

The Boundaries of Divine Ontology: The Inclusion and Exclusion of Meṭatron in the Godhead*

Daniel Abrams

Hebrew University, Jerusalem

One of the central aspects of Jewish theology, and Jewish mysticism in particular, is the conception of the nature of God's being and the appearance of the divine before humanity. No one view has dominated the spectrum of Jewish interpretations, since the biblical text is the only common frame for the wide variety of speculations. At issue is whether the one God depicted in the Hebrew Bible is manifest to humans directly or through the agency of a divine, semidivine, or created power. Even the nature of angelic figures in the Bible remains a matter of debate, both in its original context and through later interpretations. Does the angelic figure physically represent God's form, or is it a literary device that metaphorically describes God's presence? The same is true of divine anthropomorphism in the Bible. Do the descriptions of God's hands or feet imply that God possesses a definite shape similar to that of human bodies, or should these descriptions also be viewed metaphorically, reinforcing a similar view to that expressed about angelic figures: no physical characteristics can be attributed to anything heav-

*This article is dedicated to Professor Elliot Wolfson; the study was made possible through grants from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture and a Warburg post-doctoral fellowship at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

only or divine? Finally, how does this accord with the spatial manifestation of God in the tabernacle through his *kavod* or glory?¹

Rabbinic literature adds another layer of ambiguity to the early definition of God's being, describing God's interaction with humanity in terms of divine attributes (*middot*) or the divine presence (*shekhina*). It is not always clear whether these terms refer only to mythic objectifications of divine qualities or attributes, or whether they also should be viewed metaphorically. In these texts, what constitutes God centers on the identification of a divine attribute with the action of the divine or with the divine being itself. When is an attribute a literary means of describing divine activity, and when is it personified as a hypostatic element, receiving an identity of its own, while nevertheless partaking in the divine ontology? The latter appears to be the case when the physical manifestation of God is not excluded from the divine being. This link between anthropomorphism and the boundaries of divine ontology has been suggested in a recent study of early rabbinic midrashic texts by Michael Fishbane, where the *middot* of God were found to refer to a hypostatic view of divine anthropomorphism. Fishbane argues, therefore, that in certain rabbinic texts, fragments of an esoteric doctrine concerning the "measures" of the divine glory can be detected.²

While no single formula can state when there is change in the definition of what constitutes the divine, the overlap in descriptions of God, angel, and human is fertile ground for such reevaluations.³ For example, these lines were blurred to a great degree in the traditions concerning Enoch who ascended to heaven. On this issue, Moshe Ide! has drawn our attention: to texts that understand Enoch to be the angelic figure of

¹See for example, Baruch Levine, "On the Presence of God in Biblical Religion," in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) 71-87.

²Michael Fishbane, "The Measures of God's Glory in the Ancient Midrash," in Ithamar Grunwald, ed., *Messiah and Christos: Studies in Jewish Origins of Christianity Presented to David Flusser* (Tubingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1992) 53-74.

³See the profound discussion of Morton Smith ("The Image of God: Notes on the Hellenization of Judaism, with Especial Reference to Goodenough's work on Jewish Symbols," *BJRL* 40 [1985] 473-512, esp. 473-81), who offers many examples in rabbinic literature of the dynamic between the three. Of note is the text of the Passover Haggada which stresses that according to the biblical account of the Exodus from Egypt, God alone, without the assistance of any celestial being, performed the miracle. See the opposing midrashim on this issue contained in the *Bird's Head Haggada* and the later gloss proclaiming the contradiction and errant view, Daniel Goldschmidt, "The Text of the Bird's Head Haggada," in *The Bird's Head Haggada of the Bezalel National Art Museum in Jerusalem*, vol. 2: *Introductory Volume* (Jerusalem: Tarshish, 1967) 116-17. I would like to thank Tamar Abrams for this reference. See further, Judah Goldin, "Not By Means of an Angel and Not by Means of a Messenger," in Neusner, *Religions in Antiquity*, 412-24.

Metatron and yet others where Metatron is identified with God, bridging all the gaps between humanity and God.⁴

In order to understand the changing definitions of divine ontology, this study will trace Jewish interpretations concerning Metatron with a special emphasis on mystical sources. Due to the elevated status of the angelic Metatron in certain early traditions, Metatron was appropriated and his nature redefined in medieval texts in the articulation of a complex godhead which contained multiple powers. I shall discuss the transformations of Metatron through various systems in light of the larger issue of the confusion between God and angel, particularly with respect to the intention of prayer. I shall also show that the career of Metatron illuminates the development of Jewish mystical attitudes toward God, divine attributes, intermediary beings, angels and the kabbalistic understanding of the ten powers of the divine theosophy called *sefirot*.

☞ Elisha's Viewing of Metatron

One of the earliest descriptions of Metatron is found in the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Hag.* 15a and parallels), where we are told that the second-century rabbi Elisha ben Abuya was granted permission to see Metatron sitting and writing down the merits of Israel. Elisha is notably shocked by what he perceives and says, "It is taught as a tradition that 'On high there is no sitting and no emulation, no back and no weariness.' Perhaps—God forbid!—there are two divinities." Elisha's response is considered blasphemous and from this moment on Elisha is deemed a heretic, and named Aher, "the other." While the precise nature of his heresy is never fully explained in this context, he is accused of "cutting the shoots."⁵

⁴See Moshe Idel, "Enoch is Metatron," *Immanuel* 24/25 (1990) 220–40; and idem, "Metatron—Comments on the Development of Jewish Myth," in Haviva Pediah, ed., *Myth in Jewish Thought* (Ber Sheva: Ber Sheva University Press, forthcoming) [Hebrew]. While the former study focuses on the boundaries between human and angel, the latter emphasizes the nature of the angel as a manifestation or extension of God, a point that will be explored in the present study through different and later texts. On the association of the divine "face" with angelic manifestations, see Ele'azar ha-Darshan (*Sefer Gematriot*, Munich MS 221, 157a): "the numerical equivalent of 'his face' is 'the angels' [= 146]" פניו במבריא דהמלאכים.

⁵The depiction of this event in *3 Enoch* is also ambiguous. See Peter Schafer, ed., *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tubingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1981) 10–11 (§20); and Rachel Elior, ed., *Hekhalot Zutarti* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992) 23. See further Peter Schafer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992) 74; R. Abraham bar Azriel, *Arugat ha-Bosem* (ed. Efraim E. Urbach; 4 vols.; Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1947) 2. 195; and Annelies Kuyt, "Heavenly Journeys in Hekhalot, The *Yeridah*: Towards a Description of its Terminology, Place, Function and Nature" (Ph.D. diss., University of Amsterdam, 1991) 234–36.

This event has been interpreted numerous times in modern scholarly literature.⁶ The assumption that Elisha gave divine status to an angelic being underlies many of these interpretations. In other words, according to most scholars, Elisha erred by perceiving that a heavenly being other than God was divine as well, and therefore Elisha had appended a second deity to the one God. The heavenly enthronement or “sitting” of Metatron, which was apparently a sign to Elisha that Metatron was himself divine, supports this understanding of Elisha’s heresy. Scholars such as Alan Segal have studied this text against the background of the heresy of “two powers in heaven.” It seems that a consensus has been formed in the scholarly literature that in early Jewish literature, including that of the Talmud, “the basic heresy involved interpreting scripture to say that a principal angelic or hypostatic manifestation in heaven was equivalent to God.”⁷

Elisha’s heresy is initially described by his uttering an unorthodox belief concerning the nature of God. Later midrashic interpretations in the form of additional stories about Elisha’s sins were incorporated into the rabbinic corpus in order to explain further Elisha’s repudiation.⁸ It seems, therefore, that in the late rabbinic period, the tradition concerning the heretical belief was lost or misunderstood. Regarding Elisha’s sin or heresy, Yehudah Liebes discussed in detail several explanations, according to the various literary formulations in the parallels to *Hagiga* as well as the interpretations provided in later Jewish literature. In explaining “cutting of the shoots,” Liebes focused on the form and context of Elisha’s hubris during his “ascension” into the *pardes* (literally, “orchard”). This conception of Elisha’s hubris is supported by Eccl 5:5 (“It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not fulfill it”), which is cited in the parable. Concerning the view that Elisha sinned by misconstruing the nature of God, Liebes pointed to a later passage from *Hekhalot Zutarti* where Metatron’s sitting and writing down

⁶See below nn. 7–11 for a bibliography concerning the various studies. Most interesting is Gedaliahu Stroumsa’s explanation of the appellation “other” against a possible gnostic background. See his article, “Aher: A Gnostic,” in Bentley Layton, ed., *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1981) 2, 808–18; see also Nehemiah Leibowitz, *Doresh Reshumot ha-Aggadah* (Jerusalem: Darom, 1929) 23–24.

⁷Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977) x. See more recently, Peter Hayman, “Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies,” *JJS* 42 (1991) 1–15, esp. 12.

⁸As outlined by David Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980) 78; and idem, *Faces of the Chariot* (Tubingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1988) 31–37, 202–5. See further, Yehudah Liebes, *Elisha’s Sin: The Four Who Entered into the Pardes and the Character of Talmudic Mysticism* (2d ed.; Jerusalem: Akademon, 1990) chaps. 1–3, esp. pp. 16–18 [Hebrew]; Albert Assaraf, *L’hérétique: Elisha ben Abouya ou l’autre absolu* (Paris: Balland, 1991).

the merits of Israel caused him to “believe” (*hirer*) that two powers existed. For this reason, Metatron received sixty lashes to distinguish him from God. According to the author of this passage in *Hekhalot Zutarti*, then, it is clear that Metatron is a lower being.⁹

Hugo Odeberg offered early evidence suggesting that Metatron was a hypostatic being. Odeberg argued that in the *Hekhalot* work known as *3 Enoch*, Metatron is the lower or lesser potency of the divine; Odeberg drew attention to Metatron’s being called *na‘ar*, which he understood as “youth.” Odeberg compared this term to the parallel term “lesser yah,” based on the Hebrew form of the divine name, which can be found in Gnostic literature.¹⁰ Scholem later commented, following an old fragment that rendered the term *na‘ar* in Aramaic as *shamasha*, that *na‘ar* in this context must be understood to mean “servant” and not “youth.” This alternative reading implies that instead of being an aspect or potency of God’s being, Metatron is a distinct heavenly being, presumably an angel, and is subservient to the commands of God.¹¹

Scholem did not at first commit himself to one interpretation of Elisha’s heresy. He suggested instead that *qizuṣ ba-neṣi‘ot* (“the cutting of the shoots”) refers to transgressions of the commandments.¹² Later Scholem amended his view, stating that the term should be understood “in the literal sense of the phrase”: of those who entered the *pardes* (here understood literally as an orchard), Elisha went beyond the foul act of helping himself to the trees of the orchard—he also destroyed them.¹³ Scholem’s interpretation therefore gives great weight to the meaning of the term “cutting” for understanding the nature of Elisha’s heresy.

Scholem’s interpretation lies somewhere between the poles of a metaphoric reading of the “cutting,” where it is a term for heresy in general,

⁹Liebes, *Elisha’s Sin*, 34–35.

¹⁰Hugo Odeberg, *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928) 82, 188–92.

¹¹Gershom Gerhard Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (2d ed.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965) 49–50; idem, “Über eine Formel in den koptisch-gnostischen Schriften und ihren jüdischen Ursprung,” *ZNW* 30 (1931) 170–76; idem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (3d rev. ed.; New York: Schocken, 1954) 68. See also Jonas Greenfield “Prolegomenon,” in Hugo Odeberg, *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (1928, reprinted New York: Ktav, 1973) xxxi; Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 65–66; Saul Lieberman, “Metatron, the Meaning of His Name and His Functions,” in Ithamar Grunwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1980) 238–39; Philip S. Alexander, “Comparing Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism: An Essay in Method,” *JJS* 35 (1984) 1–2. Finally, see Michel Tardieu (*Porphyre, La Vie de Plotin* [2 vols.: Paris: Vrin, 1992] 2. 532–33), where Metatron’s name refers to ascension into heaven. I would like to thank Charles Mopsik for this last reference.

¹²Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 16 n. 6.

¹³See Scholem, “Addenda,” in *ibid.*, 127.

and a literal reading, where the act of cutting an actual thing is the heresy. A number of scholars, who sought to understand the phrase "cutting of the shoots" through a comparison of its usage in other texts and contexts, and not only in the context of the narrative in *Hagiga*, argued for the former view.¹⁴ In his study of *3 Enoch*, Charles Mopsik suggested the latter, literalist position. Based on the immediate context alone, Mopsik suggests that Elisha "cut" the (angelic) *logos*, named Metatron, away from God.¹⁵ Elisha's error then was not his elevation of an angelic being to equality with God, but rather his isolation and consequent exclusion of an aspect that was intrinsic to the divine unity.¹⁶ Although the rabbis may have held additional views about the nature of angels which preclude this reading, at least in this context, the background for Elisha's heresy seems to be the orthodox belief that Metatron is ultimately one with God, a conception similar to that of a *logos* in Christian and Gnostic thought.¹⁷

This approach to the *pardes* account in general and the role of Metatron in particular can be found in the works of some kabbalists, beginning in the early thirteenth century. Although it may seem that we are reading a rabbinic text through the lenses of the kabbalistic world view, the understanding of the continuous or organic being of the divine, which

¹⁴Efraim E. Urbach claimed ("The Traditions about Merkabah Mysticism in the Tannaitic Period," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom Scholem* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967] 13–14 [Hebrew]), for example, that the *pardes* referred to the vision of the *merkabah*, wherein the "cutting" is the sin of revealing the secrets he learned there. In his detailed study of the textual traditions of this passage, David Halperin (*The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*, 90) agreed that it outlines a metaphor, but maintained that "the referent of the metaphors remains a mystery." Henry Fischel (*Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy* [Leiden: Brill, 1973] 19) criticized any consensus that "the cutting of the shoots" refers to a mystical experience, but "corresponds to the death and insanity of the two visitors. . . it indicates what happened to Aher after he left."

¹⁵Charles Mopsik, *Le Livre hébreu d'Hénoch ou livre des palais* (Paris: Verdier, 1989) 30–37, 247.

¹⁶To be sure, the "cutting" alone does not constitute the heresy described, but rather the independence of will or governance that is implied in isolating a hypostasis, as noted already in geonic literature (Lieber, *Elisha's Sin*, 11).

¹⁷This idea was already forwarded by David Neumark (*Geschichte der jüdischen Philosophie des Mittelalters* [2 vols.; Berlin: Reimer, 1907] 1. 93) at the beginning of this century; and compare Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1985) 310. In a tradition from the Sar-Torah material of the Hekhalot texts (Schafer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, 124 [§ 279 = 678]), Metatron is described as "Metatron, Lord God of Israel, God of the heavens and the Earth." In the *Book of Illumination* written by the first known kabbalist in Castile, R. Ya'acov ben Ya'acov ha-Kohen, Metatron is called אֱמֶטְרוֹן, *logos*. See my study of this text and figure ("The *Book of Illumination* of R. Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen: A Synoptic Edition From Various Manuscripts" [Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1993]).

extends from the simple unity of the godhead to a hypostatic manifestation, predates much of the Talmud. As Shlomo Pines has shown,¹⁸ Nahmanides' view that the divine glory (*shekhina*) is not separate from God and cannot be thought of as a created being can be found already in the second century, in Justin Martyr's dialogue with Trypho the Jew. Justin records that (at least some of) the Jews believe that the presence of God in the world, described in terms of a divine angel, glory, or *logos*, depends on the instructions of God. This glory "cannot be cut and separated (ἀτμητον δὲ καὶ ἀχώριστον) from the Father, just as when the light of the sun shines on the earth, it cannot be cut and separated from the sun in heaven."¹⁹

In the passage from Nahmanides' *Commentary to the Torah* discussed by Pines, Nahmanides explicitly takes issue with Maimonides (and with the tenth-century sage Sa'adia Ga'on by inference), and seeks to characterize the fundamental difference between his tradition and Maimonides' Aristotelian world view.²⁰ The difference centers around the inclusion or exclusion of the divine manifestation within the godhead. Nahmanides posits an organic or continuous relationship between God's being and that of the angel—that is, they are both immanent in the same divine substance.

Pines and Mopsik posit a more complex model of divine theology in early Jewish thought than was previously suggested.²¹ Independent of the particular doctrine they describe, however, in rabbinic literature we find a mythic depiction of divine attributes that provides the general background for the doctrine of a hypostatic form that represents God in the world. In the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Ber. 7a*) we read of the dynamic relationship between the divine attributes of mercy and judgment, without any objection to the possible implications concerning God's unity. While the mythic description of God's attributes may be seen as nothing more than a complex metaphor, this text may point to the rabbinic acceptance of hypostatic powers in the godhead. In the context of this

¹⁸Shlomo Pines, "God, the Divine Glory and the Angels according to a 2nd Century Theology." in Joseph Dan, ed., *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism*. vol. 6 (3–4): *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987) 1–14 [Hebrew] See also Moshe Idel ("In the Light of Life: A Study in Kabbalistic Eschatology," in Isaiah Gafni and Aviezer Ravitzky, eds., *Studies in Memory of Amir Yekuti'el* [Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish Studies, 1992] 208 [Hebrew]), who shows that the "form" that God illuminates can be found a century earlier in the works of Philo.

¹⁹Justin Martyr *Dial.* 128.3.

²⁰For a comparison of Nahmanides' view with that of Maimonides, see Efraim Al-Nakawa, *Sha'ar Kavod ha-Shem* (Tunis: Castro, 1802) 45b–50a; and Elliot Wolfson, "The Secret of the Garment in Nahmanides," *Da'at* 24 (1990) xxv–xlix.

²¹Pines, "God, the Divine Glory," 1–14; and Mopsik, *Le Livre hébreu d'Hénoch*, 30–37.

tradition (*b. Ber. 7a*), the divine attributes are presented as aspects of a single divine will and not as competing powers that would result in a dualism.²² That is to say, rabbinic theology could withstand, and may have even encouraged, the mythic or dramatic depiction of God's attributes in various forms, including at times a *logos*-like manifestation, depicted as an angelic being such as Metatron. (Of course, not all hypostases or angels enjoy this status.) Those who adopt a more literal understanding of the rabbis' view of divine unity may find any hint of plurality to be heretical. Here, however, I argue that the rabbis objected only to an opposition or competition of wills. Following this view, Elisha's declaration that there are *shtei reshuyot* (literally, "two powers") should be translated according to the heretical view of "two ruling authorities" and not the acceptable view of "two powers" in heaven.²³

■ Prayer and the Divine Hypostasy in Ashkenazi Sources

The distinction between God and a hypostasized Metatron comes to the fore in medieval European Jewish mysticism in the prekabbalistic works of the German Pietists.²⁴ The doctrine of the ten hypostatic powers known as *sefirot* is absent from their system; their theology centered upon the hypostasized glory, or *shekhina*. Elliot Wolfson recently has shown how the distinctions between older traditions concerning the divine glory, the *shekhina*, Metatron, and the divine *anthropos* were blurred in certain Ashkenazi texts, and how the identifications between them can be found prior to the appearance of the sefirotic kabbalah.²⁵

At the risk of oversimplifying the associations Wolfson detailed, the various identifications offer a bridge between the more general symbolism of divine presence and the more specific divine manifestations of a human or angelic form. By doing so, the divine glory, which the tenth-century Jewish philosopher Sa'adia Ga'on excluded from the godhead as a created being separate from God, has once again been included within it. The importance of this move cannot be overestimated, for while the

²²Compare with David Stern, "Imitatio Hominis: Anthropomorphism and the Character(s) of God in Rabbinic Literature," *Prooftexts* 12 (1992) 151–74, esp. 164–67. For the early usage of hypostatic terms, see David Flusser and Samuel Safrai, "The Essene Doctrine of Hypostasis and Rabbi Meir," in David Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988) 306–16.

²³See Segal's extensive note (*Two Powers in Heaven*, 5–6), where he argues this point on the issue of the "two authorities" theology among the rabbis.

²⁴See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 80–118; and Joseph Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidim* (Jerusalem: Mosad Byalik, 1968) [Hebrew].

²⁵Elliot Wolfson, "Metatron and Shi'ur Qomah in the Writings of *Haside Ashkenaz*," Proceedings of the conference on *Mystik, Magie und Kabbala im Aschkenasischen Judentum*, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt, West Germany, 9–11 December 1991.

shekhina in rabbinic literature is nothing more than the figurative way of expressing God's presence (as has been argued by certain scholars),²⁶ its identification with a being that has shape in Ashkenazi texts transforms the metaphor into a physical entity, which may indicate a redefinition of the nature of God. According to the internal logic of these prekabbalistic theological systems, once physical attributes not shared by God are predicated to the *shekhina*, either the *shekhina* must be excluded from the godhead to preserve God's formless being, or the nature of the godhead must be readdressed.

This reassessment took place in the circles of Jewish mystics in thirteenth-century Germany and Spain. I argue that this was a result of the associations between the divine presence and the manifestations in human form outlined by Wolfson. The shift in the view of the *shekhina* and of angelic figures in those circles is most clearly seen in their various stances toward prayer. To demonstrate the reassessment that bridged these identifications, I shall outline three models, drawing examples for each from Ashkenazi texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. While examples for some of these models can be found in both the early rabbinic corpus and later mystical works, the immediate discussion will be confined to the period just prior to the emergence of the kabbalah, where the unfolding of these new associations is most relevant.

In the first model, the *shekhina* is a term "used when the manifestation of the Lord and His nearness to man are spoken of"²⁷—that is, the *shekhina* does not indicate a hypostasis, but is identified with God. The earliest medieval identification of Meṭatron with God that I was able to locate is found in a comment attributed to R. Tam (France, 1100–1171). This tradition is offered as a response to the rabbinic interpretation that Meṭatron is the angel mentioned in Exod 23:20: "I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way, and to bring you to the place I have made ready."²⁸ It appears that R. Tam (or perhaps Pseudo-R. Tam) was uncomfortable with the view that God acts through an angelic agent and wished to predicate the role of "guard of Israel" to God alone. Because R. Tam could not reject the formulation of the received biblical text and abolish one of the two referents, God and the angel, nor could he deny the rabbinic tradition that Meṭatron is the angelic guide as explained in the verse, he interpreted the "angel" who "guards the way"

²⁶See, for example, Efraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975) 43.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸For sources see Menahem Kasher, *Torah Shelema* (42 vols.; New York: n.p., 1960) 19. 228–29; and see further in the following notes.

as none other than God himself. This he accomplished by pointing to another verse (Exod 23:13), where God guards the Israelites in their journey.²⁹

And R. Tam commented that the Holy One blessed be He is himself called Metatron as is said in the *Pesiqta*³⁰ [Exod 23:13] “and the Lord walked before them all the day.” The Holy One said I was the guide [מְנַיֵּיטֵר] ³¹ for my children, that is, their guard.³²

Due to the brevity of the passage, it is not clear whether the author wished to state that God is described as an angel, or that God functions in the world through such a manifestation, which should nevertheless be identified with God, or whether the author’s comment applies to all angelic beings or only to the one specified in the verse. Because of the specific interest in the prior midrashic associations of Metatron as a guide (*menitor*), however, I believe that the tradition speaks directly of

²⁹George Moore (“Intermediaries in Jewish Thought.” *HTR* 15 [1922] 74) argues for the force of this idea, independent of this scriptural exegesis. See further Amos Goldreich, ed., *Me’irat Einayim* (Jerusalem: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1981) 112–13.

³⁰I was not able to locate this passage in the text.

³¹Concerning this etymology of the name Metatron, see *Gen. R.* 5.4 and Nathan ben Yehiel’s dictionary as discussed by Gershom G. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (trans. Allan Arkush; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) 299. See also Lieberman, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, 235–41.

³²*Moshav Zeqenim al ha-Torah* (ed. Solomon David Sassoon; London: Honig, 1959) 198. Another tradition concerning Metatron in the name of R. Tam, which also cites the *Pesiqta*, can be found in the *b. Yebamot* 16b as cited in Reuven b. Hoschke Katz, *Yalkut Reuveni* (Prague: n.p., 1660) 82a. Another possibility is that מְנַיֵּיטֵר refers to Mentor, Telemachus’s teacher in Homer’s *Odyssey*, the paradigmatic guide, whose name has entered the English language as a synonym to “tutor” or “teacher.” Robert Lamberton (*Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* [Berkeley: California University Press, 1989] 56) recently published a thorough study of the uses of Homer in classical and medieval philosophy. I find there no information, however, which could be used to support our suggestion. It thus requires further research. My thanks to Tzvi Langermann for this comment. On the issue of Metatron’s identification as “prince of the world” see further *b. Hul.* 60a and *t. Hul.* 60a. The interpretation of Metatron as *na’ar* using Ps 37:25 can already be found in the Talmud and throughout kabbalistic works. See, for example, Yehoshu’a Ibn Shu’aib, *Derashot al ha-Torah* (Krakow: n.p., 1575) 24b; and the anonymous *Sefer Ma’arekhet ha-Elohut* (Mantua: Me’ir ben Efrayim, 1558) 72b. It may be that the various midrashim of God appearing as a young warrior at the Red Sea (the Exodus) and as an old man at Mount Sinai (the giving of the Torah) may already be predicated to Metatron in *b. Yebamot* through the scriptural proof. This would suggest that, as later texts state explicitly, Metatron refers to the various physical manifestations or representations of God. See Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience of Abraham Abulafia* (trans. Jonathan Chipman; Albany: SUNY Press, 1988) 117–19; and Gedaliyahu Stroumsa, “Polymorphie Divine et Transformations d’un Mythologème. *l’Apocryphon de Jean et ses Sources*,” in idem, *Savoir et Salut* (Paris: Cerf, 1992) 57–59. Compare to Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 67 n. 24.

Metatron's status in relation to the divine. In other words, the author absorbs the role, appellation, and traditions concerning the angel Metatron into the simple identity of God.

In the texts where God's presence is understood figuratively, it stands to reason that the discussion of prayer directed to a second being is completely absent. In turn, the heretical nature of prayer, directed at an angelic being which, in contrast to the *shekhina*, is a created entity, is beyond question. An example of this can be found in the early and short version of a work called the *Seventy Names of Metatron*. As I have argued elsewhere, by tracking the development of the doctrine of the divine glory through the versions of this text, one can place the short version no later than the generation of R. Yehudah he-Ḥasid (d. 1217).³³ According to the tradition concerning the name Miṭon, Metatron receives prayers from Israel and transfers them "on high":

This is the Prince of the Countenance to whom we request to raise our prayers on high [to be placed] on the head of the Holy One blessed be He.³⁴ [And the name Miton] is the numerical equivalent of the hand of God [יָ כַּף = 115] for he grasps the whole world in his hand and its numerical equivalent is "upon God" [עַל יְיָ = 115]. And so [he is] upon Him [עַל בְּרַיָּה = 115], [that is], He [Metatron] endures the whole world and he rests on the "back" of the Holy One.³⁵

Metatron is here an intermediary being, distinct from God, but dependent upon him. In the passage immediately preceding, Metatron, "the

³³Daniel Abrams, "'The Secret of Secrets': The Concept of the Divine Glory and the Intention of Prayer in the Writings of R. Ele'azar of Worms," *Da'at* 34 (forthcoming) n. 25 [Hebrew]. Joseph Dan suggested (*The Esoteric Theology*, 220 n. 5) that the two versions (other than the one under discussion) may be the products of R. Yehudah he-Hasid and R. Ele'azar of Worms, respectively. See further Moritz Steinschneider, "Einzelschriften: Hebraica," *Hebraische Bibliophile* 14 (1874) 6–8, 33; Naftali Ben-Menahem, "Sefer ha-Hesheq," *Pithet She'arim, Diyuqim ve-Iyunim Bibliografiyim* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Quq, 1976) 300–302; Joseph Dan, "The Seventy Names of Metatron," *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division C* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1981) 19–23. See also Mopsik, *Le Livre hébreu d'Hénoch*, 362; and Claudia Rohrbacher-Sticker, "Die Namen Gottes und die Namen Metatrons: Zwei Geniza Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 19 (1991–92) 95–168.

³⁴This role is often assumed by the angel Sandalfon. For sources see Elliot Wolfson, "Mystical-Theurgical Dimensions of Prayer in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*," in David Blumenthal, ed., *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times* (3 vols.: BJS 134; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1988) 3, 77 n. 146.

³⁵Rome ms, Angelica 46, fol. 36b, printed with slight variations in R. Avraham Hamai, *Sefer Bet ha-Din* (Livorno: n.p., 1858) 199a. Similar traditions to the name *Miton* can be found in the prayerbook of Naftali Treves Hirz, *Mele'ah ha-Areẓ de'ah* (Thiengen: Eli'ezer Hirz, 1560) 191a and in Jerusalem ms 8° 1136, fol. 26b.

prince of the countenance,” is compared to “the *shekhina* who is above, next to the divine chariot; and [he, Metatron]³⁶ praises the Holy One.”³⁷

In the second model of the reassessment of the godhead in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Ashkenazi texts, the lines of demarcation between God and the *shekhina* or glory become more distinct and the issue of where to direct one’s prayer emerges. An example can be found in the thirteenth-century Ashkenazi treatise on the unity of God by R. Eleazar ha-Darshan, the grandson of R. Yehudah he-Ḥasid. He concludes this short piece, entitled “Secret of [Divine] Unity,” with a warning that succinctly summarizes his view: “And one should be careful not to pray and bow except before the Holy One, blessed be He, and not to the *shekhina*, for indeed the *shekhina* herself prays before the Holy One.” The full import of this doctrine is discussed elsewhere.³⁸ Here the *shekhina* is not only distinguished from God, but relates to God through prayer just as humanity does. It seems to me that in this text, prayer is the primary concern of the author and is not incidental to his view of the *shekhina*, as may be the case in the comment from the *Seventy Names of Metatron* discussed above (p. 301). In both texts, the *shekhina*, also referred to as the divine glory, is separate from God but not independent of God. While Eleazar ha-Darshan’s comment is very brief, it is clear that to him the *shekhina* not only shares the aspect of prayer before God with humanity, but possibly also a will or needs of its own. As the treatise makes clear, the *shekhina* is subservient to the invisible form of God, is dependent upon it, and in no way constitutes an opposing or equivalent power.

This doctrine is repeated with variations in the longer version of the *Seventy Names of Metatron* which contains most of the shorter version (although sometimes in a revised form).³⁹ The major theme, absent in the

³⁶It is not fully clear who is the subject of this clause, offering the praise—Metatron or the *shekhina*. I have suggested that Metatron offers the praise, based on the context of the traditions in this version of the text. On Metatron’s functions and place in the divine world relative to the throne see Meir Bar Ilan, “The Throne of God: What is Under it, What is Opposite It and What Is Near It,” *Da’at* 15 (1985) 21–36 [Hebrew].

³⁷Rome MS, Angelica 46, fol. 38a. The final words concerning Metatron’s praising God are absent from the printed edition, but can be found in the manuscripts, including its later reworkings: for example, Berlin MS, fol. 116b and Firenze MS, fol. 243b (see n. 39 below). On the importance of Metatron’s praise, see Daniel Abrams, “The Shekhina Prays Before God: A New Text Toward the Theosophic Orientation of the German Pietists and Their Method for the Transmission of Esoteric Doctrines,” *Tarbiz* (forthcoming) [Hebrew].

³⁸See Abrams, “The Shekhina Prays Before God”; and idem, “The Unity of God” of R. Eleazar ha-Darshan,” *Qovez al Yad* 12 (1994) 149–60 [Hebrew].

³⁹It is important to note that the esoteric doctrine of Eleazar of Worms, Yehudah he-Ḥasid’s main student, can be found in the longer version(s), particularly in the *Sefer ha-Hesheq*. The longer text itself can be found in different versions, a point that cannot be

short version and added to the expanded version(s) of the text, is Metatron's role in humanity's prayer to God. In the long versions, Metatron's role is to assist Israel in its prayers and recall its merits before God.⁴⁰ Following the tradition mentioned in *Hagiga*, Metatron "records the merits of Israel and pleads [to God] on their behalf, and [therefore] the Holy One blessed be He shows mercy to them."⁴¹ Metatron is clearly an intermediary figure

fully explored in this context. See Abrams, "The Concept of Divine Glory." It should also be noted that Asi Farber has already commented on the affinity between the dual nature of Metatron in *Sefer ha-Hesheq* and the doctrine of the sanctified cherub; see Farber "The Concept of the Merkabah in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism: 'Sod ha-Egoz' and its Development" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1986) 559 [Hebrew]. The printed version of *Sefer ha-Hesheq* (Lemberg: Epstein, 1865; reprinted in *Sefarim Qedoshim mi-Talmidei ha-Besht ha-Qadosh*, vol. 34: *Sefer ha-Hesheq* [Union City, NJ: Gross, 1984]). if not written at least in part by Ele'azar of Worms, was composed by a student who was familiar with his doctrine and the emergence of a new and developing esoteric theology. While all the versions of the *Seventy Names of Metatron* touch upon the issue of prayer, there is a stronger concentration of traditions on this matter in the printed version which parallels certain manuscripts. I shall therefore discuss Metatron's role according to this text, while citing in the notes parallel traditions from the other versions. As noted by Yehudah Liebes ("The Angels of the Shofar and *Yeshu'a Sar ha-Panum*," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 (1987) 171–96 [Hebrew]), the manuscripts of *Sefer ha-Hesheq* differ from the printed edition (Lemberg, 1865), the text-tradition of which can be found as well (with variations) in Oxford MS 1748, fols. 25a–44a. Dan ("The Seventy Names of Metatron," 19–23) compared the printed edition to Berlin-Tubingen MS Or. 4° 935, fols. 112a–118a and concluded that they were composed by R. Yehudah he-Hasid and R. Ele'azar of Worms. Yehudah Liebes noted further differences between the various textual traditions. It seems, however, that the versions discussed by Dan represent the second and possibly third stages of the text's literary development with little change between the last two. Moreover, Firenze-Lurziana MS 2.5, fols. 237a–246a also differs from the versions mentioned here. It displays strong parallels to passages found only in the printed version. It must be noted that the texts may not necessarily reflect a linear development, but could have been reedited simultaneously by different authors. Further study is required to identify all of the additions and editings that altered the order of the passages. Finally, the more readily available Lemberg edition shows strong similarities to the very rare edition of *Ayin Shemot de-Metatron* (Williamsdorf: Moshe Graff, 1677) and may have been printed from it. In this volume, the text is preceded by selections from 3 *Enoch* 5–15. See further Nehemiah Brull, "Miscellen," *Jahrbucher fur Judische Geschichte und Literatur* 1 (1874) 221–25; and P. S. Alexander, "The Hebrew Book of Enoch," in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.: Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983) 1. 224. Dr. Klaus Herrmann has kindly informed me that the textual tradition found in the 1677 edition can be found exclusively in Oxford MS 1748, fols. 25a–44a.

⁴⁰*Sefer ha-Hesheq* § 19 of the Lemberg edition (p. 3b). This theme recurs various times throughout this work and is stated in different language in § 43 (pp. 5b–6a) also found in Firenze MS, fol. 244a.

⁴¹*Sefer ha-Hesheq* § 23 (p. 4a). Firenze MS, fol. 241: "When Israel pray with intention to their father in heaven, he [Metatron] opens for them the gates of prayer and the gates of mercy. And he extends his hand below the throne of glory and receives the prayers of Israel."

who mediates the requests of humanity before God. The line between angelic intermediary and divine being becomes blurred when Metatron is described as he who is "appointed to receive the prayers from Israel."⁴² implying that he may be the final destination of the prayers, able to answer them independently without conveying them to God. Accordingly, in another passage, it is Metatron who acts as advocate or intercessor for Israel. He "prays for them and *vindicates* them" when "the Holy One, blessed be He, is angry with them."⁴³ It follows that prayers may be directed to Metatron or through him: "And this refers to the Prince of the Countenance, whom we request to offer our prayers to 'on high' [to place them] on the head of the Holy One, blessed be He."⁴⁴ Here too, Metatron is an intermediary figure who does not answer the prayers himself but transfers them or offers them before God.

In this body of traditions, Metatron also assumes the role of God, inasmuch as he is the final destination of the prayers. The danger, as R. Eleazar ha-Dashan perceived it, is that if Metatron is the final destination of the prayers, he may possess a will of his own; and from the perspective of those offering the prayers, Metatron may be understood as a deity, as the object of these prayers. The author warns against this conception and instructs that:

He [Metatron] commands the angels to praise the King of the Glory, and he is among them. This is what the poet has written: "The great of Israel shall call out with their voices the greatness of the Lord, the King."⁴⁵ And also, do not think in your heart [during this prayer] about the Prince of the Countenance, that he is the Deity [אלהי], because his power is very great and tremendous: rather God is the King. And he is called according to the name of his master, as it is written [Exod 23:21]: 'Do not defy him because My name is in him,' that is to say: do not substitute⁴⁶ [God for] him, because My name is in him. And he has no [independent] ability to cause harm, but only through the power of his great Name.⁴⁷

⁴²*Sefer ha-Hesheq* § 24 (p. 4a). Firenze MS, fol. 242b. Of note is the personification of the Memra of the Targum (*Tg Yer. I Deut 4.7*) which sits on the throne of God and receives the prayers of Israel. George Herbert Box, "The Idea of Intermediation in Jewish Theology: A Note on Memra and Shekinah," *JQR* 23 (1932) 111.

⁴³*Sefer ha-Hesheq* § 38 (p. 5b). Berlin MS, fol. 116a; Firenze MS, fol. 243a. On this theme see Odeberg, *3 Enoch*, 115–16.

⁴⁴*Sefer ha-Hesheq* § 22 (p. 3b). Firenze MS, fol. 243b.

⁴⁵See *Mahzor Rosh ha-Shana* (ed. Daniel Goldschmidt; Jerusalem: Koren, 1979) 77.

⁴⁶This is a common wordplay on "defy" and "substitute" which have similar written forms (דָּבַר, דָּבַר).

⁴⁷*Sefer ha-Hesheq* § 13 (p. 3a). This passage is also found with slight variations in Firenze MS, fol. 246a. In a separate passage in Berlin MS, fol. 113a, the numerical equivalent to "will be" (יִהְיֶה) is offered: "by the power" (בְּכֹחַ) which is then interpreted "because

According to the printed version of this text, therefore, Metatron's activity on behalf of Israel distances God from the one who prays and places Metatron in the center of humanity's thought concerning prayer. Not only has Metatron assumed various roles as a mediator, which in earlier texts were ascribed only to God, but here the distinctions are minimized to the point that the author must emphasize that Metatron is indeed not God.

One final passage, which highlights the blurring of the boundaries between God and Metatron, deserves consideration. According to the different reading of passage thirty-nine in another version of *Sefer he-Hesheq*,⁴⁸ "One of the seventy names of Metatron, מְטַטְרֵן, numerically equals 'your Creator' [= 229], because after the Creator, he is supreme [among the archons]."⁴⁹ Here, Metatron is named the creator. Although the demiurgic role is given to Metatron in other texts, such as in the works of Ibn Ezra,⁵⁰ in Ashkenazi sources, God is usually termed "the creator" (הַבְּרִיאַת). Here again R. Ele'azar ha-Dashan finds it necessary to explain that although he is supreme, Metatron is nevertheless an angel.⁵¹

In the third model, the *shekhina* can be defined separately from God's other aspects or powers, but remains an indispensable part of the divine pleroma, namely the kabbalistic doctrine of the ten *sefirot*. In this system, the *shekhina* harmoniously works in consort with the nine other ontic grades of the divinity. As plainly stated by the kabbalists, to pray to the *shekhina* alone is to separate her from the arrangement of powers and to give her being a separate ontic root. By separating out this *sefirah*, the *shekhina* has been allotted an independence that provides for additional authority and governance parallel and equal to that of God. The doctrine of the *sefirot*, therefore, lends itself to a paradoxical view of the *shekhina* with respect to prayer; on the one hand, one cannot pray to the *shekhina* without committing a grave heresy, and on the other hand, to avoid the *shekhina* in prayer is to deny the existence of an integral aspect of the godhead. The prescribed practice of the kabbalists regarding the intention of prayer, therefore, is to direct one's prayer at this divine grade while connecting it in one's thought to the remaining nine.

after the power of the Creator, his [Metatron's] power is very great." Compare § 13 with the similar comment of Ele'azar ha-Darshan in his *Sefer Gematriot* (Munich MS 221, fol. 152b).

⁴⁸Berlin MS, fol. 113b. This text is lacking in the printed edition.

⁴⁹Literally, "after the Creator, there is no other archon אֲרֹחָן who is more than he."

⁵⁰See Elliot Wolfson, "God, the Demurge and the Intellect: On the Usage of the Word Kol in Abraham Ibn Ezra," *REJ* 149 (1990) 77–111.

⁵¹See Joseph Dan, "Anaphiel, Metatron and the Demurge," *Tarbiz* 52 (1983) 447–57 [Hebrew].

Any one of countless Spanish texts could demonstrate the kabbalistic view of the proper intention of prayer, and conversely, the “cutting of the shoots.”⁵² Instead, in order to show the evolution of the models described above, I shall use a series of thirteenth-century Ashkenazic texts, which were influenced by the Spanish kabbalah, and discuss the doctrine of the “sanctified cherub.”⁵³ The authors of these writings combined philosophic, Ashkenazi, and kabbalistic doctrines into a new and unique theology. According to these works,⁵⁴ God cannot appear before humans nor can God directly receive a person’s prayer, which is a product of the material world. Instead, God receives prayers via the cherub who sits on the throne of glory. This is an interpretation of Ezekiel’s vision of a seated human form (Ezek 1:26) and the singular usage of the “cherub” in Ezek 10:4.⁵⁵ The authors of these texts are as concerned with distancing anthropomorphisms from the “cause of causes” as they are with giving independent authority to the cherub. The relationship between these divine powers is repeatedly stressed in terms of upward and downward movements of the blessings or an efflux, “which unites the multiple powers as one.”⁵⁶

⁵²See for example. Todros b. Yosef Abulafia. *Sefer O-zar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem* (Warsaw: 1879) 24a: שֶׁקָצַץ הַדְּבָרִים הַמְּיֻחָדִים וְדִפְרִידֵם זֶה מִזֶּה “that he cut the two distinct beings and separated them from each other.” For a fuller listing of sources, see Abrams. “The *Shekhina* Prays Before God.” n. 45. On the broader issue in the context of prayer, see R. David Ibn Zimra, *Ql-ur Sefer Peliṭah* (Jerusalem: Mussayef, n.d.) 14a: “The first man (אָדָם הַרִאשׁוֹן) thought that it was sufficient [to pray] to the prince of the world [Metatron], and prayed to him and did not extend his prayer to Her [the *shekhina*].”

⁵³Joseph Dan has termed these works the writings of the “special” or “exceptional cherub circle” (Joseph Dan. “The ‘Exceptional Cherub’ Sect in the Literature of the Medieval German Hasidim,” *Tarbi*: 35 [1966] 349–72; reprinted in idem. *Studies in Ashkenazic-Hasidic Literature* [Ramat Gan: Massada, 1975] 89–111 [Hebrew]). I have chosen a different rendering of מְיֻחָד due to the role of the cherub in these works, as will be discussed below (p. 313).

⁵⁴Dan has made an inventory of these works in “The ‘Exceptional Cherub’ Sect,” 349–72. In “New Manuscripts to the Book of Secrets of R. Shem Tov bar Simha and the Sources He Possessed,” *Asufot* 9 (1995) (forthcoming) [Hebrew]. I have discussed numerous unknown manuscript witnesses to the texts that have been edited by R. Shem Tov and which until now could be found only in part in an Alder manuscript housed in the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. See also Daniel Abrams. “The Evolution of the Intention of Prayer to the ‘Special Cherub’: From the Earliest Works to a Late Unknown Treatise.” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 21 (1995) (forthcoming). For a published section of the Adler manuscript New York MS (microfilm, JTSA) 2430, fols. 65b–66a, see Joseph Dan. “Prayer Intentions from the Tradition of R. Yehudah he-Hasid,” *Da’at* 10 (1983) 48–56 [Hebrew]. In the following discussion, citations will be given from Zurich MS 102, Moscow MS 737, and Cambridge MS 858.

⁵⁵Scholem, *Major Trends*, 113. See the fuller explanations provided by Farber, “The Concept of the Merkabah,” 556–60.

⁵⁶Moscow MS, fol. 184a; Zurich MS 20b: לִיחַד כֹּה רַבִּים כִּכָּה אֶחָד: compare to New York MS Microfilm JTSA 2430, fol. 66a, in Dan. “Prayer Intentions.” 50: לִיחַד כֹּה רַבִּים כִּכָּה יֶחֶד.

This body of literature is historically later than the first emergence of the kabbalah and stems from different authors. Due to the variations in their synthesis of the Ashkenazi traditions concerning the cherub with the doctrine of the *sefirot*, these texts can illustrate collectively the stages in the gradual blending of the Ashkenazi orientations with the sefirotic doctrine of the Spanish kabbalah. I shall limit the following discussion of the development of the sanctified cherub doctrine to the cherub's relationship to Meṭaṭron and the divine world.

One of the earliest works of this body of literature is the *Pesaq ha-Yir'ah*, a short text consisting of some five hundred words. The basic doctrine of the circle is established here; the cherub emanates [אצל] from the "great fire" and assumes all those attributions of physical form that could be applied to God. The aspect of God that has no form is termed the "divine glory" or "his holiness," while that which does have form is termed "his kingdom," the "*Shi'ur Qomah*," or "the cherub." "Holiness" is located in the west and the "kingdom" in the east. Although these locations may be understood as points on the divine map of the ten *sefirot*, this only holds true for later texts written according to this theology.⁵⁷

In the collection of commentaries to the prayers, collected and edited by R. Shem Tov b. Simha in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, the cherub is directly identified with the lowest grade of the divine; "One should not err in his thoughts about the *sefirot* because they are all degrees [מעלות] of the Creator. And the tenth degree [=sefirah] is the sanctified cherub, to which the angels above direct their praise [so that their praise] will go before the Cause of Causes without separation and without *cutting*."⁵⁸ While this text explicitly states that one should clear the mind of all thoughts except those concerning the creator,⁵⁹ blessings must nevertheless be directed through the cherub.

When one enters the synagogue in the morning to pray, he should direct⁶⁰ his prayers so that they will be accepted by the Creator,

⁵⁷See Moscow MS, fols. 187b and 189a. *Pesaq ha-Yir'ah* influenced various other texts, including Menahem Zioni, *Commentary on the Torah* (Lemberg: Zis, 1882) 35a, 39a; and Nuremberg MS, Cent V. App. 5/2, esp. fols. 82a, 90a–91a, an anonymous text that repeatedly cites the *Pesaq*. For further discussion see Joseph Dan, "*Pesaq ha-Yir'ah ve-ha-Emunah* and the Intention of Prayer in Ashkenazi Esotericism," *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 19 (1991–92) 185–215.

⁵⁸Moscow MS, fol. 183a; and Zurich MS, fol. 20b. See also the later tradition stemming from these works as cited by Moshe Idel, "Between the Kabbalah of Jerusalem and the Kabbalah of R. Yisra'el Saruq: Sources for the Doctrine of the Garment of R. Yisra'el Saruq," *Shalem* 6 (1992) 168 [Hebrew].

⁵⁹Moscow MS, fol. 180b; and Zurich MS, fol. 20a.

⁶⁰Literally, "think in his heart."

may He be exalted, through the agency [כַּרְבּוּב] of the Cherub⁶¹ which is emanated and created from the great fire, fire which consumes fire. And when the Holy One blessed be He sends efflux to the Cherub through the emanated potencies [מַדְרֵיגָה], the Cherub sends the efflux to Israel on high and from there to Israel that is below. And behold this is sufficient for the initiates.⁶² And so they should not err with their prayers and “cut” and separate [a potency] by saying—God forbid—that there are two ruling powers, because we have strong faith that all [exists] by the cause of the Creator whom thoughts cannot comprehend. And he is called the Cause of Causes.⁶³

The reference to “two ruling powers” is a clue concerning the author’s relationship to earlier sources, implying the *pardes* account and Elisha’s heresy. The cherub, therefore, has been identified with the lowest *sefirah* and the angel Metatron. A passage from R. Shem Tov’s edition of the material reinforces the identification between Metatron and the cherub: “‘Do not defy him’ [Exod 23:21], that is, you should intend your prayer to him.”⁶⁴

As noted above, the verse from Exodus is generally understood as a description of the angel Metatron. If Metatron and the cherub, however, are the tenth *sefirah* as has been suggested, it is difficult to define the “Israel on high” which lies below it in the divine world. While the cherub could be identified with a higher *sefirah*, such as *Tiferet*, and the “Israel on high” could be identified with the tenth *sefirah*, it seems that the symbolism focuses on the lowest grade and reflects the merging of traditions of Metatron as an angel and the angelic cherub as the lowest

⁶¹Zurich MS, fol. 20a mistakenly reads “creator.”

⁶²Literally, “those who understand.”

⁶³Moscow MS, fols. 181b–182a; and Zurich MS, fol. 20a. Compare to the significantly different reading in New York MS (Microfilm, JTSA) 2430, fol. 65b published in Dan, “Prayer Intentions,” 48. In this reading the efflux is replaced with the *sefirot* and the cherub is that which was emanated. In what may be an intended corruption of the text, the distinction between the two “Israels” is eliminated. See Scholem’s comment (*Origins of the Kabbalah*, 215), bracketed inside his translation of this passage from the New York MS. See the alternative French translation and discussion by Henry Corbin, *Le paradoxe du monothéisme* (Paris: Herne, 1981) 185; Georges Vajda, *A Hebrew Abridgement of R. Yehudah b. Nissim Ibn Malka’s Commentary on the Book of Creation* (Ramat Gan: University of Bar-Ilan Press, 1974) 31 [Hebrew]; and Roland Goetschel, “Les métamorphoses du Cherubin dans la pensée juive,” in Adeline and Jean-Jacques Rassias, et al., eds., *L’Interdit de la représentation* (Paris: Seuil, 1984) 104.

⁶⁴Moscow MS, fol. 183a; and Zurich MS, fol. 20a. Later in this text (Moscow MS, fol. 190a and Zurich MS, fol. 24a), the cherub is called *Adonai ha-Qatan*, the “little YHWH.” Of note is Jacob ha-Kohen’s terminology of the *YHWH ha-Qatan* and the *YHWH ha-Gadol*, the former being identified with Metatron. See Schocken MS (kabbalah) 14, fol. 61b; and New York MS (Microfilm, JTSA) 1849, fol. 1b in Abrams, *The Book of Illumination*, 392 n. 18. See further Goldreich, *Me’irat Einayim*, 397.

sefirah. Although they are similar in their possession of an anthropomorphic form, they are distinguished by their function;⁶⁵ the upper aspect receives the efflux, and the lower one transfers it to the world below. As seen in the texts presented here, Meṭatron is identified in some passages with the cherub and the last *sefirah*, and in other passages he is distinguished from one or even both of them.

The identification of the lower aspect of the tenth grade of the divine (here, supernal Israel) with Meṭatron is elucidated in the second text that R. Shem Tov incorporated into his collection of material. There he says, “One intends his prayer to the cherub which is blessed from above, from the cause of causes; and from the cherub the efflux descends to the ‘youth’ [נער] and from the ‘youth’ to Israel.”⁶⁶ In yet another formulation in R. Shem Tov’s collection, the cherub, which functions as a *sefirah*, is called “the great Meṭatron [מטטרון הגדול]⁶⁷ and he is called the congregation of Israel and from there efflux descends to Israel.”⁶⁸ It can be assumed that the “lesser Meṭatron” implied here is the lower and angelic aspect of the tenth *sefirah*.⁶⁹

More explicit usage of the dual role of the name Meṭatron to designate an angelic figure and a *sefirah* can be found in various formulations in the works of kabbalists in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; some were influenced by these very sources, and some arrived at this idea independently. The most common formulation involves the ortho-

⁶⁵In a different work that holds to the sanctified cherub doctrine, the distinctions between these symbols are almost blurred: “Behold, for he who understands, the visible power is also called angel, and that the *Shekhina* [is called] the cherub” (Moscow-Gunzberg MS 1403, fol. 10b). Compare to the view of the author of *Sefer ha-Navon* (Joseph Dan, “*Sefer ha-Navon* by a Member of the German Pietists,” *Qoveṣ al Yad* 6 [1966] 209–10 [Hebrew]) where the *shekhina* is equated with the physical form that appears to humans, the angel, the divine glory, and the divine name.

⁶⁶Moscow MS, fol. 184a–b and Zurich MS, fol. 20b preserve better readings than New York MS (Microfilm, JTS) 2430, fol. 66a (see Dan, “Prayer Intentions,” 50). The distinction between the cherub and Meṭatron is present in Hirz, *Meleṣah ha-Areṣ deṣah*, 48a–b.

⁶⁷See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 214.

⁶⁸*Commentary to the Barukh She’amar* (Zurich MS, fol. 24a; Moscow MS, fol. 185b; Cambridge MS, fol. 17a). The distinction between the sanctified cherub and Meṭatron can also be found in R. Reṣūven Zarfati, *Commentary to the Book Ma’arekhet ha-Elohut*. For sources and treatment of this issue see Avraham Elkayam, “Issues in the Commentary of the Book *Ma’arekhet ha-Elohut*” (M.A. thesis, Hebrew University, 1987) 46–48 [Hebrew].

⁶⁹This adds a new dimension to the theology of the sanctified cherub and distinguishes it from the tradition recorded in the name of R. Avraham b. David. Scholem (*Origins of the Kabbalah*, 211–12) who understood the special cherub texts through the lenses of Provençal texts, because he placed the former texts in an early stage of the development of the kabbalah and believed that the author or authors were influenced by the kabbalists in Provence. See also R. Schatz, ed., *Ha-Qabbalah be-Provence* (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1963) 185.

graphic representation of Metatron's name, with or without the letter *yod*. As an angelic figure, Metatron is described as ascending into the realm of the *sefirot*. As a *sefirah*, he is described as the last grade of the divine, the extra letter symbolizing the efflux he emanates to the lower world.⁷⁰

Finally, we can identify yet another formulation of the doctrine of the sanctified cherub where Metatron is identified neither with the cherub nor with the tenth *sefirah*. In one section of R. Moshe b. Eleazar ha-Darshan's *Commentary to Sefer ha-Qomah*, the cherub and Metatron are each "joined" (מִתְחַבֵּר) to the ten *sefirot* and included in the emanative system that unites the theosophic powers. In a revealing passage, R. Moshe described the three elements of the godhead:

One should know the tripartate division [of the divine] and they are: the ten *sefirot*, the Cherub and the Prince of the Countenance. And the Holy One blessed be He is called the Cause of Causes, of which we cannot predicate anything of existence or non-existence, no measure and no body, no length, no width, no end and no boundary. . . and from it is emanated [each of the] three powers and all three are joined [מִתְחַבֵּרִים] to it and receive emanation from it. And [they in turn] emanate [themselves]. [And these are] the ten *sefirot* which are [emanated] from itself, [i.e.] the Cause of Causes, and [then] the Cherub from the ten *sefirot*, and the Prince of the Countenance from the Cherub. And the Holy One blessed be He is the Cause of Causes above them all. And because He has emanated the ten *sefirot* from Himself, one should unite them all in one's prayer. . . lest he "cut the shoots."⁷¹

Although not demonstrable, one can assume a linear development of these writings, according to the developing complexity of their symbolism, proceeding from angelic figures alone to a sefirotic doctrine lacking any focus on angels. According to such an outline, R. Moshe would be placed at an intermediate stage in the development of the sanctified

⁷⁰See Abrams, "The *Shekhina* Prays Before God," n. 38; and Goldreich, *Me'irat Einayim*, 79, 112, 114–15. See also the tradition Vatican MS 228, fol. 17a: "For my name is in him, this is the angel called Metatron whose name is like his master. That is, the numerical equivalent of Metatron is *Shaddai* [שֵׁדַי = 314]. And when the *shekhina* emanates to the created angel then it is called Metatron." Although the manuscript witness does not record the difference in Metatron's name, it can be assumed that the latter Metatron should be transcribed with a *yod*. See also Vatican MS 236, fol. 153b concerning the related tradition of Metatron "ascending with six [letters] and descending with seven." For further sources see Abrams, "The *Book of Illumination*," 207.

⁷¹Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 212–14. It is important to note the anonymous comment added to this passage in Paris MS BN 799, fol. 3a (Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 213 n.7) which objects to Metatron's equal status to the *sefirot* while not being identified as one: "ten *sefirot*, but not the prince of the countenance."

cherub doctrine, after the *Pesaq ha Yir'ah* and prior to the material collected by R. Shem Tov. Unlike the *Pesaq ha Yir'ah*, R. Moshe acknowledged the existence of ten *sefirot*. However, R. Moshe's theology does integrate the angelic elements of Metatron and the cherub into a single conception of ten *sefirot*. It seems, therefore, that a theology of the cherub existed independent of the doctrine of the *sefirot* or other Ashkenazi traditions concerning Metatron and was gradually incorporated into their thought. The various theosophical systems concerning the cherub, Metatron, and the ten *sefirot* provide a unique test-case for evaluating the standing of Metatron in the divine world in early medieval Jewish mysticism.

Prayer and the Divine Hypostasy in Kabbalistic Sources

With the crystallization of sefirotic symbolism in Spanish kabbalah during the second half of the thirteenth century, Metatron's nature became more defined. For most kabbalists not influenced by Ashkenazi sources, Metatron was either included completely in the divine ontology (identified with the lowest *sefirah*), or relegated to the angelic world, where he was ontologically equivalent to the other celestial beings.⁷² This is true also for cherub symbolism, for which the kabbalists tapped into rabbinic traditions concerning the two cherubim in the tabernacle and identified them either with the *sefirot* of *hesed* and *gevurah*, or *Tiferet* and *malkhut*.⁷³

⁷²See Odeberg, *3 Enoch*. 111–24; and Mopsik. *Le Livre hebreu d'Hénoch*, 49–57. In a passage from a commentary to the prayers (London MS. British Library 751, fol. 5a) published by George Margoliouth ("The Doctrine of the Ether in the Kabbalah," *JQR* 20 [1908] 834), Metatron is termed the primal ether (אֵייר הקדמון), which apparently lies at the beginning of the emanative system. See Moshe Idel, "Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrine" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1976) 77 [Hebrew]; and R. David Ibn Zimra. *Sefer Qi-ur Sefer Pl'ah* (Jerusalem MS, Mussayef 68, fol. 3b) where Metatron is termed both עֲבֵרָה and כְּתֹרֶת עֲלִיּוֹן; the beginning and the end of the sefirotic theosophy respectively. Finally, Charles Mopsik (*Les grandes textes de la Cabale* [Lagresse: Verdier, 1993] 392–93) notes a tradition where the *shekhina* and Metatron are two angels separate from the tenth *sefirah*.

⁷³This basic difference in symbolism appears already in the works of Ezra of Gerona and Nahmanides, as noted by Tishby in R. Azriel ben Menahem, *Commentary to the Aggadol* (ed. Isaiah Tishby, Jerusalem: Mikize Nirdamim, 1945) 17, 71 [Hebrew]; see also Moshe Idel. *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 132–34; Marc Saperstein. *Decoding the Rabbis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980) 84. See further the later kabbalistic commentary to the ten *sefirot* (London MS, British Library 1074, fol. 247a) which includes Nahmanides' identification of the two cherubim, and further identifies עֲבֵרָה, the tenth *sefirah*, with the second cherub. *na'ar* (youth) and Metatron. In *Sefer Toldot Adam* (Paris MS. BN 841, fol. 202), the two cherubim are identified alternatively with the ninth and tenth *sefirot*. Finally, see Yosef of Hamadan's symbolism concerning Metatron and *shekhina* as discussed by Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 230.

The kabbalah of Nahmanides contains the best example of the transformation of symbolism from a hypostasized angel or created glory to the doctrine of the *sefirot*. In his *Commentary to the Torah* (on Gen 46:1) he says:

And God forbid that what is called *Shekhina* or the Created Glory is outside of the divine Name, may He be blessed as the Rabbi [Maimonides] believed. . . and if one claims that it is the Created Glory according to the Rabbi's view⁷⁴ of the verse [Exod 40:34] "And the Glory of God filled the tabernacle." then how can blessings be offered to it? And he who blesses and prays to the Created Glory is as an idolater [because] the many statements of the Sages have dictated that the *Shekhina* is God. may He be blessed.⁷⁵

As Nahmanides himself states, his kabbalah is not explicated fully in his works. Rather, hints and veiled references are scattered throughout his works, designed to impress the reader with the existence of an esoteric doctrine. Pines attempted to explain this text further through a parallel to a source from antiquity. Other scholars have looked to the supercommentaries on Nahmanides' work composed by members of his school.⁷⁶ This passage, however, particularly Nahmanides' conception of Metatron, is best understood from a comment made by a student of Nahmanides who cites the doctrine of his teacher:⁷⁷

⁷⁴Maimonides *Guide of the Perplexed* 1.63.

⁷⁵Translated from the better text found in New York MS (Microfilm, JTSA) 1686, fol. 24b.

⁷⁶Moshe Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition on This." in Isadore Twersky, ed., *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) 11–34; Elliot Wolfson, "By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutic," *AJS Review* 14 (1989) 103–78.

⁷⁷In R. Shem Tov Ibn Ga'on's supercommentary to Nahmanides' *Commentary to the Torah*, entitled *Keter Shem Tov*, Metatron is identified with the lowest *sefirah* because of its designation as "prince of the world," that is, the lowest grade that has contact with the world: "And the *shekhina* is prince of the world and because of this he is called the great prince, as the sages have said his name actually [שׂרפ] is like his as is found in the aggada: 'The holy one blessed be he said: I took Enoch' until 'I have raised his throne [to be] like mine' [שׂרפ > אנוך] and I have called him Lord [שׂרפ]" (Parma MS 2425, fol. 67b; printed in *Sefer Ma'or Va-Shemesh* [ed. Avraham Koriati, Livorno: Eli'ezer Ottolenghi, 1798] 26a). R. Yizhaq of Acco (*Ozar Hayim*, Moscow-Gunzberg MS 775, fol. 80a) identifies Metatron with the *sefirah Tiferet*. See the related traditions in Goldreich, *Me'irat Einayim*, 116. The author of the anonymous supercommentary to Nahmanides' work also identifies Metatron with *Tiferet* (Escorial MS G.I 15, fol. 150a). In an apparent reworking of the cherub doctrine by kabbalists outside known circles, the sanctified cherub is identified with *Tiferet* (London MS, British Library 752, fol. 39a). This manuscript was first cited by Scholem, *Major Trends*, 374 n. 85; conversely, see the reworking of a kabbalistic tradition according to the doctrine of the special cherub, where the cherub receives efflux from *Tiferet* (Kaufman MS 399, fol. 89a; published in Avraham Ben Azriel, *Arugat ha-Bosem* [ed. Efraim Urbach; 4 vols.; Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1963] 104 n. 96).

I have received [מקובלני] from the mouth of the Rabbi [Nahmanides] that Metatron is a messenger, and is not a separate thing [דבר מיוחד] as his name indicates. Every messenger is called *metator* [מיטטור] according to the Greek. And it is logical that those things that are sent [השלוחים] receive efflux from the Cause [of Causes] in order to accomplish their task.⁷⁸

According to this passage, there is nothing unique in the etymology of “Metatron”; the implications of his name are attributed to all divine messengers. The pivotal phrase in the passage is דבר מיוחד (“separate thing”), which either denies the existence of an angel named Metatron, or qualifies its nature. According to the former reading, “messenger” applies to all angelic manifestations, which vary according to their mission. In view of Nahmanides’ tradition (from his *Commentary to the Torah*), however, I understand the passage as Nahmanides’ confirmation that Metatron is the lowest *sefirah* and therefore the grade that relates to the world. That is, as the lowest grade that “receives efflux,” he carries out the divine will in the world. The tradition is therefore a statement about the status of Metatron in the divine world. By claiming that Metatron “is not a separate being,” Nahmanides denied Metatron’s angelic status and defined him as an inherent part of the continuous and unified being of the divine.⁷⁹

In these texts, as in the texts discussed above, the issue of the nature of divine beings comes to the fore in the context of prayer. The connection between the efflux and the intention of prayer is made more explicit in further material recorded by Nahmanides’ students. In various works, his students explain how the intention of prayer connects the *sefirot* one to another, as does the downward movement of the efflux. As recorded in Nahmanides’ name, specific occasions require the initial intention to be directed to a certain *sefirah*.⁸⁰ The danger, of course, is that one will terminate one’s intention with that *sefirah*. The prescribed intention of prayer as articulated by Nahmanides’ students reflects both

⁷⁸This passage is the correct reading of the tradition recorded in various manuscripts of the secrets of Nahmanides’ kabbalah by members of his school. For the various readings and manuscript witnesses, see Abrams, “New Manuscripts to the Book of Secrets.”

⁷⁹For this interpretation see Al-Nakawa, *Sha’ar Kavod ha-Shem*, 97a, and the concluding sentences of the “Commentary to the Ten Sefirot” attributed to Rabbi Ya’aqov ha-Kohen (published by Gershon Scholem, *Mada’ei ha-Yahudut* 2 [1926] 230) where it is said in the name of Nahmanides that the angel of the Lord is the tenth *sefirah*. Compare to the description of Nahmanides’ doctrine in Wolfson, “By Way of Truth,” 138; see also Wolfson, “Metatron and *Shi’ur Qomah*”; and Moshe Idel, “On the Concept of Zimzum in Kabbalah and its Research,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 10 (1992) 65–68 [Hebrew].

⁸⁰Goldreich, *Me’irat Einyim*, 84, 89.

the language of the passage cited in their teacher's name and the place of the last *sefirah* in relation to the gothead.

One should not err in intending his prayer as [others] have commented. Rather, one should intend such that the Cause of Causes will emanate its blessing to Israel through the particular *sefirah*, and that efflux will descend from grade [מִיְהִיָּה] to grade until it [finally] rests [below]. And anyone who intends his prayer to a single grade alone "cuts the shoots."⁸¹

Assuming that the attributions of both traditions are accurate, the isolation of the lowest *sefirah* in prayer, or "cutting the shoots," is equivalent in Nahmanides' system to designating angelic status to Metatron.

The work found in the manuscript entitled "The Order of Metatron" is attributed to Nahmanides' contemporary, R. Ezra of Gerona. In this text, Metatron "serves before the entrance to the palace. . . he is the gate keeper of the king who opens and locks [the gate for prayer]. And he is worthy to pass judgment. . . and [he is] the way [through which] you should direct your heart during prayer."⁸² Metatron is also identified with the divine concubine (פְּלִיטָה), the lowest grade of the corresponding left or evil emanation. As the concubine, Metatron personifies the attribute of judgment, functioning as the lowest *sefirah*.⁸³ By contrast, in a text from Gerona that Scholem published,⁸⁴ Metatron is both the lowest *sefirah*⁸⁵ and Enoch, who was transformed into an angel. The anonymous author criticizes those who argue that because one cannot direct prayer to the "cause of causes," which is too exalted for humanity's intention, one should pray to Metatron, who presides over worldly matters.

⁸¹This comment is copied in the margin of *sodot* to the prayers recorded in the name of Nahmanides (New York MS [Microfilm, JTSA] 2430, fol. 68a).

⁸²New York MS (Microfilm, JTSA) 1884, fol. 18a. This work was in all likelihood written by Yosef Hamadan: see Moshe Idel, "Additional Remnants From the Writings of R. Yosef of Hamadan," *Da'at* 21 (1988) 49 [Hebrew]. See also the version of this text in Mark Verman, *The Books of Contemplation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992) 94–95, 232–33. On Metatron who opens and locks the gate for prayer, see *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-Elohit*, 72b.

⁸³See Idel, "Additional Remnants," 49. Metatron is also described as "the beginning of his powers [מִיְהִיָּהוּ]" (New York MS [Microfilm, JTSA] 1884, fol. 18b), and presides over the angelic beings (fol. 18a). Compare to R. Azriel ben Menahem, *Commentary to the Aggadot*, 11, where the angel of glory [מַלְאֲכַי הַקְּבוֹדָה] is identified with the cherub and the *shekhina*. This text is lacking in the printed edition of Ezra's commentary to the aggadot, *Likutei Shikhehah u-Fe'ah* (Ferara: n.p., 1556) 3b.

⁸⁴Gershom Gerhard Scholem, *Reshit ha-Kabalah* (Tel Aviv: Shoken, 1948) 252–53. This text follows London MS 746 and not 146 as misprinted in Scholem; it can be found as well, without variation, in Paris MS, BN 974, fols. 108b–109a.

⁸⁵According to the text he is the seventh, apparently the last of the lower seven (Scholem, *Reshit ha-kabalah*, 253 n. 1).

By the time of expulsion of the Jews from Spain, the dual nature of Metatron had disappeared. The *Zohar* had gained central importance and the works of the German Pietists receded far into the background. While some prayers directed toward angels still existed at this time,⁸⁶ Metatron became an appellation, a specific *sefirah*, or another member of the divine retinue.⁸⁷ For example, in a kabbalistic tradition from the fourteenth century, “Metatron and Sandalfon are below the *Atarah* [the tenth *sefirah*] and they are the created glory, which is the two cherubim that Ezekiel saw.”⁸⁸

In the sixteenth century, R. Yosef b. Shlomo Al-Ashqar composed his work, *Tsafnat Pa'aneakh*, permitting prayer, or more specifically prostration before angels, while prohibiting the same form of worship toward a *sefirah*.

And if you claim that angels are called “other gods” [Exod 20:3] and prostration before them is forbidden, as it says [Exod 20:5] “Do not bow down before them and do not serve them,” then how is it that Joshua bowed before an angel, as it says [Josh 5:14] “And Joshua threw himself face down to the ground, prostrating himself.” And so with Abraham, as it says [Gen 18:2]: “And as soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance to the tent to greet them, and bowed to the ground.” One could excuse this and say that Abraham and Joshua did not bow [before angels], but before the Lord, may He be blessed. As it says of Abraham [Gen 18:3], “And he said: Lord, if it please you, do not go on pass your servant.” And it is holy as is mentioned in [the Midrash] *Genesis Rabbah*:⁸⁹ “And he turned his face toward the *Shekhina* and bowed.” And so also with Joshua who bowed before the *Shekhina*. . . . And one should conclude that there is a prohibition of prostration before angels only when they have not assumed a physical form. But when they have assumed the form of man, then it is permissible to bow to them. The reason being. . . [Exod 20:4] “Do not make for yourself a sculpted image or any likeness [of what is in the heavens above],” for [God] has no image or shape. And all these matters are con-

⁸⁶See Ira Robinson, “Abraham ben Eliezer Halevi: Kabbalist and Messianic Visionary of the Early Sixteenth Century” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1980) 208 n. 70; and at length in my dissertation, “The *Book of Illumination*,” 61–64. See further Raphael Isaac Fira, *Prayers for the Western Wall* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1881) 32b [Hebrew].

⁸⁷On prayers imitating the *shekhina* and prayers directed toward the *shekhina*, see Beracha Sack, “Some Remarks on Prayer in the Kabbalah of the 16th Century,” in Roland Goetschel, ed., *Prière, Mystique et Judaïsme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987) 179–86.

⁸⁸Parma MS 1221, fol. 5b. See also the related traditions there on fols. 4b, 10b, 185a. Compare to Yizhaq of Acco, *Ozar ha-Hayim*, Moscow-Gunzburg MS 775, fol. 14a: “And indeed according to the esoteric doctrine the cherubim refer to Metatron and Sandalfon.”

⁸⁹I was not able to locate this tradition.

tained in the first commandment of the decalogue. . . . That is, [it is forbidden] in so far as God does not partake in any of these [physical forms].⁹⁰

Al-Ashqar's view touches upon many of the central issues concerning the status of divine hypostases and angelic beings. Unlike the mystical texts of the thirteenth century discussed above, Al-Ashqar is not concerned with the angelic aspect of a *sefirah*, nor is the object of the intention of prayer a central issue. Material forms, including angels, have no divine ontology for him, and therefore one may bow before them. According to Al-Ashqar, one must be careful in praying to an angel when it has not materialized on earth, for only then could one confuse it with the divine itself. This brings us full circle to Elisha's viewing of Meṭatron. In the heavenly setting of the *pardes*, where God and Meṭatron are enthroned, confusion could occur. This is true according to mystical texts that describe either the inclusion of an angel in the godhead or the exclusion of the *logos* from it. This also applies to the Ashkenazi and early kabbalistic sources discussed above: if the divine *sefirah* can have angelic attributes or form, it may become confused with the angels that lie outside the boundaries of the divine being.

Meṭatron and Jesus

Hans Bietenhard discussed at length the differences between Jesus and Meṭatron in early Jewish and Christian texts.⁹¹ In a brief discussion, Almo Murtonen listed the strong parallels between the main functions of Meṭatron and Jesus.⁹² On the basis of these parallels, Murtonen concludes that Meṭatron is a counterpart to Jesus, stemming from a "coherent prototype" possibly reflected in the gnostic figure "little Jao." More recently, Gedaliahu Stroumsa has shown strong connections between early traditions concerning divine forms in Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic texts, suggesting that there "existed a cluster of mythologoumena about the archangelic hypostasis of God."⁹³ At issue here is the reliance of Jew-

⁹⁰R. Yosef ben Moshe Al-Ashqar, *Sefer Tsafnat Pa'aneakh* (Jerusalem: Misgav, 1991); facsimile (Jerusalem MS. Jewish National University Library 4 154) 106b.

⁹¹Hans Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (Tubingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1951).

⁹²Almo Murtonen, "The Figure of Metatron." *VT* 3 (1953) 409–11. Further parallels have been shown in Alan Segal, "Ruler of this World: Attitudes about Mediator Figures and the Importance of Sociology for Self-Definition." in E. P. Sanders, et al., eds., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition* (London: SCM, 1981) 245–68. For Jesus as the *logos* see also Joseph L. Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944) 48.

⁹³Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ," *HTR* 76 (1983) 269–88, esp. 279. See also Michael Fishbane, "Some Forms of Divine Appearance

ish-Christian texts on esoteric Jewish traditions, that “the origin of the mythologoumenon must be Jewish, rather than Christian.”⁹⁴

Considering the wide range of traditions in Jewish sources discussing Ezekiel’s vision of a human form on the divine throne, one would expect to find warnings in Jewish texts against confusing this divine manifestation with Jesus.⁹⁵ In fact, Yehuda Liebes has brought to our attention the striking identification of Meṭatron with Jesus in the liturgy and the reverberations of these traditions in passages of the printed edition of *The Seventy Names of Meṭatron* and in later kabbalistic works.⁹⁶ Liebes argues that the reference to Jesus stems from antiquity and is represented textually as “Yeshu‘a, prince of the countenance,” a clear reference to the angelic Meṭatron. As Liebes shows through a separate example, these associations and literary traditions stem from Jewish-Christian circles and found their way into canonical Jewish texts.⁹⁷

While the identification of Meṭatron with Jesus can be found already in fourteenth-century polemical works against Jews and in the works of seventeenth-century Christian kabbalists, a matter that requires further study,⁹⁸ it is not until the beginning of the eighteenth century that fig-

in Ancient Jewish Thought,” in Jacob Neusner, et al., eds., *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding* (BJS 159, 173–75; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) 261–70. Most recently, see Charles Mopsik, “La datation du *Chi’our Qomah* d’après un texte néotestamentaire,” *RevScRel* 68 (1994) 131–44.

⁹⁴Stroumsa, “Form(s) of God,” 287. See also Gilles Quispel, “Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis,” *VC* 34 (1980) 1–13; Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. 1: *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 17; for a similar conclusion derived through the study of Samaritan texts, see Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, 307–31.

⁹⁵See Salmon ben Yeruhim (*The Book of the Wars of the Lord Containing the Polemics of the Karaites Salmon ben Yeruhim Against Saadia Gaon* [ed. Israel Davidson; New York: Bet midrash ha-Rabanim be-Amerika, 1934] 124 [Hebrew]), who seems to misquote a passage from the *Shi ur Qomah* traditions purposefully: “Anyone who knows the measure of the body of the demiurge will be saved [יִשָּׁע].” By offering the reading, “saved,” instead of “will enter the world to come” בְּיָמֵי הַבָּא (Schafer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, 191 [§ 484], 260 [§710], 296 [§952]) Salmon could very well be equating what he believes to be the rabbinic view of anthropomorphism with that of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation of God. See Salmon’s comment on Elisha’s viewing of Meṭatron, *The Book of Wars*, 113; see also Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, 518–22; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 366 n. 107.

⁹⁶Liebes, “The Angels of the Shofar and *Yeshua Sar ha-Panim*,” 171–96.

⁹⁷Yehudah Liebes, “Who Makes the Horn of Jesus Flourish,” *Immanuel* 21 (1987) 55–67; translation from the Hebrew published in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1984) 313–48; with additional remarks in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 4 (1985) 341–44.

⁹⁸See Gershom Scholem, “Zur Geschichte der Anfänge der christlichen Kabbala,” in *Essays Presented to Leo Baeck* (London: East & West Library, 1954) 175; Ernst Benz, “La Kabbale Chrétienne en Allemagne du XVIe au XVIIIe Siècle,” in Antoine Favre and Frédéric Tristan, eds., *Kabbalistes Chrétiens* (Paris: Michel, 1979) 96; Egidio de Viterbo,

ures appear who concentrated a significant part of their literary efforts on the identification of Meṭaṭron with Jesus. I am aware of at least two works that seek to harmonize Christian and Jewish sources (especially the kabbalah) on the specific issue of Meṭaṭron.

The first work was composed by Moshe Kahana of Krakow, who converted to Christianity and assumed the name Johannan Kemper. His lengthy work on kabbalistic issues relies heavily on quotations from the *Zohar* and was composed in Hebrew in Uppsala between 1710 and 1713. This work includes a chapter focusing on Meṭaṭron's identification with Jesus. "Jesus. . . is called Meṭaṭron and became the servant-messenger [עבד שליח] who was sent to atone for the sins and to suffer for them."⁹⁹ The author incorporated many themes associated with Meṭaṭron in Jewish literature; he is the created angel¹⁰⁰ who took form [ההיגשם]¹⁰¹ on the earth and is called *shekhina*.¹⁰² Finally, in a christological recasting of a theme cited earlier from heterodox Jewish texts, the author writes: "we must bow before him and kneel before the Lord (YHWH)."¹⁰³

The second text concerning Meṭaṭron is included in a lengthy book entitled *Gloria Christi* by Caspar Calvor (Caluerius), issued with an added Hebrew title page captioned *Kavod Yeshu'a Mashiaḥ* (כבוד ישוע משיח). The work was composed in *hochdeutsch* and was printed in Leipzig

Scechm e Libellus Litteris Hebraicis (ed. François Secret; 2 vols.: Roma: Centro Internazionale di Studi Umanistici, 1959) 2: 13; Moshe Idel, "Egidio da Viterbo e gli scritti di Avraham Abulafia," *Italia* 2 (1980) 48–50 [Hebrew]; idem, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988) 53; and Chaim Wirszubski, *Between the Lines: Kabbalah, Christian Kabbalah and Sabbateanism* (ed. Moshe Idel; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990) 77 [Hebrew]. See also the response to the Christian interpretation that the angel mentioned in Exod 23:21 is the forgiving power in R. Yosef ben Natan Official, *Yosef ha-Mekane* (ed. Yehudah Rosenthal; Jerusalem: Mekitse Nirdamim, 1970) 86 [Hebrew]. If the specific source of these traditions does not stem from far more ancient sources, as outlined for example by Stroumsa ("Form[s] of God," 269–88, esp. 279) and Fossum (*The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord*, 313 n. 139) one must ask whether this identification is a product of the exegesis of Jewish kabbalists who apostasized, therefore reinterpreting their kabbalistic world view according to new doctrines, or the product of Christians who saw parallels to their own models of the divine ontology in Jewish symbolism. While examples of both could exist side by side, the former might prove that the Christian kabbalists were influenced by the works of early converts to Christianity. See further Moshe Idel, "Notes on Medieval Jewish-Christian Polemics," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1985) 689–98 [Hebrew].

⁹⁹Uppsala MS 24, fol. 115a. I would like to thank Professor Moshe Idel for bringing this manuscript to my attention. Shifra Assulin is currently preparing a study of this and other works by Kemper.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., fol. 120a.

¹⁰¹Ibid., fol. 149b.

¹⁰²Ibid., fol. 152a.

¹⁰³Ibid., fol. 120a.

in 1710. The section relevant to our discussion is a series of questions and answers on Meṭaṭron, *shekhina*, and Memra. In 1923, Hugo Odeberg published these passages in a German rendition, supplemented with a brief introduction and notes.¹⁰⁴ While Odeberg was convinced that the text was written by a convert to Christianity who was born Jewish and received an education in rabbinic and kabbalistic literature, Scholem later showed that the text was written in Halle in the Institutum Judaicum with missionary purposes in mind.¹⁰⁵ After discussing the terms Meṭaṭron, *shekhina*, and Memra according to talmudic, medieval (namely, Rashi and Maimonides), and kabbalistic sources, the author asks his concluding question: Should the messiah be [identified] with Meṭaṭron, *shekhina*, and Memra?

Answer: When the issue gets its *be'ur* or explanation in light of the New Testament, then the Christians will say that behind these Jewish ideas is nothing other than the messiah, Jesus. But while we have not come so far that the Jew would accept the New Testament as the word of God, we cannot hold this to be true [from their perspective]. For now, it is enough that the Jews themselves accept that together with the everlasting God is a high being above all the angels, through which God rules the world.¹⁰⁶

Unlike many Christian kabbalists, the author avoided a reference to the ten *sefirot* in his discussion. Instead, he reduced the symbolism of each corpus of literature to a common element of a mediating divine being. Avoiding the method of many medieval polemics, the author did not argue that the Jewish texts contain the Christian belief;¹⁰⁷ he argued instead that to arrive at the Christian belief one must transform the earlier symbolism through that of another theological system.

¹⁰⁴Hugo Odeberg, "Fragen von Metatron Schekina und Memra," *Bulletin de la Societé Royale des Lettres de Lund* (1941–42 [2]) 31–46. I would like to thank Joe Forman for providing me with photocopies of the original Leipzig edition.

¹⁰⁵Gershom Scholem, "Collectanea to the Bibliography of the Kabbalah," *Kiryat Sefer* 30 (1945) 412 [Hebrew].

¹⁰⁶Odeberg, "Fragen von Metatron," 45–46 (Halle edition, 113–14).

¹⁰⁷One prominent example of this is the Barcelona Disputation involving Nahmanides. See Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 86–114. The work from Halle stands in contrast to the numerous works written by Christian Hebraists of the same period who debate the trinitarian or unitarian nature of Christian belief. See for example, Peter (Pierre) Allix, *The Judgment of the Ancient Jewish Church, Against the Unitarians in the Controversy upon the Holy Trinity* (London: n.p., 1699). On the Memra (the divine presence) and *shekhina* as understood through Nahmanides, see pp. 164–65; and on Meṭaṭron, see pp. 454–56. I would like to thank Matt Goldish for bringing this work to my attention. See further Johann Reuchlin, *De Arte Cabalistica* (Hanau: n.p., 1517) 67b.

The assertion that Jewish and Christian symbolism concerning the divine hypostasis can be reduced to a common element can be found already in the thirteenth century. In at least one strong example, Jews were cognizant of the problems arising from using kabbalistic material in their own polemics. In a work written in Hebrew entitled, "Response to the Heretics [*minim*]," the Jewish author is concerned with the anthropomorphic manifestation of the *shekhina*: "Be careful not to say to him [the Christian] that the *shekhina* has a body, for he will say that if so, man too has a body and you will be caught [on this point] and will fail."¹⁰⁸ This comment is interesting, for he does not argue that a statement about the body of the *shekhina* will be too difficult to explain, but rather that it suggests a parallel to Jesus' human form. The anonymous author acknowledges this problem and warns his Hebrew reader not to speculate on this matter, which can be found in known and accepted Jewish sources. He then confides to the reader a kabbalistic doctrine of the *shekhina*:

But if you think in your thoughts that it is written in the *Sefer Ha-Qomah*¹⁰⁹ that the *Shekhina* has a body. [then I say that] we are not permitted to think of this and also not to mention it to a non-Jew. Rather, [say to them] as I have written. And he who says to them that the *Shekhina* [indeed] does have a body, foolish Christians will laugh at him and say that the Jews have no [true] wisdom [of their own], that they are really heretics, because they contradict themselves.¹¹⁰ [They will say this because] the non-Jews have not the sufficient intellect to delve fully into the spirituality [*ruhaniuth*] of this, for they have no part in the intellect, the *Shekhina* and the *sefirot* as I have shown above from [the explanation of] biblical verses. Therefore, say as I have written above, but know that the *Shekhina* is [the] Name and the holiest of the angels. And She is created and is separate [*nivdal*] from [God]. may He be blessed; but if He wills, He unites with Her entirely or partially. But to the Cause of Causes, It intermittently makes contact. . . . But of all this, do not mention a word to the non-Jews, for they do not under-

¹⁰⁸Oxford MS 2289, fol. 42b. For a portion of this text according to an abridged version found in Paris. MS BN 1408, see Yehudah Rosenthal, *Studies and Texts in Jewish History, Literature and Religion* (Jerusalem: Mas, 1967) 368–72 [Hebrew].

¹⁰⁹A text from the Hekhalot literature that provides the measurements of God's body. See Martin Cohen, *The Shiur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983) esp. 1–50.

¹¹⁰Literally, "that they speak of an impossibility." Compare to the statement of Agobard, the archbishop of Lyon from 816–824 CE, as discussed in Andrew Sharf, *The Universe of Shabbetai Donnolo* (New York: Ktav, 1976) 80.

stand and they share no part in the supernal understanding.¹¹¹ Even to the masses of our own people one should conceal this [view], so all the more so from the impure [nations].¹¹²

While Metatron is not discussed in this passage, the supreme angel, who is both manifest in the world and at times united with God, forms the essence of the esoteric doctrine within Judaism. By insisting that it be concealed from the Christians and excluded from discourse, he foreshadows the eighteenth-century texts discussed above. In the context of Jewish anthropomorphism and Christian doctrine, the author shows that where the boundary between angel and God becomes blurred, it also becomes difficult to characterize the differences in religious symbolism.

¹¹¹A term for the third *sefirah*.

¹¹²Oxford MS 2289, fol. 43a.



Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.