. The conclusions arrived at in this chapter has value in themselves, helping scholars to appreciate the extent to which these expressions of Syriac Christian religiosity were furnished with ideas and concepts from the broader, inter-denominational religious environment from which they emerged, and evidently participated. Yet, the particular interest of this material stems from the fact that it provides us with a literary lens through which, with sensitivity, we can not only look back into the imaginative world of our hagiographer but understand

⁵¹⁴ Ibid, p.85

something of the precedent of those more recent patterns of Christian religiosity, discerned by Gollancz. Looking back through this lens of Late Antique hagiographical literature, one of the notable results of our analysis is our revision of the impression given by the hagiographer of the Christian monk and his ritual practices as both different and superior to Mesopotamia's other ritual specialists, with whom he shared Mesopotamia's religious landscape. In reality, as David Frankfurter rightly concludes, 'the dichotomy between sorcerer and monk in the monastic literature, where the one orchestrates through his knowledge of the name of Christ what the other sets through magic, masks a much more fluid range of ritual experts both within and without the monastic fold'. On closer inspection of the hagiographical literature, it would seem that the Late Antique Christian Holy man was just as likely to adapt the vocabulary and ritual practices of those 'magicians' and 'sorcerers' whose various binding spells and incantations have been made available to the scholar in abundance. Indeed, the Christian holy man may have been a 'superior' ritual specialist, but it had not prevented him from embracing the techniques and supposed powers of the identities that they renounced and derided as impotent and demonic, a fact which serves to illuminate clearly the integral connection of these texts with the wider blueprint of Late Antique Mesopotamian patterns of belief and behaviour. Perhaps Gollancz was not far wide of the mark in suggesting that the ideas and patterns of belief which he discerned from the nineteenth-century Christian charms of Northern Mesopotamia, had survived many centuries by taking refuge in the cell of the monk, both in the hagiographical tales which he told and in the ritual incantation texts which relayed them over centuries.⁵¹⁵

Concluding thoughts

This chapter has by no means sought to offer an exhaustive study into the wealth of Late Antique Mesopotamian hagiographical materials, nor then shall it attempt to draw any over-arching conclusions about what the limited scope of these materials might reveal to the historian. One might at least begin to conclude with some

⁵¹⁵ Based upon what he had found in more recent Syriac incantation texts, Gollancz would describe how it had seemed evident, 'that ancient demonology has, to a certain extent, survived through many centuries with very little change, and that it even found shelter and refuge in the cell of the monk'. One wonders if this apparent familiarity with ancient demonology had also extended to a Christian familiarity with an ancient pattern of Mesopotamian ritual praxis. See, H. Gollancz (ed.) *A Selection of Charms from Syriac Manuscripts* (Nabu Press, 2010), p.2.

confidence, however, that these few and albeit chronologically variable excerpts, provide something of a literary lens through which to discern a Late Antique Christian sense, not only of the potential to acquire divine gnosis but of the power and privilege of having done so. The asceticism of the Christian holy man, much like that of his Jewish contemporary ‘the Yored Merkavah’, had paved the way to acquiring a more intimate understanding of God and a greater familiarity with the hidden gnosis of his celestial kingdom. Indeed, we read how the exceptionally pious had even occasionally ascended pathways on high, in order to do so. Though, a significant part of the textual traditions surrounding their journeys towards spiritual enlightenment, would seem to have been concerned less with the immediate consequences of incredible piety than with the marvellous potential bestowed because of such an insight. According to their hagiographers, the holy man was not simply a man at prayer, nor was he simply someone who through ascetic performances had constructed a virtuous self as an alternative to the deadening conventions of Late Antique society. His consciousness of ‘the fine sounds of spiritual intelligences’ and his ‘communion with the spiritual hierarchies’, had also rendered him fully conversant with the celestial means to both engage and orchestrate the power of a celestial hierarchy. With this knowledge of divine gnosis, and its transformation into more earthly forms of prayer ritual, we have read how the ‘Yored Merkavah’ adjured the ‘Sar-Torah’ to acquire a perfect memory of Torah; to be saved from tribulations’, and even to be exempted ‘from the judgement of Gehinnom’. Equally, the Christian hagiographer would attribute a whole variety of often remarkable possibilities to the assumed power, wielded by his Christian contemporaries. When faced with the onslaught of uncontrollable disease, men and women, young and old, are described as having petitioned R. Hormizd to negotiate divine healing from the LORD on their behalf, and through his prayer, how they were all subsequently healed.⁵¹⁶ When the wiles of demons enslaved the souls of the spiritually weak and vulnerable; when their schemes threatened the crew and cargo of trading vessels, or commanded man-eating beasts to decimate entire populations; the prayers of Simeon Stylites were imagined to have bound and chased them away.⁵¹⁷ When threatened with natural calamity, when lacking the sufficient quantity of oil for sacristy, when one hoped to humble the ego of an over-confident Marzban, and

⁵¹⁶ A catalogue of examples might be referenced here from the *Life of Hormizd* alone, see former discussions but also see ‘Folios 36b; 38a; 45a; 45b; 53b; 79b and 83a. The blessings of healing, as this chapter has sought to emphasise, was by no means the prerogative of Hormizd but a more general characteristic of the Christian pious. Indeed, see ‘Folios 20a; 29b; 48a; 48b; 65a; 70b and 71a’ in *The Life of Rabban Bar Idta*, as well as ‘Book IV, Chapters XVII-XIX; Book V, Chapters VII-X; Book V, Chapter XVII; Book VI, Chapter IV; Book VI, Chapter VIII’ in *The Book of Governors*, and ‘Lent, p.127; 134; 136; 139; 140; 167 and 196’ in *The Life of Simeon Stylites*, to refer to but a few examples of this broader hagiographical motif.

⁵¹⁷ For these particular examples from the ‘Life’ of Simeon Stylites, see ‘Lent, p. 197; Syriac, p.643, Lent, p.174; Syriac, p.607’; ‘Lent, 143; Syriac, p.558’ in the *Life of Simeon Stylites*, respectively.

even when one wanted to divert the attentions of inadvertently summoned demons, only the prayers of the Christian holy men alluded to in this chapter would supposedly do. Rabban Hormizd, Simeon Stylites, Mar Narsai, Mar Abdiso and Mar Jacob, to name but a few of the names from Syriac Christianity's Late Antique hagiographical catalogue, were proximate to the divine but also 'enjoyed the gladness of knowing divine things' because of their familiarity with the channels of mediating its power. According to Rabban Hormizd's hagiographer, the extent and greatness of their knowledge and subsequent miraculous potential 'the tongue of the flesh had power neither to utter nor to declare'.⁵¹⁸ Of course, having only scratched the surface of the available source material, it is clear that a significant number of monastic writers had given it a jolly good go. It is through their efforts that we are able to discern not only something of our hagiographer's expectations of the power of piety but perhaps, even something of the Late Antique religious environment in which these expectations were formed and in which these texts had circulated.

To borrow a phrase from David Brakke, this image of the Christian holy man as 'impresario' to the theatrical performances of divine intervention and diabolic exorcism, would place him amongst the company of others in Late Antique Mesopotamian society who equally professed the ability to pull at the strings of divine and demonic puppets. In an environment dense and charged with the supernatural, the demand for miraculous intervention was almost boundless, and so was the supply of those able to orchestrate it. Various virtuosi promised and competed to offer insight into the future; to alleviate illness; to curse enemies; enhance fertility and inspire erotic passion, just as non-monastic persons, whether Christian or not, attributed an array of miraculous possibilities to the sanctity of the Christian Holy man. The authoritative authors of the hagiographical excerpts reviewed and analysed in this chapter may have sought to define and differentiate these 'Holy men' and their relationship to the divine as both different from and superior to these other ritual specialists, labelling them 'Magicians' and 'Sorcerers'. But, on closer inspection; and occasionally even by the hagiographer's admission, the powerful potential of piety and the ritualised procedures through which it was manifest, leaves little with which to effectively differentiate what had supposedly been distinct, and morally incompatible identities.

Christian monks, like other ritual experts, knew how to communicate with and persuade beings that most people could neither hear nor see, indeed their 'lives' were crowded with their achievements. Though, aside from hagiographical ideas of the

⁵¹⁸ 'Folio 14b' in *The Life of Rabban Hormizd*, p.29

potential of the pious, perhaps what is most striking about these Late Antique literary traditions of Mesopotamia's Holy men, is the insight that they offer into precisely how they sought to exercise that privilege. Those whose 'Lives' have been analysed in this chapter may have been sufficiently qualified to perform miraculous feats as a consequence of their sanctity, but it would seem that they did so not only by appealing to the divine but through invocations of the Divine name and references to relevant biblical precedents. The promise of piety's potential, and the fruit of the holy man's intent, was not merely manifest through his decision to act. Far from it, the power of piety was dependent upon the holy man's praxis of a ritualised regimen and only having done so might the benefits of his piety be truly felt. But what do the observations made in this chapter mean? How are we to understand the belief that one might orchestrate the power of the divine, but also the suggestion of the ritualised and mechanical approach of doing so, and what are the wider implications of these narratives upon our understanding of the religiosity and imagination of Late Antique Mesopotamian Christianity? While any analysis of this hagiographical literature of Late Antiquity, of the men who produced it and those it described, must remain tentative, one cannot help noting the apparent resonance of the ideas and rituals they describe with the 'magical texts' of Late Antique Mesopotamia's other ritual specialists. Deducing their precise relationship and reconstructing the historical process which generated them, is far from easy. Indeed, it is fraught with difficulties and must be carried out with caution. But in doing so, I believe we might begin to speculate not only about Late Antique Christianity's participation within a larger cultural framework of Mesopotamian religiosity, but about its familiarity with the specific phenomena of incantation and adjuration.

In the opening paragraphs of this chapter, I proposed that the intention of exploring these hagiographical excerpts was not only to situate them within the historical and cultural matrix which produced the adjurations of the Jewish Hekhalot, but to question whether the same scholastic assumptions; namely of their comparison to other Mesopotamian practices of incantation, might also apply to the traditions surrounding Christianity's holy men. The suggestions of resonance evinced in this thesis; between the motifs of textual traditions compiled by two radically different religious systems, that is to say between Judaism as it appears in the Hekhalot texts and the Christianity of Late Antique Hagiography, has offered plenty of food for further thought, concerning both the social contexts and contacts of those who produced them, and any tentative conclusions that might be drawn about a Christianity familiar with

ritual practices to gain power. Despite the tentative nature of drawing any conclusions in this area, this chapter has begun to map out and delineate sites of potentially significant comparison. Indeed, from the few excerpts examined, it has identified how Hekhalot and Hagiography share similar cosmological assumptions about the celestial world and the multitudes of celestial beings found there, as well as similar speculations of humanity's potential to both engage with and ultimately benefit from this cosmological reality. It has shown how comparable demonstrations of ascetic piety, correct invocation of various *voces mysticae* and the utterance of other powerful formulae, were understood to have manifest incredible revelations and celestial interventions for the Christian Holy man and Yored Merkavah alike, but also how those means could draw comparisons with Mesopotamia's other ritual specialists. Indeed, not only had the ritual practice and potential of Christianity's holy men caused them to look like one of Mesopotamia's other ritual specialists, but his hagiographer's familiarity with the kinds of vocabulary typically associated with their praxis would even cause him to sound like one.

Of course a sustained complex of such significant parallels between the motifs and mentality of the Hekhalot and Hagiography is of considerable interest, and certainly warrants further investigation beyond the limited analysis of this chapter. Though, for the purposes of this study, such comparability can only offer so much in terms of identifying Christianity's familiarity with Late Antique adjuration rituals and practices. The historian can treat them as little more than compelling, though sadly inconclusive glimpses of what was undoubtedly the reality of Christian praxis in the period in which they were written; and it is for that reason that one must turn to another, particularly significant piece of evidence. Indeed, perhaps one of the most interesting and certainly most conclusive insights into these hagiographical narratives of holy men and ritualised power; can be discerned from the way in which the legends of the saints and the mystical praxis outlined in those texts, came to be embedded within the recipes of the very 17th-19th century Christian charms which inspired this study. Just as the holy formulae and ritualised prayer of the Hekhalot had been incorporated into an extensive corpus of Late Antique "magical" texts and devices; including a number of metal amulets, inscribed bowls and Cairo Geniza fragments, hagiographical tales of holy men and their holy words had seen a decisively theurgical life, far beyond the parameters of their original hagiographical contexts.

Vast swathes of the hagiographer's texts are given to describe attempts of Christianity's holy men to act on behalf of the necessitous though a command of correct

words, and the power invested over the supernatural, through their illocution.⁵¹⁹ The prestige of the holy man was dependent upon his proficiency with powerful words and his understanding of the correct circumstances of their recitation, but it would seem that those words held an apotropaic potential beyond the lips and immediate contexts of the pious. An excerpt from Thomas Marga's *Book Of Governors* would describe, for example, how a certain Mar Narsai had instructed two fishermen in the further use of his words so as to land large and bountiful catches- a gift for keeping their silence, having unintentionally witnessed the holy man walking upon the surface of the water like Christ -and how those words had been ritually manipulated long after his eventual 'departure from the world'.⁵²⁰ Indeed elsewhere, the 'Life' of Simeon Stylites recalls how a certain youth was released from the coils of a 'fierce black serpent' upon one deacon's recollection of the prayers of 'Mar Simeon who stands in Telneshe', and how an elder sought to make a test of the prayers' potential by binding eleven mountain goats to his command, albeit with rather unpleasant consequences for unnecessarily testing 'the spirit of God'.⁵²¹ These excerpts were by no means alone in their speculation of the posthumous potential of the saint's prayer as a means of blessing by proxy. In an account alluding to its hagiographer's evident disapproval of ascetic weakness, 'The History' of Rabban Bar-Idta would relate how one monk's ongoing attachment to familial concerns had led him to leave the monastic confines of his cell and to the assaults of a ferocious lion; how he prayed with the prayer of Rabban Bar-Idta was eventually relieved from its hostility, on account of its correct recital.⁵²² Tales of donkey's miraculously resuscitated; lustful thoughts thwarted; water transformed to wine and disasters averted; all point to an understanding of the efficacy of the saint's words beyond his immediate vicinity, and judging from their recitation within

519 Frankfurter writes, "Thus a holy man, by the late fourth century a fixture in the cultural landscape, served primarily as a transmitter of blessings...whatever their personal ascetic intentions, holy men acquiesced readily and creatively to the roles that supplicants defined for them". See D. Frankfurter, 'Syncretism and the Holy Man', p.378

520 'The Life of Mar Narsai', in *The Book of Governors*, pp.556-558. Elsewhere, the Book of Governor's relates how a monk managed to conceal himself from the aggression of oppressors having recited the prayers of a certain Mar John, 'and I saw an old man of lofty stature who appeared to me standing at the door of the cave, clothed in glorious and shining apparel... and he deceived those thieves with apparitions and he hid me from them, and having sought me and finding me not, they departed and went away. Thus the Lord protected me and all that was with me by the prayers of that holy man'. See, Idem. p.224. An infertile woman is also described as having received a son 'by the prayer of the Rabban [Mar Cyprian], though not in the immediate presence of the saint but long after his death, and by means of a proxy (henena). See Idem. p.618. To this we might also add an occasion when a certain Mar Cyriacus was described as healing by the prayers of another saint, 'by the prayers of Rabban Jacob'. See, Idem. p.429

521 "By the prayer of Mar Simeon, be ye bound, that ye many not pass until I come to you" And they all collected and stood quiet until he came to them....after a little while he said to them, "by the prayer of the holy mar Simeon, cross over and go your way", and thereupon they left him. Then, from fear and distress on account of what he had done, he felt something seize his heart and choke him'. See, 'Lent, p.128; Syriac, p. 534' and 'Lent, p.147; Syriac, p. 564' in *The Life of Simeon Stylites*.

522 See, *The Life of Rabban Bar Idta*, p.285. It is perhaps worth noting here that the efficacy of prayer was supplemented here with promises of a life henceforth committed to absolute monastic solitude.

hagiographical and far later incantation texts alike, his words and the precedent of their miraculous manifestations would seem to have had no particular sell-by-date.⁵²³

Looking beyond the immediate context of these hagiographical tales; what has particularly fascinated me as a scholar of Late Antique ritual practice, is the apparent reformation and even the eventual translation of the saint's words and mystical praxis, into an array of talismans and ritual charms.⁵²⁴ Shenoute; though an Egyptian monk and a saint more typically revered by Christian Orthodoxy, is often quoted by historians as offering an insight into the holy man's creativity for mediating the miraculous; describing the production of charms; the bestowal of fox claws and alligator teeth; blessed henena and an extensive corpus of "magical" texts, which 'reflect the scribal activities of such monks'.⁵²⁵ To borrow a phrase from Frankfurter, this corpora of charms and amulets for the Late Antique ritual negotiation of crisis by no means belonged to 'some arcane wizard's underworld'. Indeed, as Frankfurter would imply, the contributions of the monks themselves to this Coptic ritual corpus is evident by the fact that some of those amulets were not only found within the monastic environment, but clearly mention monks in their ritual formulations.⁵²⁶ The various uses of scriptural verse; divine names; and perhaps more importantly for our purposes, the historiography of holy men wielding their power *in illo tempore*; would represent in written form something of the very 'blessings' that the saints are described as dispensing. Through his creative retelling of the saint's miraculous mediation, the Coptic monk recorded and replicated the saint's adjuration in what seems to have been a process of democratising the mystical beyond the saint's immediate preserve, with the words spoken by the saint, the precedent of his miracle and its contextualization within the personalised amulet, all affecting the transformation and integration of the beneficiary with the holy spirit. It is perhaps with an understanding of this Late Antique process of hagiographical appropriation; its adaptation of legends depicting the miraculous mediations of saintly words, as well as the very idea of their elocutionary potential, that one might begin to comprehend a similar incorporation of

⁵²³ The number and range of possible hagiographical references to the potential of recited prayer is extensive, indeed for these final excerpts, see idem, p. 287; 288 and 282.

⁵²⁴ DeConick has also identified this reformation of mystical praxis from hagiographical texts, within the sacramental rituals of the Late Antique Christian Church and the 'gnostic schools', see A. DeConick, *Paradise Now*, p.23

⁵²⁵ See Frankfurter's discussions in D. Frankfurter, 'Syncretism and the Holy Man', pp.378-381.

⁵²⁶ Idem, p.378-379

hagiographical legend in those more recent adjurational charms, published by Gollancz.⁵²⁷

Charm Number Two: Leaf 9a-13b	
1 The anathema of Mar	Leaf 9a
2 Georgios	1 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
3 the martyr.	2 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
4 In the name of the father and the son	3 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
5 and the Holy Spirit: the prayer	4 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
6 and the request and the supplication of Mar	5 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
7 Georgios	6 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
8 the martyr the excellent	Leaf 9b
9 prayed and asked	7 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
10 from God	8 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
11 the merciful	9 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
12 at the time of crowning,	10 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
13 placed his knee	11 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
14 in prayer	12 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
15 and said 'my Lord	13 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
16 and powerful God,	14 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
17 all Sons of Man	Leaf 10a
18 [who] mention in your Holy name	15 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
19 our Lord	16 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
20 Jesus Christ,	17 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
21 and in the name belonging to	18 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
22 Georgios, there will not	19 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
23 be in him fear	20 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
24 nor trembling,	21 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
25 nor anxiety,	Leaf 10b
26 weakness, nor one	22 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
27 of the evil pains,	23 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
28-29 sicknesses, accursed demons,	24 ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܪ ܝܫܘܥ
30 deceivers	
31 rebellious satans	
32 and envious evil ones,	
33 visions of pain	
34 and of death, of demons	
35 evil devils,	
36-37 and the evil spirit	

⁵²⁷ Hagiographical precedents of the miraculous and the ritualised means of pursuing its potential would seem to have been an integral component to the adjurational texts of a variety of those Christian incantation charms, uncovered within the repositories of Mesopotamia's dwindling monastic communities in the 19th Century. A great many of the charms published by Gollancz would seem to have drawn upon the precedent of certain holy men petitioning the Lord to protect those who mentioned his holy name; recalling both the hagiographical legend of blessings communicated by proxy, as well hagiographical idea of the continued contemporary relevance of its recollection. From hagiographical traditions describing the precedent and potential of ritualised prayers to counter fear, to those describing ritual prayers performed for the barren; for binding the tongue; and for thwarting lustful thoughts, these charms would describe the dynamic effort of their authors to weave together antique traditions of Christian authority with local, contemporary expectations of piety, and all through the media of text and blessing. The restrictions of this study mean that I am limited here to reference the tip of a very large iceberg of texts, worthy of further analysis. For further reading see this study's Appendices, where I have translated those manuscripts known to Gollancz as 'Codex C' in their entirety. One might consult Charm Number Two: Leaf 9a-13b; Charm Number Five: Leaf 22a-23b; Charm Number Twenty-Five: 68b-72b; Charm Number Twenty-Six: 73a-77a especially. In addition to those manuscripts published by Gollancz and entitled 'Codex C', one might also consult a similar corpus of 19th Century charms and talismans see London, British Library, MS Or.528 SCH 10075, see 'Folios 18a-18b' and 'The Anathema of my Lord Abdiso' in particular, in which the precedent of the holy man's prayer for bringing fertility to the infertile is used and the specific words of his prayer recited, according to similar expectations. Also see 'The Anathema of Rabban Hurmizd, Which is of Avail for Mad Dogs' in H. Gollancz, 'Codex A'; which describes a similar belief in the potential of quoting the words and precedent of the saint's prayer against rabid dogs, for contemporary situations.

38 <u>the eye of all those</u>	ܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ 25
39 <u>evil men</u>	ܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ 26
40 <u>and rebellious ones, nor</u>	ܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ 27
41 <u>fear, shaking</u>	ܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ 28
42 <u>and the resemblance</u>	
43 <u>of demons,</u>	Leaf 11a
44 <u>fear,</u>	
45 <u>and the bondage</u>	ܬܠܝܬܐ 29
46 of sorcery,	ܬܠܝܬܐ 30
47 also	ܬܠܝܬܐ 31
48 Lilith	ܬܠܝܬܐ 32
49 and Zarduk and the demon	ܬܠܝܬܐ 33
50 Malwita,	ܬܠܝܬܐ 34
51 mother of youths,	ܬܠܝܬܐ 35
52 strangler of male youths	ܬܠܝܬܐ 36
53 and female youths, the souls	ܬܠܝܬܐ 37
54 of the birds	
55 of heaven,	Leaf 11b
56 all	
57 pains, sicknesses	ܬܠܝܬܐ 38
58 evil, rebellious	ܬܠܝܬܐ 39
59 visions of power,	ܬܠܝܬܐ 40
60 also the pains, also	ܬܠܝܬܐ 41
61 the sweet sounds of the head	ܬܠܝܬܐ 42
62 seventy and two	ܬܠܝܬܐ 43
63 evil sounds,	ܬܠܝܬܐ 44
64 and accursed Satans	ܬܠܝܬܐ 45
65 deceivers rebellious	ܬܠܝܬܐ 46
66 and envious evil ones	
67 and all wounds,	Leaf 12a
68 and all sickness	
69 evil from his house	
70 of he who carries writs	ܬܠܝܬܐ 47
71 these, amen.	ܬܠܝܬܐ 48
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 49
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 50
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 51
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 52
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 53
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 54
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 55
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 56
	Leaf 13a
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 57
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 58
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 59
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 60
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 61
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 62
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 63
	Leaf 13b
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 64
	ܬܠܝܬܐ 65

	66 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ 67 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ 68 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ 69 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ 70 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ 71 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܪܝܢ
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The discourse of this chapter has sought to identify and discuss the motif of ritual practice within the hagiography as an integral component of the saint's mediation of the miraculous, how his words and ritual gestures were deemed to inspire divine acquiescence, but also how their further articulation served as an efficacious precedent within the mouths or upon the pages of those able to recite them. It is by looking beyond the immediate framework of the hagiography, indeed beyond those accounts of the saint's potential to work ritual wonder; that we discern not only the remarkable transmission of hagiographical legend through the centuries, but the transmission of age old expectations of the holy man's words, and the adjurational potential of reciting them. Like the fishermen of the hagiographical traditions surrounding the Life of Narsai, the relatively more recent author behind these incantation charms believed that the Holy Man's words had life beyond their orator, even when the time period in question could be counted in centuries rather than in terms of the lifetime of a fishermen and his son, and he believed by recalling the tradition of the holy man's ritual prayer that he too might communicate it's benefit. The saints had mediated the miraculous as a consequence of their words, and it was the literary accounts of that potential, as well as the very idea of that potential, which seems to have loosely translated across centuries to eventually inform a nineteenth-century ritual practice. Transmitted and preserved within the unique environment of the remote Kurdistan mountains, it is with an appreciation of this almost indiscernible process of transmission, translation and adaptation of Late Antique narrative; that the historian might begin to draw conclusions about the resonance of nineteenth-century Christian charm and the ritual devices of a far more ancient past.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁸ Sabar's translation of Seventeenth Century folk literature of Kurdistan Jews largely echoes this sentiment, suggesting how the remoteness of the Kurdistan Mountains provided a unique environment for the cultural transmission and preservation of far earlier patterns of Jewish belief and tradition. Sabar's translation of one tradition surrounding R. Samuel ben Nathanael hal-Levi Barzani Adoni', described how he received the promise that: 'eleven generations of your descendants shall stand to perform the holy service, and they shall be proficient in preparing remedies and amulets, with which they will make their living in comfort and success'. According to Sabar, this literary tradition pointed not only to the translation of far older ideas of ritual praxis and incantation production, but to an attempt to sanction an ongoing preoccupation with what he refers to as

This chapter's exploration of Late Antique hagiographical narrative, and its frequent incorporation into adjuration texts written by the hands of men centuries later, has uncovered two different life situations for this material. The first being that of the Monastic communities of Late Antique Mesopotamia, in which men pursued ascetic lives in order to reach the ultimate goal of spiritual illumination, and saw in the lives of their monastic forebears not only a legacy worth recalling and disseminating, but ultimately one which was worth imitating. The lives of the pious in this context served as a model for others to aspire to, with textual biographies recalling traditions not only of the exasperating extent of their piety, and their spiritual endeavour towards a growing perfection, but the proximity which they had subsequently enjoyed, both to the Divine and towards an understanding of celestial gnosis. Piety within these hagiographical narratives was not only something to aspire to; it was also the means of acquiring an almost unprecedented privilege, both to approach the divine but also the miraculous potential of divinity. Mesopotamia's Late Antique Hagiographers, writing in the desolate cells of their monastic environment, would inscribe with painstaking effort how the efforts of the pious had been rewarded with the potential of receiving celestial visions and visitations, how they had been bestowed with divine insight and the divine potential to work miracles quite literally of biblical proportions. Like Christ and the Gospel accounts of the Apostles before them, these hagiographer's had invested in pious men of the past the potential to engage with and exorcise the demonic cause of a variety of torments, to heal the sickness and disease of a variety of ailments, and even alter the rules which governed creation. They had moved mountains and walked upon the surface of rivers; they commanded the rain clouds and orchestrated the devastating impact of entire plagues of locust; all through the acquisition of a powerful gnosis, including various celestial names and other formulae which if recited correctly, could result in miraculous potential for any and all who recited them.

The second context is less easy to ascertain and articulate, though it consisted of Christian circles in the mountainous regions of Northern Mesopotamia, who drew upon the hagiographical catalogue and their accounts of ritualised power, in order to produce the ubiquitous incantation charms of the 16th-19th centuries. The composers of

'practical mysticism'. For further reading on this tradition, and for speculation of how alternative literatures might serve to contextualise more recent forms of ritual practice among the Jewish, and perhaps therefore even the Christian communities of nineteenth-century Kurdistan, see Y. Sabar, 'Legends about R. Samuel ben Nathanael hal-Levii Barzani Adoni and Other Rabbis of Kurdistan' in *The Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews: an Anthology*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), pp.104-128 [113-115].

these particular texts included the same celestial names and adjured them with the same written formulae, shown to have been efficacious from the hagiographical traditions of centuries past. They attempted not necessarily to imitate the piety of those whose lives which had inspired such celestial intervention, but rather to tap into the celestial channels through which celestial salvation had formerly been bestowed, recalling the historical precedent of the hagiographical legend and reproducing the ritualised means through which that precedent had been made efficacious. Precisely who the composers of these texts were is difficult to say, indeed, apart from the obvious fact that these men had a sound grasp of Christian hagiographical tradition, and the occasional reference made by 19th Century travellers to region of the ecclesiastical contexts in which some of these traditions were produced, the historian has little upon which to draw sound conclusions. Be that as it may, the key interest of these sources has little to do with the identity of those who produced them, nor does it have so much to do with the evidence they provide for the transmission of Hagiographical tradition, both throughout the centuries of Late Antiquity and into relatively more recent times, although this in itself is significant. The key point here is the specific contexts in which these hagiographical traditions had been embedded. The incantation charms of the Northern regions of Mesopotamia are not theoretical or fictional literature, alluding to the piety and subsequent potential of exceptional men in exceptional times. The historian is able to study them because real clients commissioned them and because real practitioners had produced them; providing them to all and to any who was seen to be suffering from the diabolic causes of a variety of misfortunes, and were thus in need of the celestial salvation once offered by the immediate prayers of Christianity's holy men. Those literary accounts of pious potential and powerful prayers had become practical works and invaluable sources for efficacious recipes which, in the absence of holy men themselves, could channel the potential of his once powerful prayer, through the independent and practical means of adjuration text.

Whatever conclusions have been drawn in this chapter concerning the appearance and behaviour of the holy man within Late Antiquity's hagiographical texts, whether or not we think of our hagiographer's understanding of the potential of piety and the ritualised means of making it manifest, as something which alludes to a Late Antique Christian familiarity with adjuration practices, is perhaps of little consequence in light of these more recent adjuration texts. An investigation of these adjuration charms reveals a catalogue of incorporated hagiographical tradition, which clearly

predate the manuscripts in which they are couched, alluding both to the range of traditions which had been transmitted to the Christian circles in which they had been produced, and evidently to the way in which those traditions had been interpreted, and subsequently deemed relevant to their craft. Clearly, the Christian communities who lie behind these 16th-19th Century texts made no distinction between the ritual practices of their holy men and their own adjurational enterprise, even drawing upon the expertise of his various ritual prayers and the powerful words of his vocabulary, for his own personal enrichment. That they chose to do so, would of course offer the historian a fascinating insight into relatively more recent Christian interpretations of Late Antique hagiographical materials, though alongside the cumulative force of analysis undertaken in this chapter, might this convenient window onto the relatively more recent religious practices of Northern Mesopotamia's Christian communities, also allow us to draw if even only the tentative of conclusions, concerning the possible historical precedent of their adjurational practices. I believe so. Where otherwise so little evidence exists of Late Antique Christianity's specific participation in the culture of Late Antique Mesopotamian adjurational practices, perhaps the salient conclusion which arises from an examination of the Lives of Christianity's Holy Men, is the potential value of these sources in helping the historian to confirm what are long held but largely unverifiable theories. Indeed, the belief that the manuscripts of a number of more recent Christian incantation charms revealed not only a glimpse into relatively contemporary beliefs, but alluded to a dialogue with the supernatural which had once been prevalent throughout Late Antique Mesopotamia, has been a belief long-held by a number of historians: all having drawn various connections to those far more ancient adjuration texts of Late Antiquity, but failing to address the question of the time disparity between them. By exploring hagiographical narratives written within the intermittent centuries dividing Late Antique and 16th-19th Century adjurations, by assessing the literary motifs and ritualised practices described by their hagiographer, and the various other literary parallels identified here between the legends of Holy men and the adjurational practices of practitioners, the historian is able not only to begin identifying the place of these narratives within the common cultural framework of Late Antiquity. He is also able to conceive of how it was possible that nineteenth-century incantation charms like those published by Sir Hermann Gollancz could possibly be seen to retain the vestiges of beliefs, which had defined the literary traditions of Mesopotamia's Christian communities for centuries.

5

Conclusion

What can be discerned between sources divided not only by centuries, but by communal boundaries? It was this fundamental question, relating to the scholastic inclination to compare 19th Century 'Christian charms' with far older, distinctly Jewish forms of ritual adjuration devices, which inspired the enquiry of this investigation into the mystical, exciting and sometimes magical world of Late Antique Mesopotamian religiosity. Indeed, where a number of scholars have noted the resonance of those manuscripts alluding to a 19th Century Christian ritual practice amongst the mountains of Kurdistan and those Late Antique ritual devices found amongst the ruins of Late Antique Nippur; few have sought to truly engage with the obvious methodological questions which arise from such suggestions of comparison. Indeed, the problem of qualifying the appearance of comparability between sources 'divided not only by centuries but by communal boundaries', is perhaps further added to when we consider that not a single 'Christian Charm' from either private collections or public libraries, would seem to date from before the 18th Century. If these relatively recent Christian charms and talismans did indeed maintain the threads of a tradition which had extended from Late Antiquity, as so many have argued, then where are those Christian charms and talismans written within the intermittent centuries which divide these sources? In light of the apparent obstacle of their absence, it is perhaps somewhat tempting to argue that any suggestion of the relationship between these sources is, if not impossible, then at least premature until such times as older manuscripts might begin to contribute to the story of these Christian charms. In this thesis, however, I have sought to argue that this is precisely the conclusion which ought not to be drawn. Despite the dearth of earlier textual evidence, this study has sought to show how the beliefs and mentality which had defined these practices of incantation had permeated the beliefs and identity of the Mesopotamian Church, and that those nineteenth-century charms published by Gollancz –far from being an anomaly- alluded to the remaining vestiges of a dialogue between both the Christian and the demon, but also between the Christian and Jewish communities of Mesopotamia, which had extended throughout the centuries. These enigmatic and seemingly self-effacing textual traditions offer the historian precious little in terms of understanding their socio-historical trajectory and milieu, but this thesis has argued that one might begin to trace some of its contours by looking beyond the remains and manuscripts of charms and

talismans and instead, to the resonance of its dominant features within analogous literary materials of a related and well documented tradition.

If, as we are told, the composition of these albeit relatively recent Syriac codices ought to be dated to sometime in the latter centuries of the Late Antique period, then it seems not entirely illogical to look in the same chronological and geographical neighbourhood for points of reference and comparison. Indeed, looking beyond the nineteenth-century charm manuscripts which inspired this thesis; it is in fact when we begin to explore the countless textual traditions which surround the 'Lives' of those Christian and rabbinic Holy Men of Late Antiquity, that we are acquainted with a literature furnished both with the concepts of ritual adjuration, and even occasionally articulated according to the same vocabulary. A perfect devotion to the ascetic principles taught by Christ or to a search for the meaning of 'the law' brought both Christian and rabbinic Holy men into spiritual proximity with the 'the father', expressed here in terms of celestial apotheosis and esoteric insight. Yet, personal sacrifice and an assumed subsequent spiritual purity would seem to have bought these Holy Men much more than an understanding and affinity with the divine and celestial realm. Indeed, to have had the experience of ascent through the heavens was not only to have been proximate to the divine but permanently changed by that proximity; to have been invested with a discernment of the language of angels which, in the contexts of these narratives, was assumed to have translated beyond the celestial realm and to have become active components of esoteric ritual in the natural world. Through a knowledge of Divine names and other esoteric secrets, and the ritual rehearsal of divine utterances and particular gestures, Christian Holy men would ritually negotiate miracles of exorcism and divine blessings in abundance; whilst a dedication to 'the law' had furnished rabbis like R. Nehunya b. Haqanah, R. Ishmael and R. Akiba with a knowledge of the adjurations, seals and celestial names with which to 'ascend on high' and ritually command the divine thereafter. In the unfortunate absence of more direct evidence, I am convinced that it is by exploring these literary traditions; their suggestion of the privileged position of the pious and the particular way in which some were assumed to have made their needs known in heaven by means of elaborate ritual performance, that we might begin to better understand how ritual practices divided by centuries could possibly have bared a meaningful resemblance.

In many ways, this thesis has and its investigation of the ritual practices of Late Antique holy men, has built extensively upon the scholastic precedent established by Gershom Scholem and Ithmar Gruenwald, both of whom had considered the

adjurations of the Hekhalot literature with the overarching framework of ‘magic’ or ‘theurgy’. The analysis conducted here draws upon the work of those theorists but also, and perhaps more significantly, upon the studies of scholars such as Rebecca Lesses and Peter Schafer, who have explored the Hekhalot’s adjurations not as expressions of ‘magic’ or ‘religion’ but as ritual performances and sometimes even as ritualised instructions ‘to gain power’. By delineating and contextualising underlying assumptions of the efficacy of the word, the performative use of language and the importance of ritual action, the approach of Lesses convincingly produced the means for analysing the Hekhalot adjurations as ritual actions performed within a matrix of ritual practice in Late Antiquity, and permits an understanding of how those who framed the Hekhalot adjurations had put their mark on ritualised practices of adjuration widespread within the Late Antique Mesopotamian religious environment. Here, in this thesis however, I have sought to draw tentative connections between the ascent and adjurational theories which defined those Hekhalot texts, and those common Christian ideas concerning hierarchies of piety, the eventual potential for apotheosis, esoteric discernment, and the terrestrial consequences of ritually rehearsing ‘the fine sounds of spiritual intelligences’. The comparisons are not exact, indeed the literatures in which they are couched are certainly different in their themes and respective agendas, but their common conjecture about individual apotheosis; esoteric insight and subsequent ritualised action; is perhaps significant enough to warrant speculation of important resonance. By adapting the premise and methodology of contemporary scholarship into the Hekhalot, and by applying it to the investigation of the ritual practices of Late Antique Christian monks, this investigation has sought to provide a platform from which to speculate not only about the possible location of these hagiographical narratives within the broader spiritual ecology of Late Antique ritual practice, but about the possible light they might be shed upon the precedent of those thoughts and beliefs, described in the 19th century incantation texts published by Gollancz. Indeed, the value of this study or at least the value of its proposal is in many ways unashamedly manifold: speculating about Late Antique Christian perceptions of piety through the framework of ritual practice rather than monastic literary convention; comparing it to common Hekhalot assumptions of apotheosis, esoteric insight, and ritually rehearsed practice, and in so doing, tentatively teasing the conclusions drawn about the Hekhalot and theorizing about their relevance for Christian monastic texts. The broader framework behind this study does not lack for scholastic pedigree, but its application within the contexts of understanding both Late Antique Christian ritual practice, as well as far later expressions of Christian ritual,

seems to have uncovered a relatively unexplored opportunity for new answers, new questions and further sites for investigation.

A number of historians have attempted to exploit saints 'Lives' for what they reveal about the historical and mainly political contexts in which they were produced, including the early but innovative studies of Van der Essen, who concluded that hagiographical traditions depicting the 'Lives' of holy Men reflected not only political and sociological realities, but the ideas and literary conventions of the age in which they flourished.⁵²⁹ His suggestion was of course a logical one, indeed it would be difficult to believe that the various literary motifs and rhetorical stratagems employed to describe the glory of Mesopotamia's Late Antique Holy Men had uniquely evolved in isolation. Yet the suggestion causes us to question precisely what ideas and literary conventions the hagiographers were reflecting, when they wrote about the enhanced ideas of piety's potential, and the ritualised means through which it could supposedly be exercised on cue. To adopt the logic of Van der Essen's suggestion, the catalogue of Late Antique Mesopotamian hagiographies and the various motifs which defined them, including the fundamental premise of piety and the acquisition of gnosis, and the potential of that gnosis when exercised through adjuration, were not entirely native to the imaginations of Christian hagiographers, but were rather reflections of and responses to more popular patterns of Late Antique Mesopotamian spirituality. Mesopotamia's Christian hagiographers then, according to this line of thinking, were not only in immediate contact with the same spiritual environment which had helped shape the kinds of Late Antique Mesopotamian incantation texts, discovered and published by Montgomery. Their texts were also responding to the same sorts of stimuli which had shaped the incantation text's particular pattern of spirituality, and the implicit emphasis of this paper has been to try and understand whether this shared cultural environment might perhaps begin to shed some light, not only upon the particular nature of the hagiographical motifs and themes under examination in this chapter, but also rather interestingly, upon the possible historical precedent of the thoughts and beliefs of those 19th century incantation texts, described and published by Gollancz.

The suggestion of parallels between literatures raises a number of vexing questions, perhaps most notably with regards to the specific value and meaning of

⁵²⁹ L. Van der Essen, *Etude Critique et Littéraire sur les Vitae des Saints Mérovingiens de l'ancienne Belgique* (Louvain, 1907), p. xi. On this, Peter Brown remarks 'just as the lives of saints have been quarried by the social historian for evidence of the life of the man on the street, so have they been used, in this past century, as a sort of bathyscope, that enables the historian to penetrate into what he regards as hitherto untouched depths of popular superstition'. See P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy man', p.81.

those assumed parallels. In his 1961 critique of biblical scholarship, S. Sandmel described how biblical scholars had been under the influence of an academic disease which he would refer to as 'parallelomania'; a crippling condition, whose primary symptom was an 'excessive piling up' of assumed literary parallels between New Testament texts and more ancient, Jewish sources.⁵³⁰ They had overemphasised and sometimes falsely proclaimed their similarities, supposing some direct relationship between the two; though Sandmel was only too keenly aware that 'parallelomania' was not just a disease suffered by New Testament scholars alone. Sandmel himself would hint at its wider implications of his critique not only for biblical scholarship, but for scholastic methodology more generally, and it is for this reason that this chapter has rightly attempted to avoid any suggestion of direct textual comparison⁵³¹. None of the texts examined here are the same, either in terms of the physical form which those texts take, or in terms of the rich and varied motifs, uniquely woven into the literary fabric of each textual tradition. Nowhere are we able to identify examples of direct comparison and in no way are we able to assume relationships of literary dependency, but whilst it is, therefore, important to emphasise the flaws and dangers of 'parallelomania', it would be nothing less than methodologically inaccurate and perhaps even culturally self-serving, to therefore view these different texts in isolation. Just as Sandmel identified the tendencies and inaccuracies of 'parallelomania', so scholars like J. J. M. Roberts and Halo would identify the flaws of the instinctive reaction of 'parallelophobia', a condition which they assumed inhibited the historian from identifying and exploring potentially useful sites of textual comparison.⁵³² The goal of this study, just as it had been for Roberts' and Halo's exploration of the parallels between New Testament and contemporaneous Jewish sources, has not been to find the key to unlocking every aspect of resonance. Rather its intent has been to silhouette the motifs of the hagiographical texts, just as Roberts and Halo had with a selection of New Testament texts, against the background of their wider literary and cultural environment.⁵³³ The various parallels of its literary motifs to the patterns discerned from Mesopotamia's Late Antique incantation texts, is here assumed to have had less to do with the immediate contact of their authors, than with their indirect association

530 S. Sandmel, 'Parallelomania' in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 81 (1962), pp.1-13. A less 'psychiatric' diagnosis had also been given by Cozijnse, who speaks of 'comparionitis'. See B. Cozijnse, 'A Critical Contribution to the Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti: Jude and Hesiod' in L.V. Rutgers (ed), *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), pp. 79-109

531 Cf. Sandmel, 'Parallelomania', p.1: 'I shall not exhaust what might be said in all areas which members of this Society might be interested in, but confine myself to the areas of rabbinic literature and the gospels, Philo and Paul, and the Dead Sea Scrolls and the NT'.

532 J. J. M. Roberts, 'The Ancient Near East Environment' in D. Knight and G. Tucker (eds.), *The Hebrew Bible and its Modern Interpreters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp.89-96. For the 'contextual method' espoused by Halo, see W. W. Halo, *Biblical History in its Near Eastern Setting: The Contextual Method* (Oxford: Pickwick Press, 1980).

533 See W. W. Halo, 'The Limits of Scepticism', in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 110:2 (1990), pp.187-199.

through a general cultural milieu. This, of course, does not allow us to presume that one text necessarily provides 'background' for another. It does, however, provide us with what B. Visotzky would refer to as a 'generally impressionist viewpoint' of the era in question.⁵³⁴ Visotzky suggests that the historian is a bit like a Lepidopterist, requiring-in the interests of good method- that the butterfly be pinned securely down for proper study, yet there are occasions when observations must be made from a distance, when the subject matter in question, is not so easily captured. The answers we acquire are not definitive, but it gives the impression of precisely how to understand the subject matter in the broader field of its natural context. It is for this reason that Visotzky would refer to each text and its parallels as giving an impressionist viewpoint of the ideas and conventions of the age in question. The closer one gets to discern the finite detail of the picture we thought we were looking at, the more it turns into a series of nondescript dots. Step back from the various dots, and we are offered an ever larger and ever clearer picture of how the parallels were formed.

⁵³⁴ See, B. Visotzky, *Fathers of the World: Essays in Rabbinic and Patristic Literatures* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995), p.8

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