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**“The Likeness of Heaven”:  
*Kavod of Azazel in the Apocalypse of Abraham***

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***Introduction***

Chapter 14 of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, a Jewish pseudepigraphon written in the first centuries CE, unveils an enigmatic tradition about the unusual power given to the main antagonist of the story, the fallen angel Azazel.<sup>1</sup> In the text, Abraham’s celestial guide, the angel Yahoel, warns his human apprentice, the hero of the faith, that God

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<sup>1</sup> On the Azazel traditions, see J. De Roo, “Was the Goat for Azazel destined for the Wrath of God?” *Biblica* 81 (2000) 233-241; W. Fauth, “Auf den Spuren des biblischen Azazel (Lev 16): Einige Residuen der Gestalt oder des Namens in jüdisch-aramäischen, griechischen, koptischen, äthiopischen, syrischen und mandäischen Texten,” *ZAW* 110 (1998) 514-534; E.L. Feinberg, “The Scapegoat of Leviticus Sixteen,” *BSac* 115 (1958) 320-31; M. Görg, “Beobachtungen zum sogenannten Azazel-Ritus,” *BN* 33 (1986) 10-16; L.L. Grabbe, “The Scapegoat Tradition: A Study in Early Jewish Interpretation,” *JSJ* 18 (1987) 165-79; R. Helm, “Azazel in Early Jewish Literature,” *Andrews University Seminary Papers* 32 (1994) 217-226; B. Janowski, *Sühne als Heilgeschehen: Studien zur Sühnetheologie der Priesterchrift und der Wurzel KPR im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (WMANT, 55; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982); idem, “Azazel,” in: *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (eds. K. van der Toorn, et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1995) 240-248. B. Jurgens, *Heiligkeit und Versöhnung: Leviticus 16 in seinem Literarischen Kontext* (New York: Herder, 2001); H.M. Kümmel, “Ersatzkönig und Sündenbock,” *ZAW* 80 (1986) 289-318; R.D. Levy, *The Symbolism of the Azazel Goat* (Bethesda: International Scholars Publication, 1998); O. Loretz, *Leberschau, Sündenbock, Asazel in Ugarit und Israel: Leberschau und Jahwestatue in Psalm 27, Leberschau in Psalm 74* (UBL, 3; Altenberge: CIS-Verlag, 1985); J. Maclean, “Barabbas, the Scapegoat Ritual, and the Development of the Passion Narrative,” *HTR* 100 (2007) 309-334; J. Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology* (SJLA, 36; Leiden: Brill, 1983); D. Rudman, “A Note on the Azazel-goat Ritual,” *ZAW* 116 (2004) 396-401; W.H. Shea, “Azazel in the Pseudepigrapha,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13 (2002) 1-9; D. Stökl Ben Ezra, “Yom Kippur in the Apocalyptic Imaginaire and the Roots of Jesus’ High Priesthood,” in: *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions* (eds. J. Assman and G. Stroumsa; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 349-366; idem, “The Biblical Yom Kippur, the Jewish Fast of the Day of Atonement and the Church Fathers,” *Studia Patristica* 34 (2002) 493-502; idem, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century* (WUNT, 163; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2003); A. Strobel, “Das jerusalemische Sündenbock-ritual. Topographische und landeskundliche Erwägungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte von Lev. 16,10,21f.,” *ZDPV* 103 (1987) 141-68; H. Tawil, “Azazel the Prince of the Steep: A Comparative Study,” *ZAW* 92 (1980) 43-59; M. Weinfeld, “Social and Cultic Institutions in the Priestly Source against Their ANE Background,” *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1983) 95-129; D.P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (SBLDS, 101; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987).

endowed his chief eschatological opponent Azazel with a special will and with “heaviness” against those who answer him. The reference to the mysterious “heaviness” (Slav. тягота) given to the demon has puzzled students of the Slavonic apocalypse for a long time. Ryszard Rubinkiewicz has previously suggested that the Slavonic term for “heaviness” (тягота) in this passage from *Apoc. Ab.* 14:13 possibly serves as a technical term for rendering the Hebrew word *Kavod*.<sup>2</sup> Rubinkiewicz has further proposed that the original text most likely had כבוד, which has the sense of “gravity” but also “glory,” and had the following rendering: “the Eternal One ... to him [Azazel] he gave the glory and power.” According to Rubinkiewicz, this ambiguity lays at the basis of the Slavonic translation of the verse.<sup>3</sup>

It is quite possible that, given the formative influences the Book of Ezekiel exercises on the *Apocalypse of Abraham*,<sup>4</sup> the authors of the text might indeed have known the *Kavod* technical terminology, which plays such an important role in the great prophetic book. Yet the transference of this peculiar theophanic imagery to an ambiguous character of the story is quite puzzling since the *Kavod* symbolism represents a very distinctive attribute reserved in the Jewish biblical and pseudepigraphic traditions almost exclusively

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<sup>2</sup> *Apoc. Ab.* 14:13 reads: “...Since God gave him [Azazel] the *heaviness* (тяготу) and the will against those who answer him...” R. Rubinkiewicz, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham en vieux slave. Édition critique du texte, introduction, traduction et commentaire*, (Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego. *Źródła i monografie*, 129; Lublin, 1987) 150.

<sup>3</sup> Rubinkiewicz points to the presence of the formulae in the Gospel of Luke 4:6 “I will give you all their authority and splendor...”

<sup>4</sup> Rubinkiewicz provides a helpful outline of usage of Ezekielean traditions in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. He notes that “among the prophetic books, the book of Ezekiel plays for our author the same role as Genesis in the Pentateuch. The vision of the divine throne (*Apoc. Ab.* 18) is inspired by Ezek 1 and 10. Abraham sees the four living creatures (*Apoc. Ab.* 18:5-11) depicted in Ezek 1 and 10. He also sees the wheels of fire decorated with eyes all around (*Apoc. Ab.* 18:3), the throne (*Apoc. Ab.* 18:3; Ezek 1:26), the chariot (*Apoc. Ab.* 18:12 and Ezek 10:6); he hears the voice of God (*Apoc. Ab.* 19:1 and Ezek 1:28). When the cloud of fire raises up, he can hear ‘the voice like the roaring sea’ (*Apoc. Ab.* 18:1; Ezek 1:24). There is no doubt that the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* takes the texts of Ezek 1 and 10 as sources of inspiration.” Rubinkiewicz, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham en vieux slave. Introduction, texte critique traduction et commentaire*, 87.

for the celestial and translated agents to signal their divine status. Could this strange tradition about the glory of Azazel suggest that the authors of the Slavonic apocalypse sought to envision the fallen angel as a kind of negative counterpart of the Deity who enjoys his own “exalted” attributes that mimic and emulate divine attributes?

A closer look at the pseudepigraphon reveals that such a dualistically symmetrical symbolism is not only confined to the description of the fallen angel and his unusual attributes. It also represents one of the main ideological tendencies of the Slavonic apocalypse. Several scholars have previously noted this peculiarity of the theological universe of the Slavonic apocalypse, which unveils the paradoxical symmetry of good and evil realms: the domains which, in the Abrahamic pseudepigraphon, seem depicted as emulating and mirroring each other.

It has been previously argued that the striking prevalence of such dualistic symmetrical patterns permeating the fabric of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* can be seen as one of the most controversial and puzzling features of the text.<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that the dualistic currents are present mostly in the second, apocalyptic portion of the text where the hero of the faith receives an enigmatic revelation from the Deity about the unusual powers given to Azazel.

Reflecting on these conceptual developments, Michael Stone draws attention to the traditions found in chapters 20, 22, and 29, where the reference to Azazel’s rule, which he exercises jointly with God over the world coincides “with the idea that God granted

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 229.

him authority over the wicked.”<sup>6</sup> Stone suggests that “these ideas are clearly dualistic in nature.”<sup>7</sup>

John Collins explores another cluster of peculiar depictions repeatedly found in the second part of the *Apocalypse*, in which humankind is divided into two parts, half on the right and half on the left, representing respectively the chosen people and the Gentiles. These portions of humanity are labeled in the text as the lot of God and the lot of Azazel. Collins argues that “the symmetrical division suggests a dualistic view of the world.”<sup>8</sup> He further observes that “the nature and extent of this dualism constitute the most controversial problem in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.”<sup>9</sup>

Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, while denying the presence of “absolute” or “ontological”<sup>10</sup> dualism in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, admits that the pseudepigraphon exhibits some dualistic tendencies in its ethical, spatial and temporal dimensions.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran sectarian writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. M. Stone; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 418.

<sup>7</sup> Stone, *Jewish Writings*, 418. Stone further makes a connection here between dualistic tendencies found in *Apoc. Ab.* and the traditions from the Qumran documents. He observes that “the idea of joint rule of Azazel and God in this world resembles the doctrine of the Rule of Community, according to which there are two powers God appointed to rule in the world (cf. 1QS 2:20-1).” Stone, *Jewish Writings*, 418. It should be noted that the connections between the dualism of the Slavonic apocalypse and the Palestinian dualistic traditions have been recognized by several scholars. Already Box, long before the discovery of the DSS, argued that the dualistic features of the Slavonic apocalypse are reminiscent of the “Essene” dualistic ideology. Thus, Box suggested that “the book is essentially Jewish, and there are features in it which suggest Essene origin; such are its strong predestinarian doctrine, *its dualistic conceptions*, and its ascetic tendencies.” Emphasis added. G. H. Box and J. I. Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (Translations of Early Documents; London: SPCK, 1918) xxi.

<sup>8</sup> Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 229.

<sup>9</sup> Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 229.

<sup>10</sup> “In the *Apocalypse of Abraham* there is no ontological dualism. The created world is good before the eyes of God (22:2). There is no other God in the universe, than “the one whom” Abraham “searched for” and “who has loved” him (19:3). There is evil in the world, but it is not inevitable. God has full control over the world and he does not permit the body of the just to remain in the hand of Azazel (13:10). Azazel is wrong if he thinks he can scorn justice and disperse the secret of heaven (14:4). He will be banished in the desert forever (14:5).” R. Rubinkiewicz, “The Apocalypse of Abraham,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, (2 vols. ed. J.H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1985 [1983]) 1.681-705 at 684.

<sup>11</sup> He observes that “... dans l’Apocalypse d’Abraham il n’y a pas trace d’un dualisme absolu... Mais le monde révèle un certain dualisme. D’abord on découvre un dualisme spatial. Il y a la terre et l’Eden, la mer et les eaux supérieures, les hommes situés à gauche et les hommes situés à droite dans le

Yet, in contrast to Rubinkiewicz's opinion, George Box sees in these spatial and temporal dimensions the main signs of the "radical dualism" of the apocalypse. He maintains that "the radical dualism of the Book comes out not only in the sharp division of mankind into two hosts, which stands for Jewry and heathendom respectively, but also in the clearly defined contradistinction of two ages, the present Age of ungodliness and the future Age of righteousness ...."<sup>12</sup>

Another distinguished student of the Slavonic text, Marc Philonenko, in his analysis of the symmetrical nature of the positions of Yahoel and Azazel<sup>13</sup> notes the peculiarity of the interaction between these two spirits, one good and one malevolent. He observes that their battle does not occur directly, but rather through a medium of a human being, Abraham. Abraham is thus envisioned in the pseudepigraphon as a place where the battle between two spiritual forces is unfolded.<sup>14</sup> Philonenko sees in this anthropological internalization a peculiar mold of the dualism that is also present in the Qumran

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tableau (XXI, 3-7). Il y a aussi un dualisme temporel: celui qui oppose le monde present (XXXII, 2) et le monde de la justice (XXIX, 18); le jour et les ténèbres (XVII, 22s.), l'humanité d'avant Abraham et l'humanité d'après Abraham (XXIV-XXV). L'humanité postérieure à Abraham est elle-même divisée entre le peuple de Dieu et les nations (XXII, 4-5; XXIV, 1). Il existe encore un dualisme éthique: on trouve des justes, mais aussi des méchants (XVII, 22; XXIII, 12); l'homme a le désir du mal (XXIII, 13), mais aussi celui des œuvres justes (XXVII, 9)...” R. Rubinkiewicz, “La vision de l’histoire dans l’Apocalypse d’Abraham,” in: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, 2.19.1. (Berlin – New York: de Gruyter, 1979) 137–151 at 149.

<sup>12</sup> G. H. Box and J. I. Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (Translations of Early Documents; London: SPCK, 1918) xxvi.

<sup>13</sup> B. Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes* (Semitica, 31; Paris, 1981) 31.

<sup>14</sup> Philonenko also draws attention to the expression found in *Apoc. Ab.* 14:6: “Since your inheritance are those who are with you, with men born with the stars and clouds. And their portion is you, and they come into being through your being.” Philonenko sees in this expression a connection with the astrological lore found in some Qumran horoscopes which expresses the idea that the human beings from the time of their birth belong either to the “lot” of light or to the “lot” of darkness. Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 32. Philonenko also sees also the dualistic opposition between the “age of justice” (ВЪ ВЪЦѢ ПРАВЕДНЕМЪ) and the “age of corruption” (ВО ТЛѢННѢ ВЪЦѢ). In his opinion all these instances represent remarkable expressions of a dualistic ideology.

materials, including the *Instruction on the Two Spirits* (1QS 3:13 - 4:26) where the Prince of Lights and the Angel of Darkness are fighting in the heart of man.<sup>15</sup>

The aforementioned scholarly suggestions about the dualistic tendencies of the apocalypse, which seems to envision a symmetrical correspondence between the divine and demonic realms, the worlds of God and of Azazel, are intriguing and deserve further investigation. The current study will attempt to explore some dualistic symmetrical patterns found in the Slavonic pseudepigraphon, concentrating mainly on the peculiar theophanic imagery surrounding the figure of the main antagonist of the text, the demon Azazel.

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<sup>15</sup> Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 32.

### *The Inheritance of Azazel*

The traditions about the two eschatological lots or portions of humanity found in the second part of the text have captivated the imagination of Slavonic apocalypse scholars for a long time. In these fascinating descriptions, students of the Abrahamic pseudepigraphon have often tried to discern possible connections with the dualistic developments found in some Qumran materials, where the imagery of the two eschatological lots played a significant role. Indeed, in the Dead Sea Scrolls one can find a broad appropriation of the imagery of the two portions of humanity which are often depicted there in striking opposition to each other in the final decisive battle. It has been frequently noted that the peculiar symbolism of the eschatological parties often takes the form of dualistic symmetrical counterparts, as these groups are repeatedly described in the Dead Sea Scrolls, through metaphoric depictions involving the dichotomies of darkness and light, good and evil, election and rejection. This dualistic “mirroring” is also often underscored by the symbolic profiles of the main leaders of the eschatological “lots,” whose peculiar sobriquets often negatively or positively reflect, or even polemically deconstruct, the names of their respective eschatological rivals: Melchizedek and Melchireša<sup>c</sup>, the Angel of Light and the Prince of Darkness.

The peculiar imagery of the eschatological portions of humanity is also manifested in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Graphic depictions of the two lots are widely dispersed in the second, apocalyptic, part of the pseudepigraphon. Scholars have previously noted that the peculiar conceptual elaborations that surround these portrayals of the portions appear to be reminiscent not only of the eschatological reinterpretations

and terminology found in the Qumran materials,<sup>16</sup> but also of the peculiar imagery of sacrificial lots prominent in the Yom Kippur ritual,<sup>17</sup> the ordinance described in detail in the biblical and rabbinic accounts.<sup>18</sup> Thus it has been previously observed that the word “lot” (Slav. *чаша*) found in the Slavonic text appears to be connected to the Hebrew גורל, a term prominent in some cultic descriptions found in biblical and rabbinic accounts,<sup>19</sup> as well as in the eschatological developments attested in the Qumran materials.<sup>20</sup>

Similar to the Qumran materials where the lots are linked to the fallen angelic figures or translated heroes (like Belial or Melchizedek), in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*

<sup>16</sup> Thus, for example, Marc Philonenko noted that the word “lot” (Slav. *чаша*) appears to be connected to the Hebrew גורל, a term attested multiple times in the Qumran materials. Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 33. On the two lots, see also Philonenko-Sayar, B., and Philonenko, M. “Die Apokalypse Abrahams,” *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit* 5.5. (Gütersloh, 1982) 413–460 at 418; Rubinkiewicz, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham en vieux slave. Édition critique du texte, introduction, traduction et commentaire*, 54.

<sup>17</sup> For the Yom Kippur traditions in *Apoc. Ab.* see L.L. Grabbe, “The Scapegoat Tradition: A Study in Early Jewish Interpretation,” *JSJ* 18 (1987) 165-79 at 157; C. Fletcher-Louis, “The Revelation of the Sacral Son of Man,” in: *Auferstehung-Resurrection* (eds F. Avemarie and H. Lichtenberger; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck) 282; R. Helm, “Azazel in Early Jewish Literature,” *Andrews University Seminary Papers* 32 (1994) 217-226 at 223; B. Lourié, “Propitiatorium in the Apocalypse of Abraham,” in: *The Old Testament Apocrypha in the Slavonic Tradition: Continuity and Diversity* (eds. L. DiTommaso and C. Böttrich, with the assist. of M. Swoboda; Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum; Tübingen, 2009) (forthcoming); D. Stökl Ben Ezra, “Yom Kippur in the Apocalyptic Imaginaire and the Roots of Jesus’ High Priesthood,” in: *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions* (eds. J. Assman and G. Stroumsa; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 349-366; idem, “The Biblical Yom Kippur, the Jewish Fast of the Day of Atonement and the Church Fathers,” *Studia Patristica* 34 (2002) 493-502; idem, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century* (WUNT, 163; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2003) 94.

<sup>18</sup> See A. Orlov, “The Eschatological Yom Kippur in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*: Part I: The Scapegoat Ritual,” in: *Symbola Caelestis. Le symbolisme liturgique et paraliturgique dans le monde Chrétien* (Scrinium, 5; eds. A. Orlov and B. Lourié; Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009) 79-111.

<sup>19</sup> For the גורל terminology see Lev 16:8-10.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, IQS גורל בל יעל (the lot of Belial); גורל קדושים (the lot of the holy ones). 1QM גורל בני חושך (the lot of the sons of darkness); גורל חושך (the lot of darkness). 11Q13 צדק [כי] גורל מל [אנש] (the men of the lot of Melchizedek).



the portions of humanity are now tied to the main characters of the story – the fallen angel Azazel<sup>21</sup> and the translated patriarch Abraham.<sup>22</sup>

It is also noteworthy that in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, similar to the Qumran materials,<sup>23</sup> the positive lot is designated sometimes as the lot of the Deity - “my [God’s] lot”:

And the Eternal Mighty One said to me, “Abraham, Abraham!” And I said, “Here am I!” And he said, “Look from on high at the stars which are beneath you and count them for me and tell me their number!” And I said, “Would I be able? For I am [but] a man.” And he said to me, “As the number of the stars and their host, so shall I make your seed into a company of nations, set apart for me in my lot with Azazel.”<sup>24</sup>

While the similarities of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* with the Qumran materials were often noted and highlighted in previous scholarly studies, the differences in the descriptions of the eschatological lots and their respective leaders have often been neglected. Yet, it is quite possible that the dualistic imagery of the eschatological portions might receive an even more radical form in the Slavonic apocalypse than in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Indeed, it seems that the Slavonic pseudepigraphon attempts to transfer to the antagonist and to his lot some of the notions and attributes which in the Qumran materials remain reserved solely for the domain of the positive portion of humanity. One such

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<sup>21</sup> *Апoc. Аб. 13:7*: “... And he said to him, “Reproach is on you, Azazel! Since *Abraham’s portion* (часть Аврамля) is in heaven, and *yours* is on earth ...” A. Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (TCS, 3; Atlanta: Scholars, 2005) 20; Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> *Апoc. Аб. 10:15*: “Stand up, Abraham, go boldly, be very joyful and rejoice! And I am with you, since *an honorable portion* (часть вѣчная) has been prepared for you by the Eternal One.” Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham*, 18; Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 60.

<sup>23</sup> This identification of the positive lot with the lot of God is also present in the Qumran materials. Cf. 1QM 13:5-6: “For they are the lot of darkness but the lot of God is for [everlast]ing light.” *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (2 vols.; eds. F. García Martínez and E. Tigchelaar; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 135.

<sup>24</sup> *Апoc. Аб. 20:1-5*. Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham*, 25.

notion includes the concept of “inheritance,” the term that plays an important role both in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Slavonic apocalypse.

Thus, the passage found in chapter 14 of the pseudepigraphon unveils the following enigmatic tradition about the very special “inheritance” given to the fallen angel Azazel:

Since *your inheritance* (ДОСТОЯНИЕ ТВОЕ) are those who are with you, with men born with the stars and clouds. And *their portion is you* (ИХЪЖЕ ЧАСТЬ ЕСИ ТЫ).<sup>25</sup>

The striking feature of this account is that in *Apos. Ab.* 14:6 the concept of the eschatological “lot” or “portion” (Slav. часть)<sup>26</sup> of Azazel appears to be used interchangeably with the notion of “inheritance” (Slav. достояние).

This terminological connection is intriguing since the two notions, “inheritance” and “lot,” are also used interchangeably in the Qumran passages that deal with the “lot” imagery. Thus, for example, 11Q13 speaks about “inheritance” referring to the portion of Melchizedek that will be victorious in the eschatological ordeal:

...and from the *inheritance* of Melchizedek, fo[r...] ... and they are the *inheritance* of Melchizedek, who will make them return. And the d[ay of aton]ement is the e[nd of] the tenth [ju]bilee in which atonement shall be made for all the sons of [light and] for the men [of] the lot of Mel[chi]zedek.<sup>27</sup>

In 1QS 3:13 - 4:26, in the fragment also known as the *Instruction on the Two Spirits* the imagery of inheritance is tied to the concept of the lot of the righteous:

... they walk in wisdom or in folly. In agreement with man’s *inheritance* in the truth, he shall be righteous and so abhor injustice; and according to his share in the lot of injustice, he shall act wickedly in it, and so abhor the truth.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham*, 21; Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 68.

<sup>26</sup> Although here and in *Apos. Ab.* 10:15 the Slavonic word “часть” is used for designation of the “lots,” *Apos. Ab.* 20:5 and *Apos. Ab.* 29:21 uses the Slavonic word “жребий” for their designation of the “lot.” Cf. Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 82 and 102.

<sup>27</sup> *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 1207-1209.

<sup>28</sup> *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 75-79.

In 1QS 11:7-8 and CD 13:11-12 this concept of inheritance is once again connected with participation in the lot of light, also labeled in 1QS as “the lot of the holy ones”:<sup>29</sup>

To those whom God has selected he has given them as everlasting possession; and he has given them an *inheritance* in the lot of the holy ones. (1QS 11:7-8)<sup>30</sup>

And everyone who joins his congregation, he should examine, concerning his actions, his intelligence, his strength, his courage and his wealth; and they shall inscribe him in his place according to his *inheritance* in the lot of light. (CD-A 13:11-12).<sup>31</sup>

In these last two texts the concept of “inheritance” appears to be understood as the act of participation in the eschatological lot rendered through the formulae “inheritance in the lot” (Heb. נחל תו בגורל).<sup>32</sup> The same idea seems to be at work in the aforementioned passage from *Apoc. Ab.* 14:6 where “inheritance” is understood as participation in the lot of Azazel.

Yet despite the similarities, one striking difference between these texts is discernable: while in the Qumran materials the “inheritance” appears to be connected with the divine lot, in *Apoc. Ab.* it is unambiguously tied to the lot of Azazel.

This transference of the notion of “inheritance”- the concept which plays such an important role in the Qumran ideology under the umbrella of the lot of Azazel in the *Apoc. Ab.* - is striking. It brings the dualistic ideology of the Jewish pseudepigraphon on an entirely new conceptual level in comparison with the dualistic developments found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

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<sup>29</sup> In 1QM 14:9 the terminology of inheritance is invoked again. There the remnant predestine to survive is called “the rem[nant of your inheritance] during the empire of Belial.” *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 137.

<sup>30</sup> *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 97.

<sup>31</sup> *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 573.

<sup>32</sup> *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 572.

This new conceptual advancement appears also to have a strong influence on the profile of the main antagonist of the text, the fallen angel Azazel who, in comparison with the eschatological opponents of the Dead Sea Scrolls, now becomes not just one of the characters in the gallery of many eschatological opponents but the adversary *par excellence*. In this respect Lester Grabbe suggests that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* seems to be referring to the “basic arch-demon complex under the name of Azazel.”<sup>33</sup> In his opinion, in the Slavonic apocalypse “Azazel is no longer just a leader among the fallen angels but *the* leader of the demons. Figures originally separate have now fallen together while the various names have become only different aliases of the one devil.”<sup>34</sup>

Such mythological consolidation affecting the profile of the main eschatological opponent advances the dualistic thrust of the Slavonic apocalypse and helps to secure Azazel’s confrontational stand not only toward Yahoel and Abraham but, more importantly, toward the Deity.

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<sup>33</sup> Grabbe, “The Scapegoat tradition: A Study in Early Jewish Interpretation,” 158.

<sup>34</sup> Grabbe, “The Scapegoat tradition: A Study in Early Jewish Interpretation,” 158.

### *The Theophany of Azazel*

The second, apocalyptic, section of the Slavonic pseudepigraphon begins with a series of arcane portrayals unveiling the striking appearance and the spectacular offices of Abraham's celestial guide, angel Yahoel. Yet, in comparison with these disclosures about the great celestial being, the figure of another important character in the story, the main adversary of the text, the fallen angel Azazel, is shrouded in a cluster of even more ambiguous and enigmatic descriptions. For unknown reasons, possibly viewing the arch-demon's figure as providing one of the conceptual clues to understanding the mystery of the theological universe of the text, the authors of the pseudepigraphon appears very reluctant to unveil and clarify the exact status of their mysterious antihero, instead offering to their readers the rich tapestry of arcane traditions embroidered with the most recondite imagery that can be found in the apocalypse.

Yet despite the aura of concealment that envelops the cryptic profile of the arch-demon, the cosmic significance of this perplexing character peeps through various details of the story. Thus, the very first lines of chapter 13, which introduce Azazel to the audience, appear to hint at him as a figure with a very special authority. His bold descend on the sacrifices of the hero of the faith does not appear coincidental; the authors of the Slavonic apocalypse may want to signal to their readers that Azazel is not merely an abandoned, demoted creature, but rather an object of worship, veneration, and sacrificial devotion, who possibly possesses an exalted status and place that negatively replicate and mimic the authority and position of the Deity.

Many previous studies have shown conceptual links between Azazel and Abraham,<sup>35</sup> as well as parallels between Azazel and Yahoel.<sup>36</sup> Yet despite the significance of these comparative studies, which have been able to clarify conceptual symmetry between positive and negative protagonists of the story, scholars have often neglected another portentous parallelism found in the text – that is, the correspondence in the roles and attributes between the Deity and the demon. The initial sign of this baffling dualistic symmetry appears already to be hinted at in the depictions of the eschatological lots, where the portion of Azazel is explicitly compared with the lot of the Almighty. Yet this juxtaposition between the fallen angel and the Divinity can be considered as rather schematic. In this correspondence between the two portions of humanity, one belonging to God and the other to the demon, one might see a merely metaphorical distinction that does not intend to match fully the status and the attributes of the Deity with the condition of Azazel; rather it simply hints at the demon's temporary role in the eschatological opposition. A closer analysis of the text, however, reveals that the comparisons between God and Azazel have much broader conceptual ramifications that appear to transcend a purely metaphorical level, as the depictions of both characters unveil striking theophanic similarities. An important feature in this respect is the peculiar imagery of the epiphanies of both characters unfolding in the special circumstances of their fiery realms.

It is intriguing that in the text, where the theophanic manifestations of the Deity are repeatedly portrayed as appearing in the midst of flames, the presence of Azazel is also conveyed through similar imagery.

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<sup>35</sup> Orlov, "The Eschatological Yom Kippur in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*: Part I: The Scapegoat Ritual," in: *Symbola Caelestis*, 79-111.

<sup>36</sup> See B. Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes* (Semitica, 31; Paris, 1981) 31; D.S. Harlow, *Idolatry and Otherness: Israel and Nations in the Apocalypse of Abraham* (forthcoming).

It has been previously noted that the imagery of fire plays an important conceptual role in the Slavonic apocalypse.<sup>37</sup> It is often envisioned there as the substance predestined to examine the authenticity of things and test their eternal status. *Apoc. Ab.* 7:2 relates that “the fire mocks with its flames the things that perish easily.”<sup>38</sup> Both animate and inanimate characters of the story, including the infamous idols and their blasphemous makers, are depicted in the text as undergoing fiery probes – the ominous tests that often lead them into their final catastrophic demise. Thus by means of fire, the young hero of the faith “tests” the wooden stature of his father, the idol Bar-Eshath, which the flames turn into a pile of ashes. Further, the craftsmen of the idolatrous figures themselves are not exempted from the fiery probes’ scrutiny. The first haggadic section of the text concludes with the blazing ordeal during which the workshop of Terah is obliterated by fire sent by God. Later, in the second, apocalyptic, section of the work, the patriarch Abraham himself undergoes multiple fiery tests during his progress into the upper heaven. All these remarkable instances of the fiery annihilations of certain characters of the story, and miraculous survivals of others, do not appear coincidental. Scholars have previously noted that in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, as in several other apocalyptic texts, including Dan 3 or Ezek 28, fire serves as the ultimate test for distinguishing inauthentic and idolatrous representations of the Divinity from its true counterparts. In accordance with this belief, which often envisions the endurance of the “true” things in the flames, the very presence of the Deity is repeatedly portrayed in the text as situated in the stream of fire. Thus, already in chapter eight, which marks a

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<sup>37</sup> See A. Orlov, “‘The Gods of My Father Terah’: Abraham the Iconoclast and the Polemics with the Divine Body Traditions in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 18.1 (2008) 33-53.

<sup>38</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 15.

transition to the apocalyptic section of the work and narrates the patriarch's response to the divine call in the courtyard of Terah's house, the divine presence is depicted as "the voice of the Mighty One" coming down in a stream of fire.<sup>39</sup> This self-disclosure of God in the midst of the theophanic furnace becomes then a standard description adopted by the author(s) of the apocalypse to convey manifestations of the Deity.<sup>40</sup>

In view of these peculiar theophanic tenets of the pseudepigraphon, it is intriguing that some eschatological manifestations of Azazel, similar to the epiphanies of the Deity, are depicted with fiery imagery.

Although in chapter 13 the patriarch sees Azazel in the form of an unclean bird, the apocalypse makes clear that this appearance does not reflect the true appearance of the demon whose proper domain is designated several times in the text as situated in the subterranean realm.<sup>41</sup> What is striking is that in the antagonist's authentic abode, in the belly of the earth, the domicile of the great demon is fashioned with the same peculiar visual markers as the abode of the Deity – that is, as being situated in the midst of the theophanic furnace.

Thus, in Yahoel's speech found in chapter 14, which reveals the true place of the chief antagonist, the arch-demon's abode is designated as the furnace of the earth.<sup>42</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>39</sup> *Apoc. Ab.* 8:1: "The voice (*глас*) of the Mighty One came down from heaven in a stream of fire, saying and calling, 'Abraham, Abraham!'" Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 16; B. Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 54.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, *Apoc. Ab.* 18:2 "And I heard a voice (*глас*) like the roaring of the sea, and it did not cease because of the fire." Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 24; B. Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 76.

<sup>41</sup> Box reflects on the peculiarities of Azazel's true abode noting that "over against Jaol stands Azazel, who here appears as the arch-fiend, and as active upon the earth (chap. xiii), though his real domain is in Hades, where he reigns as lord (chap. xxxi.)." Box and Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, xxvi.

<sup>42</sup> Already George Box noticed the fiery nature of the demonological imagery found in the Slavonic apocalypse where Azazel is portrayed as the fire of Hell. Box reflects on this fiery theophany of Azazel arguing that "...in fact, according to the peculiar representation of our Apocalypse, *Azazel is himself the*



Azazel himself is portrayed as the “burning coal” or the “firebrand” of this infernal kiln.<sup>43</sup> This depiction of Azazel glowing in the furnace of his own domain is intriguing. It evokes the peculiar memory of the fiery nature of the divine abode which, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, is portrayed as the upper furnace. The fiery nature of the heavenly plane is underlined multiple times in the text. It is notable that the seer’s progress into the domain of the deity is portrayed as his movement into the fiery realm. Thus, in *Apoc. Ab.* 15:3, the transition of the hero and his guiding angel through the boarder of heavenly realm is portrayed as an entrance into fire: “...and he carried me up to the edge of the fiery flame. And we ascended like great winds to the heaven which was fixed on the expanses.”<sup>44</sup>

Then, in chapter 17, the readers again encounter this terrifying presence of the celestial furnace as the flames envelop the visionary and his celestial guide on their progress to the abode of the Deity:

And while he was still speaking, behold, a fire was coming toward us round about, and a sound was in the fire like a sound of many waters, like a sound of the sea in its uproar (*Apoc. Ab.* 17:1).<sup>45</sup>

In 18:1, upon his entrance into the celestial Holy of Holies, the visionary again passes another fiery threshold: “... while I was still reciting the song, the edge of the fire which was on the expanse rose up on high.”<sup>46</sup>

The fiery apotheosis reaches its pinnacle in chapter 18 where the patriarch sees the Deity’s heavenly throne room. There, in the utmost concealed theophanic locale, the seer

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*fire of Hell* (cf. chap. xiv. ‘Be thou the burning coal of the furnace of the earth,’ and chap. xxxi. ‘burnt with the fire of Azazel’s tongue’).” Box and Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, xxvi.

<sup>43</sup> See *Apoc. Ab.* 14:5 “Say to him, ‘May you be the fire brand of the furnace of the earth! (главнѣю печи земныя).’” Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 21; B. Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 68.

<sup>44</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 22.

<sup>45</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 23.

beholds the very seat of the Deity fashioned from the substance of fire: “And as the fire rose up, soaring higher, I saw under the fire a throne [made] of fire and the many-eyed Wheels” (*Apoc. Ab.* 18:3).<sup>47</sup> This fiery nexus of the divine presence paradoxically parallels the fiery nature of the antagonist’s subterranean abode.

This striking imagery brings us back to the Azazel tradition found in *Apoc. Ab.* 14:5 where, according to some scholars, the demonic presence is fashioned as the fire of Hell.<sup>48</sup>

This identification of Azazel’s essence through the imagery of the subterranean flames is intriguing in view of the aforementioned conceptual currents in which fire serves as a distinctive theophanic medium, expressing the very presence of the Deity. Similar to the Deity who is depicted as the fire of heaven enthroned on the seat of flames, the demon is portrayed as the fire of the underworld.

In this respect it is also noteworthy that, similar to the divine Voice, the main theophanic expression of the Deity in the book, which is depicted as coming in a stream of fire, Azazel’s aural expression is also conveyed through similar fiery symbolism. Thus, *Apoc. Ab.* 31:5 speaks about “the fire of Azazel’s tongue” (Slav. огонь языка Азаилова):

And those who *followed after the idols* and after their murders will rot in the womb of the Evil One—the belly of Azazel, and *they will be burned by the fire of Azazel’s tongue* (палими огнемъ языка Азаилова).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 24. See also *Apoc. Ab.* 18:13: “And above the Wheels there was the throne which I had seen. And it was covered with fire and the fire encircled it round about, and an indescribable light surrounded the fiery people.” Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 24.

<sup>48</sup> Box and Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, xxvi.

<sup>49</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 35; Rubinkiewicz, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham en vieux slave. Introduction, texte critique traduction et commentaire*, 202.

It is also interesting that, like the fire of God that destroys the idols and idolaters alike in its flames,<sup>50</sup> the fire issuing from Azazel has power to destroy those who “follow after the idols.” Though it is not entirely clear in this context if the fire of Azazel is the fire of God, since in *Apoc. Ab.* 31:3, the Deity says that he has destined those who “mocked” him “to be food for the fire of hell, and ceaseless soaring in the air of the underground depths.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Apoc. Ab.* 31:2-3 “And I shall burn with fire those who mocked them ruling over them in this age and I shall commit those who have covered me with mockery to the reproach of the coming age.” Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 35.

<sup>51</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 35.

## *The Kavod of Azazel*

Our previous exploration of the features of the text's infamous antagonist showed that the authors of the apocalypse appear to envision Azazel as the one who possesses theophanic attributes mimicking the attributes of the Deity.

The impressive cluster of enigmatic traditions about the attributes and offices of the fallen angel that closely resemble their divine counterparts reaches its new paradoxical shape in chapter 23, where the hero of the faith receives a vision of the protological scene portraying the demon's corruption of the Protoplasts.

Before examining this puzzling scene, something must be said about the peculiar arrangement of the patriarch's vision, during which the exalted hero of the faith literally gazes into the abyss from the heights of his most exalted position near the Throne of the Deity. This enigmatic setting seems to provide further support for the dualistic framework of the text with its repeated parallelism of the lower and upper realms.

In the beginning of this mysterious vision, the Deity orders the seer to look beneath his feet and "contemplate the creation." The apocalypse then portrays Abraham looking beneath the expanse at his feet and beholding what the text calls the "likeness of heaven."<sup>52</sup> This reference to the "likeness of heaven" (Slav. подобие неба)<sup>53</sup> has baffled the imagination of many scholars<sup>54</sup> because of the text authors' decision to situate under the category of the "resemblance of heaven" the vision of the corrupted domain belonging to Azazel:

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<sup>52</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 26.

<sup>53</sup> Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 84.

<sup>54</sup> Cf., for example, H. Lunt's comment in R. Rubinkiewicz, "The Apocalypse of Abraham," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; ed. J.H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1985 [1983]) 1.681-705 at 699.

And I looked beneath the expanse at my feet and I saw *the likeness of heaven* (подобие неба) and what was therein. And [I saw] there the earth and its fruits, and its moving ones, and its spiritual ones, and its host of men and their spiritual impieties, and their justifications, <and the pursuits of their works,> and the abyss and its torment, and its lower depths, and the perdition which is in it. And I saw there the sea and its island<s>, and its animals and its fishes, and Leviathan and his domain, and his lair, and his dens, and the world which lies upon him, and his motions and the destruction of the world because of him. (*Apoc. Ab. 21:2-4*).<sup>55</sup>

In this arcane vision, which the patriarch receives from the highest heaven gazing down into the abyss, the reader encounters another dazzling illustration of the dualistic vision of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

Yet the most puzzling disclosure in the cluster of these mysterious expositions about the “likeness of heaven” follows further along in chapter 23, where the visionary beholds Azazel’s appearance under the paradisaal Tree.

*Apoc. Ab. 23:4-11* unveils the following enigmatic tradition that draws on peculiar protological imagery:

And I looked at the picture, and my eyes ran to the side of the garden of Eden. And I saw there a man very great in height and terrible in breadth, incomparable in aspect, *entwined* (съплетшася) with a woman who was also equal to the man in aspect and size. And they were standing under a tree of Eden, and the fruit of the tree was like the appearance of a bunch of grapes of the vine. And behind the tree was standing, as it were, a serpent in form, but having hands and feet like a man, and wings on its shoulders: six on the right side and six on the left. And he was holding in his hands the grapes of the tree and feeding the two whom I saw entwined with each other. And I said, “Who are these two *entwined* (съплетшася) with each other, or who is this between them, or what is the fruit which they are eating, Mighty Eternal One?” And he said, “This is the reason of men, this is Adam, and this is their desire on earth, this is Eve. And he who is in between them is the Impiety of their pursuits for destruction, Azazel himself.”<sup>56</sup>

In this vision which the patriarch receives while standing at the place of God’s theophany near the divine Throne, Abraham beholds Azazel’s protological manifestation in the lower realm where the demon’s presence is placed in the midst of the protoplasts.

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<sup>55</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 26.

<sup>56</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 27; Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, 88.

The depiction is also interesting in that it renders the abode of Azazel through the primordial imagery of the Tree situated in the Garden of Eden.

There are no doubts that the text offers to its audience the portrayal of the infamous Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil – the arboreal symbol of the protological corruption of the first human couple. The peculiar features of the scene, and the reference to the “grapes of vine” as the fruit of the Tree, bring to memory the cluster of familiar motifs associated in the Jewish lore with the legendary paradisaical plant. While some features of the scene look familiar, others are not. One novel detail baffling the reader’s imagination is the portrayal of Azazel *between* the intertwined protoplasts under the Tree.

This intriguing tradition has long puzzled students of the Slavonic apocalypse. Although the imagery of the intertwined Protoplasts is known from Jewish and Christian lore about the serpentine Eve,<sup>57</sup> the depiction found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* appears to unveil some novel, perplexing symbolism. Some scholars have noted an erotic dimension in this portrayal suggesting that the demon and the intertwined protoplasts form here some sort of *a ménage à trois*.<sup>58</sup> What might be the theological significance of this ominous intercourse involving the demonic spirit and the human couple?

Is it possible that, in this scene depicting an enigmatic union of the arch-demon and the protoplasts, one might have not merely a scandalous illustration of the protological corruption of the first humans, but also the disclosure of one of the most mysterious and controversial epiphanies of Azazel? If it is indeed possible, then here, as in some biblical

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<sup>57</sup> On the traditions of the serpentine Eve in Jewish and Christian literature, see S. Minov, "'Serpentine' Eve in Syriac Literature of IV-V CE: An Exegetical Motif in Context," (forthcoming).

<sup>58</sup> Thus, for example, reflecting on the imagery found in *Apoc. Ab. 23:4-11*, Daniel Harlow suggests that “the three of them appear in *a ménage à trois*, the man and woman entwined in an erotic embrace, the fallen angel in serpentine guise feeding them grapes...” D.S. Harlow, *Idolatry and Otherness: Israel and Nations in the Apocalypse of Abraham* (forthcoming).

and pseudepigraphic accounts, the erotic imagery and the symbolism of the conjugal union might be laden with theophanic significance.

Moreover, if the epiphanic angle is indeed present in the protological scene, the arboreal imagery also appears to contribute to this theological dimension. In this respect, the peculiar details of Azazel's position between the protoplasts *under the Tree* might be invoking the memory of a peculiar theophanic trend related to another prominent plant of the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Life.

In Jewish lore the Tree of Life often has a theophanic significance described as the very special arboreal abode of the Deity. In these traditions God is depicted as resting on the cherub beneath the Tree of Life. These traditions are found in a number of apocalyptic and mystical accounts. Thus, for example, the Greek version<sup>59</sup> of the *Life of Adam and Eve* 22:3-4 connects the theophany of the Deity with the Tree of Life:

As God entered [the Garden,] the plants of Adam's portion flowered but all mine were bereft of flowers. And the throne of God was fixed where the Tree of Life was.<sup>60</sup>

A similar tradition is also found in *2 Enoch* 8:3-4 where the Tree of Life again is described as the abode of God:

And in the midst (of them was) the tree of life, at that place where the Lord takes a rest when he goes into paradise. And that tree is indescribable for pleasantness and fine fragrance, and more beautiful than any (other) created thing that exists. And from every direction it has an appearance which is gold-looking and crimson, and with the form of fire. And it covers the whole of Paradise (*2 Enoch* 8:3-4, the longer recension).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> On various versions of the *Life of Adam and Eve*, see M.E. Stone, *A History of the Literature of Adam and Eve* (SBLJL, 3; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992); M. de Jonge and J. Tromp, *The Life of Adam and Eve* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

<sup>60</sup> *A Synopsis of the Book of Adam and Eve. Second Revised Edition* (eds. G.A. Anderson, M.E. Stone; Early Judaism and its Literature, 17; Atlanta: Scholars, 1999) 62E. The Armenian and Georgian versions of *LAE* 22:4 also support this tradition: "He set up his throne clos[e] to the Tree of Life" (Armenian); "and thrones were set up near the Tree of Life" (Georgian). *A Synopsis of the Book of Adam and Eve. Second Revised Edition*, 62E.

<sup>61</sup> F. Andersen, "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; ed. J.H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1985 [1983]) 1.114.

The tradition of the Divinity dwelling on the cherub under the Tree of Life was not forgotten in later Jewish mysticism where God's very presence, his *Shekinah*, is portrayed as resting on a cherub beneath the Tree of Life. *3 Enoch* 5:1 unveils the following tradition:

R. Ishmael said: Metatron, Prince of the Divine Presence, said to me: From the day that the Holy One, blessed be he, banished the first man from the garden of Eden, the *Shekinah* resided on a cherub beneath the tree of life.<sup>62</sup>

A striking feature of this account is that here, like in the classic Ezekelian accounts, the cherubic creature represents the "angelic furniture" that functions as the seat of the Deity.

It is also intriguing that in the later Jewish mysticism it is not only the Tree of Life but also the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, that receives similar epiphanic re-interpretation, being envisioned as the symmetrical theophanic locale with its own cherubic servants.

Thus, for example, the *Book of Zohar* I.237a unveils the following enigmatic tradition about the symmetry of the upper and lower cherubim explicitly associating the former with the Tree of Sin and Corruption:

Adam was punished for his sin, and brought death upon himself and all the world, and caused that tree in regard to which he sinned to be driven out along with him and his descendants for ever. It says further that God "placed the cherubim on the east of the garden of Eden"; these were the lower cherubim, for as there are cherubim above, so there are cherubim below, and *he spread this tree over them*.<sup>63</sup>

This passage is striking since it brings to memory the Tree of Knowledge found in the Slavonic apocalypse, which provided the shadow for the protological couple holding

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<sup>62</sup> P. Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; ed. J.H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1985 [1983]) 1.259.

<sup>63</sup> *The Zohar* (5 vols.; eds. H. Sperling and M. Simon; London and New York: Soncino, 1933) 2.355.



in their midst the presence of Azazel. It is noteworthy that in the passage from the *Zohar* the Tree of Knowledge is now unambiguously associated with the angelic servants, designated as the “lower cherubim.”

Keeping in mind this cryptic tradition about the cherubic servants, it is now time to return to the protological scene found in the Slavonic apocalypse. The subtle allusions to the cherubic imagery might also be present in Azazel’s epiphany in *Apoc. Ab.* 23:4-11, where he is depicted under the Tree of Knowledge in the midst of the protoplasts. What is intriguing in the description of Azazel here is that the presence of the evil spirit is manifested in the connubial union of the intertwined couple.

It should be noted that the imagery of the intertwined primordial couple holding the presence of the spiritual agent is quite unique in the Adamic lore. Yet, it invokes the memory of another important theophanic tradition of the divine presence, where God’s presence is portrayed through the imagery of the intertwined cherubic pair in the Holy of Holies.

The treatise *Yoma* of the Babylonian Talmud contains two passages that offer striking, if not scandalous, descriptions of the intertwined cherubim in the Holy of Holies. Thus, *b. Yoma* 54a reads:

R. Kattina said: Whenever Israel came up to the Festival, the curtain would be removed for them and the Cherubim were shown to them, whose bodies were intertwined with one another, and they would be thus addressed: Look! You are beloved before God as the love between man and woman.<sup>64</sup>

This arcane passage relates an erotic union of the cherubic angelic servants holding the presence of the Deity. One might see here later rabbinic innovations which are far distant,

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<sup>64</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud* (ed. I. Epstein; London: Soncino, 1935-52) 3.255.

or maybe even completely divorced, from the early biblical tradition of the Cherubim in the Holy of Holies.

Still scholars have previously noted that already early biblical accounts hint at the ambiguous “proximity” of the famous cherubic pair. Rachel Elijor notes that in some biblical materials “descriptions of them usually imply a posture characterized by reciprocity or contact: ‘they faced each other,’<sup>65</sup> or also ‘their wings touched each other’<sup>66</sup> or were even joined<sup>67</sup> together.”<sup>68</sup> While the early traditions about the cherubim found “both in the Bible and elsewhere, imply varying degrees of proximity and contact – later tradition was more explicit, clearly indicating the identity of the cherubim as a mythical symbolization of reproduction<sup>69</sup> and fertility, expressed in the form of intertwined male and female.”<sup>70</sup>

In *b. Yoma 54b* the tradition of the intertwined cherubim is repeated again:

Resh Lakish said: When the heathens entered the Temple and saw the Cherubim whose bodies were intertwined with one another, they carried them out and said: These Israelites, whose blessing is a

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<sup>65</sup> Exod 37:9.

<sup>66</sup> 1 Kings 6:27; Ezek 1:9.

<sup>67</sup> 2 Chr 3:12.

<sup>68</sup> R. Elijor, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004) 67.

<sup>69</sup> In then later Jewish mysticism the imagery of the Cherubim in the Holy of Holies was interpreted as the conjugal union between male and female. Thus, in *Zohar* III.59b the following tradition can be found: “R. Simeon was on the point of going to visit R. Pinchas ben Jair, along with his son R. Eleazar. When he saw them he exclaimed: A song of ascents; Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Ps. CXXXIII, 1). The expression ‘in unity,’ he said, refers to the Cherubim. When their faces were turned to one another, it was well with the world – ‘how good and how pleasant,’ but when the male turned his face from the female, it was ill with the world. Now, too, I see that you are come because the male is not abiding with the female. If you have come only for this, return, because I see that on this day face will once more be turned to face.” *The Zohar* (5 vols.; eds. H. Sperling and M. Simon; London and New York: Soncino, 1933) 5.41. Another passage from the *Zohar* III.59a also tells about the conjugal union of the Cherubim: “Then the priest used to hear their voice in the sanctuary, and he put the incense in its place with all devotion in order that all might be blessed. R. Jose said: The word ‘equity’ (*mesharim*, lit. equities) in the above quoted verse indicates that the Cherubim were male and female. R. Isaac said: From this we learn that where there is no union of male and female men are not worthy to behold the divine presence.” *The Zohar* (5 vols.; eds. H. Sperling and M. Simon; London and New York: Soncino, 1933) 5.41.

<sup>70</sup> Elijor, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism*, 67.

blessing, and whose curse is a curse, occupy themselves with such things! And immediately they despised them, as it is said: All that honored her, despised her, because they have seen her nakedness.<sup>71</sup>

Rachel Elijor argues that the description of the intertwined cherubim found in the Talmud suggests “a cultic, mystical representation of myths of *hieros gamos*, the sacred union or heavenly matrimony....”<sup>72</sup> It is also apparent that this arcane imagery of the Cherubic union has theophanic significance as it expresses in itself the manifestation of the divine presence – the feature especially evident in *b. Yoma 54a* with its motifs of the removal of the curtain and the revelation of the Cherubim on Yom Kippur. It is therefore clear that the tradition of the intertwined cherubim is envisioned here as a theophanic symbol.

In view of these developments, it is quite possible that this theophanic dimension of the conjugal union might be also negatively evoked in the depiction of the intertwined protoplasts in chapter 23 of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Could it be possible that the erotic ordeal of the protological couple holding in their midst the presence of Azazel somehow serves as a negative counterpart of the Cherubic Couple holding the divine presence in the Holy of Holies? Can Adam and Eve be understood here as the “lower

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<sup>71</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud* (ed. I. Epstein; London: Soncino, 1935-52) 3.257. *Zohar* III.67a, which describes the actions of the high priest on Yom Kippur, also attests to the same tradition when it portrays the “wrestle” of the Cherubim in the Holy of Holies who are “beating their wings together” The passage then describes the high priest entering the Holy of Holies bringing the incense that “pacifies” or “reconciles” the “wrestling” of the angelic creatures. *The Zohar* (5 vols.; eds. H. Sperling and M. Simon; London and New York: Soncino, 1933) 5.60. See also: *Zohar* I.231a “Now at sunset, the Cherubim which stood in that place used to strike their wings together and spread them out, and when the sound of the beating of their wings was heard above, those angels who chanted hymns in the night began to sing, in order that the glory of God might ascend from below on high. The striking of the Cherubim’s wings itself intoned the psalm, ‘Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord... lift up your hands to the sanctuary, etc.’ (Ps. CXXXIII). This was the signal for the heavenly angels to commence.” *The Zohar* (5 vols.; eds. H. Sperling and M. Simon; London and New York: Soncino, 1933) 2.340.

<sup>72</sup>Elijor, *The Three Temples*, 158. In relation to this union of the angelic creatures in the Holy of Holies Elijor further noticed that “the grammatical relationship between the Hebrew words for the Holy of Holies – *kodesh hakodashim* – and for betrothal – *kidushin* – suggests an ancient common ground of heavenly and earthly union.” Elijor, *The Three Temples*, 158.

cherubim” overshadowed by the Tree of Knowledge, the Adamic tradition explicitly articulated in the *Zohar* 1.237, and maybe already hinted at in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*?

What is also fascinating in the veiled description in chapter 23 is that the mysterious shape of Azazel situated under the Tree appears in itself to point to the unity of the cherubic couple, as his form combines some attributes of the two cherubim joined together.<sup>73</sup> The passage says that the demon has twelve wings – six on the right side of his body and six on the left side:<sup>74</sup>

And behind the tree was standing, as it were, a serpent in form, but having hands and feet like a man, and wings on its shoulders: six on the right side and six on the left.<sup>75</sup>

It is noteworthy that earlier in the text, when Abraham sees the “Living Creatures of the Cherubim” in the heavenly Throne Room, he reports that each of them has six wings:

And under the throne [I saw] four singing fiery Living Creatures ... and each one had six wings: from their shoulders, <and from their sides,> and from their loins (*Apoc. Ab.* 18:3-6).<sup>76</sup>

These baffling attributes of the demon are intriguing and, in view of the aforementioned theophanic traditions, it is possible that Azazel here attempts to mimic the divine presence represented by the cherubic couple in the Holy of Holies by offering

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<sup>73</sup> Similar to the “Living Creatures of the Cherubim” the demon is also portrayed as a composite being which combines zoomorphic and human features - the body of a serpent with the hands and feet like a man.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 13: “Sammael was the great prince in heaven; the *Hayyot* had four wings and the Seraphim had six wings, and Sammael had twelve wings...” *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (2nd ed.; tr. G. Friedlander; New York: Hermon Press, 1965) 92. Cf. also Georgian *LAE* 12:1 “My [Satan's] wings were more numerous than those of the Cherubim, and I concealed myself under them.” *A Synopsis of the Book of Adam and Eve. Second Revised Edition*, 15-15E.

<sup>75</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 27.

<sup>76</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 24.

his own, now corrupted and demonic version of the sacred union.<sup>77</sup> Here the Adversary, who according to the Slavonic apocalypse appears to have his own *Kavod*,<sup>78</sup> given to him by God, possibly intends to fashion his own presence in a dualistic symmetrical correlation with the divine theophany which takes place between two intertwined angelic creatures.

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<sup>77</sup> This imagery of Azazel posited between Adam and Eve might serve also as a profound anthropological symbol which possibly signifies the division of the Protoplast. Azazel might be envisioned here as the primordial knife separating androgynous proto-humanity and dividing it on the male and female sides.

<sup>78</sup> In this respect it is intriguing that several versions of the *Primary Adam Books* attest to a tradition about the “glory” of Satan that the antagonist had even before his demotion. Latin *LAE* 12:1 "... since on account of you I was expelled and alienated from my glory, which I had in heaven in the midst of the angels." Armenian *LAE* 12:1 "... because of you I went forth from my dwelling; and because of you I was alienated from the throne of the Cherubim who, having spread out a shelter, used to enclose me...." Georgian *LAE* 12:1 "through you that I fell from my dwellings; (it was) by you that I was alienated from my own throne." *A Synopsis of the Book of Adam and Eve. Second Revised Edition*, 15-15E.

## *Conclusion*

In conclusion of our study of the dualistic tendencies found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, we should say that the exact nature and possible sources of these conceptual developments remain shrouded in mystery. A number of studies have previously sought to explicate the dualistic tenets found in the Slavonic translations of several pseudepigraphical works, including the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and *2 Enoch*, through their alleged connections with the Bogomil movement, a dualistic sect that flourished in the Balkans in the late middle ages. These studies argued that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* might contain Bogomil dualistic interpolations.<sup>79</sup> Recent scholarship, however, is increasingly skeptical of such radical proposals and generally finds little or no connection between the aforementioned pseudepigraphons and the Bogomil movement.<sup>80</sup>

Our research helps further question the validity of the “Bogomil hypothesis,” noting the conceptual complexity of the dualistic tenets in the Slavonic apocalypse and their reliance on authentic Jewish traditions. The consistency and paramount significance of these developments for the overall conceptual framework of the pseudepigraphon suggests that they do not represent secondary additions and interpolations, but rather embody the main theological tendency of the Slavonic pseudepigraphon. This peculiar ideological trend shows remarkable similarities to the Palestinian dualism reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the dualistic currents manifested in the later Jewish mystical literature.

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<sup>79</sup> J. Ivanov, *Богомилски книги и легенди* (София, 1925[1970]).

<sup>80</sup> É. Turdeanu, *Apocryphes slaves et roumains de l’Ancien Testament* (SVTP, 5; Leiden: Brill, 1981); F. I. Andersen, “Pseudepigrapha Studies in Bulgaria,” *JSP* 1 (1987) 41-55.

In view of these portentous developments, it is quite possible that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* in itself can represent an important conceptual bridge between the early Palestinian dualistic currents found in the Qumran documents and their later rabbinic counterparts. Additional investigation of the dualistic profile of the text's chief antagonist will further clarify the true extent and nature of these significant theological advancements in the Slavonic apocalypse.