question has been tackled by Raphael Patai, who formulated a remarkable theory. He was well aware of the fact that all medieval literature that evokes the custom of *jus primae noctis* has been proven to be folkloristic and has no historical basis. On the whole, Patai abided by these conclusions. He argued, however, that a special case should be made for the talmudic sources describing the same sort of custom. He claimed that since all the sources that are now considered legend and depict the practice in Christian medieval Europe were composed much later than the period they propose to describe, it is acceptable to discard them. In Judea, on the contrary, in the aftermath of the Bar Kokkhav revolt, the Romans actually put into practice such a law, as the "reliable" rabbinic sources claim. Patai, as a folklorist, should have known better. If a motif of this sort could have appeared in a sixteenth-century document and upset the entire history of medieval Europe for the next two centuries, the same motif likewise could have cropped up in the fourth- or fifth-century Palestinian Talmud, falsely describing events of the second century. In my opinion, the conclusions of the present article, which make the *jus primae noctis* narrative of the Palestinian Talmud nothing more than an apology for an inconvenient Judaic custom that is described cryptically in the Mishnah, undermine Patai’s claim. From a large repository of folkloristic material circulating worldwide, the *jus primae noctis* was conveniently drawn in order to explain and justify a custom that seemed to the rabbis to undermine their view of proper conduct in Jewish society.

1 Patai, "Jus Primae Noctis:"


3 The *jus primae noctis* is now an accepted literary motif in folklore dictionaries. See, for example, Dov Noy (Neuman), *Motif Index of Talmudic-Midrashic Literature* (Ph.D. diss.; Ann Arbor Dissertation Series Microfilms, 1984) 725.


---

Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul’s Apostolate

Part 2: Paul’s Heavenly Ascent and its Significance

C. R. A. Murray-Jones

Stanford, California

Notice: This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U.S. Code).

Part one of this article examined the Jewish sources that record the story of four individuals who ‘entered paradise,’ three of whom came to grief while R. Agiba, alone, survived unscathed. The story is preserved within a talmudic compilation of materials concerning *mahzor merkabah* (an esoteric, visionary-mystical tradition associated with Ezekiel), in *Song of Songs Rabbah,* and in two ‘merkabah-mystical’ hekhelot compilations: *Hekhalot Zutarti* and *Merkabah Rabbah.* Several scholars have adopted the

---

Footnotes:


1a, 2a, 3a; b, 4a, 5a; c, 6a, 7a. All three texts are translated in part 1, pp. 210-15.

2 Cant. 1:28 (v. 1:41). Cant 1:4 is applied to Agiba in the story as recorded in the talmudic sources. For a translation of this text, see part 1, pp. 210-15.

3 In Peter Schäfer, ed., *Synopses zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Texte und Studien zum Amikhen Juden Judentum 2; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1988) §§548-65 (Hekhalot Zutarti) and §§671-73 (Merkabah Rabbah); also idem, ed., *Greco-Egyptische Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Texte und Studien zum Amikhen Juden Judentum 6; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1984) 84, lines 6-17 (Hekhalot Zutarti). Translations may be found in part 1, pp. 196-98.
suggestion, first offered by Wilhelm Boussert,5 that this story indicates the background in Jewish mystical tradition of Paul's account of his ascent to paradise (2 Cor 12:1–12). The traditional interpretation of the rabbinic "paradise" story, however, has been challenged by scholars who have argued that the story was originally non-mystical in intent and only came to be associated with merkabah when it was so interpreted, in the third or fourth century CE, by the redaction(s) of the talmudic "Mystical Collection." According to this view, the merkabah stories, which interpret the story as an account of Agiba's ascent to the merkabah (the divine throne), are derivative of the talmudic tradition if not actually post-talmudic. Although several scholars have, in recent years, perceived the potential significance of Jewish mysticism for the study of Paul and other early history of the parades story has inhibited further exploration of its relevance to Paul's experience, as recorded in 2 Corinthians 12.

Analysis of this problem began with a consideration of m. Hag. 2:1, the lemma on which the talmudic "Mystical Collection" depends. The mishnah states that no individual was permitted to "exhale ha-merkabah [that is, Ezekiel 1]" unless he was a hokam ("sage"). In the prerabbinic, apocalyptic milieu from which the rabbinic story of the first and second centuries inherited this unit of tradition, the term hokam was originally referred to a "mantic sage," who held the esoteric knowledge and visionary-mystical experience ("d'at"). Within the context of rabbinism, however, it assumed the meaning "rabbi." The restriction is associated with a concern to safeguard the traditions concerning God's glory (kabod), or appearance in human form upon the merkabah, against potentially heretical interpretations, in particular the so-called "two powers heresy." That Paul's christology was profoundly influenced by such traditions is now widely recognized.6 The talmudic versions of the parades story and the version in Midrash Rabbah narrate the story in the third person and identify the three who came to grief as Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, and Eliezer b. Abuyah. Whereas Aqiba was an ordained rabbi (hokam), these three were never ordained and are referred to in other sources as "disciples of the sages" (talmedi-hakhamim). Thus, the talmudic version of the story (followed by Midrash Rabbah) is an illustration of the restriction concerning merkabah recorded at m. Hag. 2:1. In the hokham sources, the story takes the form of a first-person narrative attributed to Aqiba, into which material derived from the talmudic version, employing the third person, has been interpolated. Only in the interpolated third-person material are the three who came to grief identified. The essential point of the talmudic version (only a hokam may safely involve himself in merkabah) is therefore absent in the original hokham account. According to this version, Aqiba states that the merit of his deeds rendered him, in God's eyes, "worthy to behold my glory" ("ra'uy lehistsakel bi-kibbod").

These considerations led to the conclusion that an early redactor of the "Mystical Collection" adapted the first-person version found in the hokham sources and made it into an illustration of m. Hag. 2:1 by adding the names of the three talmedi-hakhamim. Linguistic affinity between the hokham version and the mishnah ("ra'uy lehistsakel bi-kibbod") indicates, however, that the two units of tradition were already associated prior to the talmudic adaptation of the story. It was observed that the context in which this association first occurred may well have been an early version of Hokham Zaphari.10

In any event, the first-person account in the hokham sources is clearly older than the talmudic versions. It must, therefore, predate the "Mystical Collection" in its present form and may go back to Aqiba himself, or to his

---

9Part 1, pp. 183–86.
circle. This original version of the story refers unambiguously to an ascent to the heavenly temple in the face of fierce opposition on the part of demonic "angels of destruction" (malakai-habbolah), who perform the function of the terrifying angelic guardians of the gateways, as described in the hekhalot sources. In this version, the term pardes is used without explanation as a technical term for the Holy of Holies in the highest heaven, where the glory of God resides. This usage was found to be derived from ancient traditions that identified the Garden of Eden with the heavenly sanctuary. According to these traditions, the heavenly temple (to which its earthly counterpart was believed closely to correspond) embodied the structure of the universe, so that ascent through the heavenly levels was also a journey "inward" through the temple's concentric areas of increasing holiness to the Holy of Holies at the center. While the majority of sources, including the hekhalot writings, describe a sevenfold division of this structure, others record an alternative, probably older, threefold model. It is not clear which of these two models was employed in the original story of Aqiba's ascent to the heavenly sanctuary, or pardes, but the story is certainly rooted in an apocalyptic and visionary-mystical tradition that is considerably older than the first century CE.

We can now turn to Paul's account of his ascent to paradise and see how it is illumined by these traditions. 2 Cor 12:1-12 reads as follows:

11It is necessary for me to boast. Though it is not profitable, yet I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord (Ωμολογείς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δόξα καὶ ἀγάλματι του πατρός). I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up to the third heaven (ὁ θεοῦ ἐν δόξα καὶ ἀγάλματι του πατρός). And I know that this man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up into paradise (ὁ θεοῦ ἐν δόξα καὶ ἀγάλματι του πατρός). On behalf of this man I will boast, but on behalf of myself I will not boast, save in my weaknesses, 12 lest I should be too exalted, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan to strike me (εὕρη δὲ μοι σκόλιον τη σκαλιν, άγγελος Σατανά ἐν μοι κατάλειψε), lest I should be too exalted. 13Three times, I called upon the Lord about this, that he might take it away from me (τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν δόξα καὶ ἀγάλματι του πατρός), but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, (for my) power is perfect in weakness." 14 Rather, then, I will boast most gladly of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell over me. 15Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities on behalf of Christ—for whenever I am weak, I am powerful. 16I have become foolish—indeed, the signs of an apostle were performed among you with all endurance, with signs and wonders and works of power!

In order to understand this passage, we must first take account of its context. Paul is at this point engaged in a defense of his apostolic authority, which his opponents have challenged. The frame within which 2 Corinthians 11:1-15 is the only substantial part of any extant letter to the Corinthians. It is immediately preceded and followed by other attempts to characterize Paul's mission and to argue for his authority. The content of 11:1-15 is therefore best considered as part of a larger argument for Paul's apostolic qualifications, authority, and message. The structure of the passage is such that it can be divided into three main sections: 1. The introduction (11:1-4), which presents the theme of the letter as an appeal for help in a time of persecution; 2. The main body (11:5-11), which describes Paul's sufferings and persecutions, and his sense of weakness and power; and 3. The conclusion (11:12-15), which emphasizes the sufficiency of God's grace in the face of weakness and suffering.

1See, for example, Hekhaloth Rabban 15:8-16:2 (Schäfer, Synopte, §§213-15).

2It seems most natural, contra among others Jörg Baumgarten (Paulus und die Apologetik: Die Auslegung apokalyptischer Überlieferungen in den echten paulinischen Briefen [WMANT 44, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975] 136-46), to interpret κατάλειψε here as an objective genitive, rather than a genitive of authorship. This will be confirmed by the following analysis.

C. R. A. M. Murray-Jones
Corinthians 10–13 is set is thus very similar to that indicated by Galatians 1–2. In both cases, Paul's defense is that his apostolic commission comes directly from God or Christ, and not through human mediation (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10; Gal 1:1; 1:12, 2:7). A similar claim is, of course, part of the standard opening formula of his letters (for example, Rom 1:1–7), but only in Galatians 2 and Corinthians 10–13 does he emphasize so strongly that his authority is independent of any human chain of transmission. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul explains that he is driven to "boast" of his visionary experience, against his own wishes and better judgement, only in response to the claims of his opponents. Normally, he refrains from such boasting (2 Cor 12:6; compare Rom 15:17–19). He thus makes it clear that he is describing an experience of which he would much rather not speak (or, at least, that he would rather not commit to writing), but that he feels forced to do so by the exigencies of the situation. Even so, he refers only obliquely to the central content of the revelation (2 Cor 12:4). It seems to follow, then, that this vision is somehow crucial to Paul's claim to apostolic authority. Elsewhere, 1 Cor 9:1 ("Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?") indicates forcefully that Paul bases this claim on his vision, or visions, of Christ.

As many scholars have remarked, a central theme of this passage is Paul's contrast between his own weaknesses and the power of Christ. This contrast resolves the difficult situation in which he finds himself: if he does not "boast" he has no answer to the claims of his opponents, but to do so is to commit the very error for which he has castigated them (2 Cor 10:12). 2 Cor 12:8b–12 shows that he has modeled his position on the example of Jesus: just as the power of God was made manifest by the weakness of Jesus, so Paul's weakness manifests the power of Christ. Thus, Paul's very "nothingness" is the basis of his claim to be "inferior in nothing" to the so-called super-apostles. In this way, he makes it clear that his boasting is of the power of Christ, rather than of his own attainment (compare 1 Cor 4:26–25).

Warnings against self-exaltation with regard to visionary experience are quite common in the hekhalot literature. Agibah's "disclaimer" in the original pardeš story ("Not because I am greater than my fellows") is a case in point. Compare Midrash Merkabah §24.19

R. Ishmael said: פנימה, the Angel of the Presence, said to me: "Son of the noble ones, do not exalt yourself above your companions, and do not say, 'Even I, out of them all, have been worthy!' for this has not come about through your effort or through your power, but by the power of your Father who is in heaven.

This warning is given to Ishmael after he has uttered, by charismatic revelation, the names of the angelic gatekeepers who guard the approach through the seven hekhalot to the merkabah. When challenged by Nehunyah b. ha-Qanah as to his right to do this, Ishmael responds:

I did not do it for my own honour, but for the glory of the King of the Universe. 30


33Midrash Merkabah §26: Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, 113; Schafer, Synopse, §856; Janowitz, Poetics, 55 (lines 0812–20); Swartt, Mystical Prayer, 242.
Paul's unwillingness to boast on his own account is at least consistent with these traditions.

This reticence explains the curious formulation of 2 Cor 12:2–3. Morton Smith interpreted these verses literally, arguing that the "man in Christ" is Jesus, rather than Paul himself.\footnote{Morton Smith, "Ascent to the Heavens and the Beginning of Christianity." \textit{Erzth} 30 (1981) 403–29.} This interpretation, however, is unable to account for 2 Cor 12:7a, in which Paul states clearly that the "heavenly visions" (διακοινωνίας) referred to in 2 Cor 12:1 are in fact his own. The vast majority of commentators, from Irenaeus onward,\footnote{Irenaeus, \textit{Adversus Haereses} 5.5.1.} have recognized that Paul must be speaking of his own experience. This understanding of the passage has been challenged by M. D. Goulder,\footnote{M. D. Goulder, "The Visionaries of Laodicea." \textit{JSNT} 43 (1991) 15–39, esp. 18–20.} who argued that the terms διακοινωνίας and ἡγίασμα have different meanings within Paul's vocabulary. According to Goulder, Paul was unable to compete with his opponents' claim to have experienced heavenly ascents, with accompanying angelic revelations (προφητεία), and was, moreover, vehemently opposed to such practices:

Where Paul can compete is in διακοινωνίας, the second category of heavenly experiences, incursions of the divine on earth—in fact he has had so many such experiences that God gave him the stake in the flesh to shake his pride. But the ἡγίασμα were a most dangerous claim. Once it is accepted that a man has been to heaven, and has been given a message by an angel, his power is virtually unlimited.\footnote{Barrett (\textit{Commenotary}, 307) observed that Luke uses διακοινωνία of earthly visions; Goulder: "Visionaries," 19 n. 1] acknowledges this observation, but discounts it.}

Goulder's exegesis must, however, be rejected. In the first place, it requires us to understand that Paul was prepared to "boast" of the experience of an unknown third party (in Goulder's view, a friend), while at the same time denying the validity of such claims. Second, Goulder cites no external evidence to support his proposed distinction between διακοινωνίας and ἡγίασμα.\footnote{Ibid., 19.} His argument at this point is circular: the sole basis for his proposed distinction is his exegesis of the passage which, in turn, is based on this distinction. Admittedly, we should not assume that the two terms are precisely synonymous, but there are no grounds for the assumption that the distinction is between "heavenly" and "earthly" visions. It seems more probable that διακοινωνία (= Hebrew marah or hazon) refers to the visual element of the experience and διακοινωνίας (gilyay or 'eruvah) to its auditory or conceptual content. Finally, the issue at stake between Paul and his opponents does not concern visions of angels, but visions "of the Lord."}

(2 Cor 12:1). Earlier in the letter, he has characterized his opponents as "false apostles" who have disguised themselves as apostles of Christ but are in reality agents of Satan, the deceiver (2 Cor 11:13–15). These opponents boast in order to be recognized as Paul's equals (2 Cor 11:12), which must mean that they too claim to have experienced "visions and revelations" of Christ (not a lesser angel). Paul clearly regards this claim as spurious, but he is forced to counter it by referring to his own genuine vision of the Lord. Nowhere does he contest the validity of such experience in principle: indeed, to do so would be to undermine the very basis of his own apostolic claim.

Although forced to cite his vision in defense of his apostolic authority, Paul is unwilling to claim it as a personal attainment. The "man in Christ" formula thus reflects his discomfort over the issue of "boasting" and may represent an attempt to observe the pseudepigraphic convention of the apocalyptic-mystical tradition,\footnote{See C. R. A. Murray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition." \textit{JJS} 43 (1992) 1–31. Compare Tabor, \textit{Things Unutterable}, 10–19, and Segal, \textit{Paul the Convert}, 34–71. In the passages cited above, Paul extends this promise of transformation (which is apparently both a future event and an ongoing process) to all those who have become "participating members" of the glorified body of Christ. It seems that the transformative aspect of the heavenly ascent was at an early period transferred to the rise of baptism. This transformation is also found in Gnostic and Syrian Christian sources, and a few Jewish texts assert the reception of the divine name, which is a key element of the heavenly transformation in the apocalyptic-merkabah tradition, with ritual immersion. See further, April D. De Conick and Jari Pousum, "Striped Before God: A New Interpretation of Litogram 37 in the Gospel of Thomas." \textit{VC} 43 (1991) 123–50.} even though to do so completely would of course defeat his purpose. The formula may also possess a deeper, mystical significance. I have elsewhere pointed out that in the apocalyptic-merkabah tradition the ascent into heaven and the vision of the kabod (whom Paul identifies with Christ) involves a transformation of the visionary into an angelic or supra-angelic likeness of this glory or divine image, and that this seems to be the background of Paul's concept of "glorification" (for example, Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).\footnote{\textit{Rowland, The Open Heaven}, 242–45 and Segal (\textit{Paul the Convert}, 38–59) interpret the formulus "heavenly" or "apostolic identity," which is conformed to the image of the enshrined and glorified Christ and therefore possesses "power" and divine conformed authority. This "man" is contrasted with Paul's earthly, human self. Thus, just as Paul's earthly personality is conformed to that of the earthly Jesus (characterized by "weakness," 2 Cor 12:9–11), so his "heavenly being" is conformed to the image of Christ-as-kabod (characterized by "power"). We may compare 2 Cor 4:18 ("while we live, we are...") to 2 Cor 12:1.)
always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh") and Gal 2:20 ("it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"). The same theme occurs at Eph 2:6, where the author states that God "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places," while Eph 4:24 speaks of "the new self, created according to the likeness of God." Returning to 2 Corinthians 12, it is Paul's identity with the celestial "man in Christ" (on whose behalf he is willing to boast, 2 Cor 12:5) that is the source of his power and authority although, paradoxically, it is his personal "weakness" that enables this power to be manifest. This theme of conformity with Christ is at the heart of Paul's apostolic claim (compare 1 Cor 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6). As James D. Tabor has commented.

The apostle is the mediator of divine power in the world and the guarantor of the "success of the enterprise." He not only speaks "in" or "for" Christ, but in a representative sense is Christ manifest in the world. 29

In 2 Cor 12:6, Paul explains his unwillingness, under normal circumstances, to boast of his mystical attainments on the grounds that he wishes to be given credit only for his words and deeds. This idea is picked up in 2 Cor 12:11-12, in which he explains that he has been compelled to abandon his usual restraint and to commend himself because of the Corinthians' failure to commend him despite the "signs and wonders and works of power" that he has performed among them. These works, which Paul evidently feels should preclude his need to boast, are the evidence of his apostolic authority and clearly connected in his mind with the "visions and revelations" by which this authority was conferred upon him. He seems here to be making a claim for himself that is reminiscent of the opening sections of Hekhalot Rabbati, where the merkabah adept is said to possess seven kinds of "greatness" (presumably, related in some way to the sevenfold cosmic structure of the hekhalot). 30

29Tabor, Things Unutterable, 23.
lesser ban, then the lesser ban again, then the greater ban, three times every day since the time when permission was given to the pure, to the humble, to the meek, to the discerning, to the uprightness, to the pious, to the chosen, to those set apart, to the righteous and to the perfect, to descend and ascend to the мерка, to say: "Let him be under a ban!" to מִצְוֹ, the God of Israel, to him, to his glorious throne, to the crown of his head, to the יִתְנָה, to the יִתְנָה, to all the host of heaven, and to all his ministers who stand before him, attending to the мерка and serving him.

R. Ishmael said: It is taught thus concerning the vision of the мерка—one who attains to the vision of the мерка has permission to stand up only in these three cases: before the king, before the high priest, and before the sanhedrin when the מִצְוֹ is present. But if the מִצְוֹ is not present, he may not stand up even before the sanhedrin. And if he does stand up, "his blood is upon his own head" because he lessens his days and shortens his years.

This text, is, admittedly, more crudely melodramatic than Paul's statement, but the claim that it makes is essentially similar. Supernatural power and authority are conferred upon the one who attains to the vision of the мерка, and this person functions as God's emissary and (eschatological?) judge of both Israel and the angels. In Peter Schäfer's words, "The Merkabah is the chosen one of God to whom messianic qualities are ascribed."

Gerd A. Wewers infers that this passage was written against the background of a social environment that the writer perceived as hostile and toward which he did not adopt an attitude of patient, passive suffering based on the "servant" model encountered in prophecy and the Psalms. Despite his personal powerlessness, the adept is vindicated by the intervention of divine power on his behalf and possesses divinely conferred authority to pass eschatological judgment on his adversaries. Like Schäfer, Wewers observes that "the mystic aligned his self-portrayal with eschatological individuals (Elijah, the messiah) and saw himself as corresponding closely to these figures (or identified himself with them?)."

The adept's superior, revealed knowledge is opposed to that conferred by exoteric and halakhic Torah scholarship, which indicates that his opponents are members of the scholastic rabbinic establishment. Wewers suggests that this composition may be a response to a specific historical situation, although it can no longer be identified. The writer's viewpoint, however, is similar to that of several (Jewish and Christian) apocalyptic authors, and it is probably better to regard the passage as one product of a tradition that was adapted, over the course of several centuries, by many different sectarian groups in situations of conflict with others, more powerful than themselves. The situation inferred by Wewers is in several respects very similar to that addressed by Paul, who, in his claim to conformity with Christ, assumes the "servant" role. The statement that the мерка adept's authority is given "to the pure, to the humble, to the meek" is reminiscent of Paul's contrast between "poor" and "weakness.

The visionary ascent to heaven of which Paul is driven to boast seems, therefore, of crucial importance to his claim to apostolic authority and power. There are grounds, moreover, for supposing that this was a мерка vision, with Christ identified as the enthroned קבוצ. This hypothesis will be strengthened if clear parallels can be demonstrated between Paul's account and the hekhalot/lamduinde paroles story.

The relationship between the "third heaven" of 2 Cor 12:1 and the "paradise" of 2 Cor 12:4 requires consideration. Are verses 2 and 3-4 to be understood sequentially or in parallel? If a seven-heaven cosmology is assumed, either interpretation is theoretically possible, but it seems most unlikely that Paul would have based his claim to apostolic authority on an ascent merely to the third of seven heavens, which would hardly qualify as an "exceptional" revelation (2 Cor 12:7a). Moreover, our analysis of the
Jewish mystical tradition has shown that pardaš was a term for the celestial Holy of Holies in the uppermost heaven. The seven-heaven model must, then, imply a “two-stage” ascent, first to the third heaven and subsequently to paradise in the seventh.38 There is, however, no parallel for this in apocalyptic or Jewish mystical literature. Normally, the ascent through all six lower levels to the seventh is described (or at least mentioned) unless (as at Rev 4:1–2, for example) the visionary proceeds directly to the highest heaven without mention of intervening levels. Nowhere, to my knowledge, does the elevator stop, so to speak, on only one intermediate floor. Since there is evidence for an alternative, and probably earlier, three-heaven cosmology, it seems most natural to assume that this is the model employed by Paul.39 This assumption is confirmed by the elegant analysis of Hans Bietenhard,40 who has demonstrated that 2 Cor 12:1–5 are a symmetrical composition, the second half of which repeats and expands upon the first. Thus, 2 Cor 12:5 picks up the theme of “boasting” introduced in 2 Cor 12:1 and adds the theme of “weakness,” while 2 Cor 12:3–4 repeats the statement in 2 Cor 12:2 (“paradise” = “the third heaven”) with an additional report of a secret, unutterable revelation. It seems virtually certain, then, that Paul’s paradise was located in the uppermost of these heavens.

The continuation of the pardaš story in Hekhalot Zuti’ati deserves consideration:41

A R. Aqiba said: At that time, when I ascended to the merkahah, a haqeq went forth from beneath the throne of glory, speaking in the Aramaic tongue. In this tongue, what did it say?

B “Before the LOD made heaven and earth, he established... corrupt word”,... in Raqia, to go in by and to come out by [scribal gloss].

41Rawland (The Open Heaven, 380–82) and Tabor (Things Unutterable, 115–20) interpret the passage in this way.

42Ralph P. Martin (Second Corinthians [Word Biblical Commentary 40; Word, 1986] 401–3) and Young (“The Ascension Motif,” 90), for example, have defended this interpretation.

43Bietenhard, Himmliche Welt, 162–68.

44Schäfer, Synopte, §§348–52; Rachel Elior, Hekhalot Zuti’ati (Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought Suppl. 1; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982) 23–25, lines 59–99. The opening words, “R. Aqiba said: At that time, when I ascended to the Merkahah, a haqeq went forth... etc.” are also found in the two manuscripts of Merkahah Rabba that contain the pardaš story (Schäfer, Synopte, 1074). See further, Schäfer, Jewish Gnosticism, 77–78; Schäfer, Der urchristen und offenbarte Gnost, 56–59, and idem, Uebersetzung, 3, 17–24.

45This word is different in all five manuscripts in Schäfer, Synopte and in the Genesis fragment T. T. K. 95 B (in Schäfer, Gnostica Fragmente, 90–91) but none of the versions is meaningful: O = Oxford; N = New York; D = Dropheim; M 40 = Munich 40; M 22 = Munich 22; G 7 = Geniza fragment.

and... corrupt word,... means nothing other than ‘gateway’ (מַקָּבָה). He established the irrefutable name, with which to design the entire universe.

C “And what man is able To ascend on high? To ride the chariot-wheels? To descend below? To explore the world? To walk on the dry ground? To behold his splendor? To untie the crown? To be transformed into his glory? To utter praise? To combine letters? To utter names? To behold what is on high? And to know what is below? To know the meaning of the living? And to see the vision of the dead? To walk in rivers of fire? And to know the lightning?

D “And who is able to explain, and who is able to see? First of all it is written: ‘For no man may see me and live’ (Exod 33:20); and in the second place it is written: ‘For God speaks to man, and he lives’ (Deut

In the following gloss, all except G 7 give a different form again. O: לֹא כָּל מַה; N: לֹא כָּל מַה; D, M 40: לֹא כָּל מַה; M 22: nond.; G 7: שְׁכִּירתוּ). Schäfer (Uebersetzung, 3, 18 nr. 14 and 19) has argued that G 7 gives the best reading, since the gloss at least agrees with the text (assuming O to be the proposition “like” or “as”). Schäfer (Jewish Gnosticism, 77–78) and Ithamar Gruenwald (Apocalyptic and Merkahah Mysticism [AGUI 14; Leiden: Brill, 1980] 148) both translated “cessible” on the basis of the gloss (one; G 7 reads: שְׁכִּירתוּ). Possibly, שְׁכִּירתוּ (“building”) should be read.

46Reading שְׁכִּירתוּ (thus O, D, M 22) as ‘affile infinitive of לֹא כָּל מַה (M 40: שְׁכִּירתוּ [meaningless]; N omits this word). Compare Schäfer (Jewish Gnosticism, 78), “to dwell with,” and see Schäfer, Uebersetzung, 3, 19 nr. 11.

47This expression is uncertain, but highly significant. The manuscripts read as follows: N: שְׁכִּירתוּ (‘to be praised in glory’); Schäfer (Jewish Gnosticism, 78) offers “to praise the glory”; M 22: שְׁכִּירתוּ (meaning uncertain, perhaps “to become old [or learned] with honor”; O: שְׁכִּירתוּ). The above translation is based on O. If the reference is to the divine glory (note that in the previous lines the possessive suffix refers to God), it must mean either: “to be transformed into his glory” (as above) or... by his glory.” Alternatively, it may refer to the mystic’s own glory; “to be transformed in his glory.” D and M 40 are identical, save that they omit the possessive suffix. They could therefore mean “to be transformed into the (divine) glory,” or... by the (divine) glory,” or... in glory.” Whatever the precise meaning, the reading of these three manuscripts is an important witness to the theme of “transformational mysticism” in the hekhalot tradition.
F are only the beginning, concerns the vision of the kabod and the mysteries of the divine name (of which the kabod is the embodiment). E establishes a link between the kabod in the preexistent celestial sanctuary and the earthly temple. F discusses the manner in which the kabod is seen by various categories of being. The saying attributed to "our rabbis" alludes to the esoteric doctrine of the 3\textit{fur gomah}. The section culminates in a warning, attributed to Moses, that this is not a matter for rational understanding or verbal definition. We may compare the following, from an anonymous medieval Yemenite commentary on the Song of Songs:30

It was said in the presence of Rabban Gamaliel: Though created beings do not have permission to declare the true being of the Creator, they do have permission to declare His praise. How so? As it is written: "for no man shall see me and live" (Exod 33:20). Life depends upon his praise, but his true being is concealed.

The following sections of \textit{Hechalot Zuari} contain detailed descriptions of the \textit{hayaot} (holy living creatures), the merkahab, and the kabod, including much \textit{3\textit{fur gomah}} material and long strings of magical names of God. Thus, the words heard by Aqiba when he ascended to the merkahab in paradise, or the celestial sanctuary, concerned the central mysteries of \textit{m\textit{ra\textit{teh merkahab}}}: that is, the innermost mysteries of God's being, which cannot and may not be described in words, but are only partially known and expressed through the medium of mystical praise. This is a remarkably close parallel to Paul's "unutterable words which it is not permitted for man to speak" (2 Cor 12:4).

The nature of Paul's "thorn (or stake) in the flesh" (2 Cor 12:7b–8) has been the subject of much speculation.52 Most modern scholars, following

---

5\textsuperscript{5} Published by Moritz Friedländer, "
\textit{Tehilin}
\textit{Pir\textit{ut Shir-ha-Shirim Metorah mi-Lashon Ebe\textit{h}}
\textit{Arab,}" in \textit{Festschrift zum achzigsten Geburtstage Moritz Weissenscher's} (Leipzig: Harrasowitz, 1896) Hebrew section, 49-59 (the quotation is on p. 58). On the antiquity of much of the material preserved by this source, see A. Maimon, "\textit{Dessens renomment d'Origine concernant les Juifs,}" \textit{Reu} 71 (1920) 193-99; and Saul Lieberman, \textit{Midrash-Tevah} (2d ed.; Jerusalem: Warhmann, 1970) 12-19 (Hebrew); see further idem, "Miknat Shir-ha-Shirim" (appendix D of Scholem, \textit{Jewish Gastronomy}) 123-24. It is tempting, although perhaps overoptimistic, to conjecture that this tradition goes back to Rabban Gamaliel the Elder, who was the first of six \textit{adonim} to bear this name and title, and who was unwittingly claimed as a teacher by Paul (Acts 22:3).

5\textsuperscript{6} Cf.contra, for example, Kasemann, \"Die Legitimitat des Apostels,\" 63-64, who argues that Paul uses this expression to emphasize the private, incommunicable nature of his experience and to deny that any claim to authority can be based on such experiences. See further n. 64 below.

5\textsuperscript{7} For a useful summary of previous scholarship on this issue, see Martin, \textit{Second Corinthians}, 4:0-23.
the earliest recorded church tradition,52 and taking τῇ σταρτὶ literally, have argued that the expression refers to an illness or disability, also mentioned at Gal 4:13–14. Various “diagnoses” have been offered on the basis of these two passages.54 Some commentators, rightly perceiving that the “thorn” is closely associated in Paul’s mind with his “exceptional” revelations, have suggested a nervous complaint (for example, epilepsy, hysteria, or migraine) caused by, or associated with, his ecstatic and visionary experience.55 According to this view, the parallel expression ἐγγέλλεις Σωτῆρα indicates that Paul believed that a demonic assault had caused his illness. Others have argued in favor of an interpretation first proposed by Chrysostom,56 namely, that Paul is referring to a human enemy or enemies at whose hands he has suffered persecution.57 This view has been persuasively defended by Terence Y. Mullins who, citing similar expressions in the Septuagint at Num 33:55, Ezek 28:24, and elsewhere, showed that Paul’s readers would have recognized σκόλοπα τῇ σταρτὶ as a literary idiom for an enemy.58 Robert M. Price has pointed out, however, that this theory fails to account for the close connection that exists in Paul’s mind between the “thorn” and the missionary experience and suggested that the reference is to an angelic opponent similar to the gatekeepers of the hekhalot tradition, who attack and punish those deemed unworthy to ascend to the merkabah.59 This view is consistent with Paul’s emphasis on his “weakness” and his dependence upon the power of Christ.

If Price’s interpretation is adopted, several noteworthy correspondences between Paul’s account and the Jewish parades story become apparent. The “angel of Satan” is reminiscent of the demonic “angels of destruction” who seek to “do violence” to Aqiba (Hekhalot Zurari and Merkabah Rabbah C2b). We also recall that one of the four was “stricken” (nirgor), and this is precisely the meaning of the verb κολοκύζω employed by Paul. If this correspondence is more than coincidental, the Pauline account and the parades story at this point explain each other. This interpretation is by no means inconsistent with the theory of a nervous illness or reaction to ecstatic experience, which Paul believed to be caused by the angel’s blows. Indeed, the geonic interpretation of the expression as referring to madness, which is not too far removed from that of the earliest Christian commentators, can be said to support this view. Finally, Paul’s report that he besought Christ to make his tormenter leave him corresponds to God’s intervention on behalf of Aqiba, “Leave this elder alone” (Hekhalot Zurari and Merkabah Rabbah C2b: Babylonian Talmud, A58).60

The cumulative weight of the evidence seems overwhelming: Paul’s account of his ascent to paradise and the Jewish parades story have common roots in the mystical tradition. An enigmatic quality, due to the reticent and elliptical manner of description, is common to both accounts. The correspondences of detail indicate that they are even more closely related than has previously been suggested. We may conclude, then, that Paul is describing an ascent to the heavenly temple and a merkabah vision of the enthroned and “glorified” Christ. The context in which his account occurs suggests that he bases his claim to apostolic authority on this vision. “Merkabah mysticism” was, therefore, a central feature of Paul’s experience and self-understanding. Since this is so, there are no grounds for the assumption that his visions were purely spontaneous, involuntary events. It is quite probable that they were induced by the use of a mystical technique, which may have been less elaborate than some of those described in the hekhalot sources but cannot have been markedly different in its essentials.61 As Tabor has argued,62 the expression “caught up” (προσελήφθη; 2 Cor 12:7; ἐφηρεύθη; 2 Cor 12:4) in no way implies the absence of such a

51Chrysostom Hom. 26 on 2 Corinthians.
55It has generally been assumed that “three times” implies three separate occasions. Given the fact that visions of Christ were a regular feature of Paul’s experience (see further below, p. 284 n. 66), and if the reference is to a chronic or recurring complaint, this may be so. Price, however, has pointed out (“Punished,” 25) that the text carries no such implication (compare Mark 14:35–39) and argued that Paul is describing a single event in his visionary experience. Young (“The Ascension Motif,” 81) suggests, plausibly enough, that the “three times” corresponds to Paul’s passage through the three celestial spheres.
56Compare Segal, Paul the Convert, 33–39; Young (“The Ascension Motif,” 80, 84) is equivocal on this point. On the one hand, he recognizes the background in Jewish mysticism of Paul’s vision, but, on the other, he is anxious to distinguish between Paul’s experience (“an extraordinary religious encounter”) and “an extreme ecstatic and sometimes self-induced mysticism.” This proposed distinction appears to be motivated by theological considerations, however, and is not supported by historical analysis.
57Tabor, Things Unutterable, 115–16.
technique, nor does the use of a mystical method imply that the experience is wholly "self-achieved" rather than divinely "granted." 63

Finally, the question of the historical event to which Paul refers remains to be vindicated. The majority of scholars have denied any connection between this event and Paul's visions recorded elsewhere. This view, however, is often associated with a tendentious desire to prove that visionary experience was of no more than marginal importance to Paul. 64 This is a distortion of the context in which 2 Corinthians 12 occurs, as is contradicted by the whole record of Paul's career, and does not deserve serious consideration. James D. Tabor and Alan F. Segal, on the contrary, maintain that practice of the heavenly ascent was repeated many times during his career. 65 This view is almost certainly correct, but the inference that Paul is

63 Compare Malachi Merkabah 3:4, above p. 271.

65 See Tabor, Things Unutterable, 32-34, for a penetrating expose of the "hidden agenda" underlying this approach, the aim of which is to produce a portrait of Paul that conforms to the exegesis of his letters. A few have argued that Paul's visions were important for him personally, but irrelevant to his apostolic claim or Christian belief. This is simply absurd.
66 Tabor, Second, 34-71; Segal, Paul the Convert, 34-71. Baumgardt (Paulus und die Apokalyptik, 143) has also emphasized the frequency of Paul's visionary experience but did not discuss the context of this. See also Richard Reitzenstein, Hellenistic Mystery Religions: Their Basic Ideas and Significance (PTMS 284).

C. R. A. Murray-Jones 285

describing only one among several such experiences, which occurred at some indeterminate point in his career, must be rejected on two counts: in the first place, this view is evidently the basis of Paul's claim to apostolic authority (in defense of which he is compelled, against his will, to boast of it) and, second, he is at pains to give the event a precise historical location. A few scholars have identified the ascent to heaven as the event on the Damascus road, 67 but this suggestion is also unconvincing. In none of the accounts of this event in Acts (9:1-9; 22:6-11, 22:12-18) do we find any indication that a heavenly ascent was involved: the narrative model corresponds more closely to the apocalyptic motif of the revelatory descent of an angelic being. Nowhere is there any indication that Paul saw a vision of Christ in human form upon the celestial throne on this occasion: all three versions in Acts speak of a blinding light and a voice from heaven. Paul's own account of this event (Gal 1:15-16) does not indicate that it was a heavenly ascent or that it involved a vision of Christ upon the throne. 68 In this account, Paul uses the verb ἀναστάσεως but not the noun ἁλώματος. This point is not (pace Coudert) at all decisive, but it tends to support the impression given by Acts that the content of this experience was primarily auditory, not visual. Most important of all, no account of the Damascus road experience provides a point of contact with the imagery of the temple which was, as we have seen, at the heart of the paradise tradition.

A recorded vision of Paul remains which has attracted little attention from recent commentators, but which satisfies all the criteria demanded by the present analysis. This is the vision in the Jerusalem temple, reported in Acts 22 at the conclusion of Paul's defense speech on the temple steps.

16 John Knox ("Fourteen Years Later,"
JBL, 58 (1939) 15-29 originally held this view but later retracted it (Chapters in a Life of Paul [New York: Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1936] 78 n. 3, see also his earlier and revised edition [Marion, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987] 34 n. 11). Riddle (Man of Conflict, 62-63, 208-11) accepted Knox's original position, which has also been supported by Charles Henry Buck and Greer Taylor (Saint Paul: A Study of the Development of His Thought [New York: Scribner, 1969] 220-26). Buck and Taylor rightly recognized the importance of this vision for Paul's claim to apostolic authority but wrongly assumed that the basis of this claim was the Damascus road event.
17 C. M. Swallow ("The Origin of Paul's Gospel," WUNT 2/4; 2d ed., Tubingen: Mohr, 1982, 223-33) whose discussion, although excellent, in many respects, rests on a false assumption. See further n. 82 below.
18 Stevanus G. ("Nouvelles remarques sur les voyages de Saint Paul à Jérusalem," Rev. Sc. Rel. 31, (1935) 329-42) suggested in passing (p. 340) that this passage may correspond to 2 Cor 12:1-12 but, as far as I am aware, this suggestion has never been developed in detail. Robert Jewett (A Chronology of Paul's Life [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979] 54-55) briefly considered the possibility, but mistakenly rejected it (see further below p. 287).
According to Acts, this vision occurred during his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. In Galatians, Paul states that this first visit occurred three years after his conversion (Gal 1:18) and fourteen years before his second visit (Gal 2:1). The vision is described as follows:

"When I returned to Jerusalem and while I was praying in the temple, I came to be in a trance (exekrama mē év exekrōmē) and to see him, saying to me: Hurry, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me." And I said: "Lord, they themselves know that in all the synagogues I used to imprison and beat those who believed in you, and (that) while the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed I myself stood approving and guarding the garments of those who were killing him." Then he said to me: "Go, for I will send you (ekpomptistew) far away to the Gentiles." Up to this point, they heard the crowd in the temple, but then they shouted: "Remove this person from here, for we are not fitting for him to live (ō kai kathēskontai ston xinē)?" (Acts 22:17-22)

If, as I have argued, the ascent to paradise means entry into the celestial Holy of Holies, this incident clearly corresponds to such an experience. Paul has been transported in his ecstatic trance (hence his uncertainty as to whether his body accompanied him) from the earthly to the heavenly temple and into the celestial Holy of Holies, where he sees Christ as the enthroned kairos. As noted by Otto Betz, the account in Acts contains several echoes of Isaiah 6, which, as was discussed in part one of this article, is a centrally important text of the messianic tradition. Acts 22:17, which echoes Isa 6:1 ("I saw the LORD"), while Acts 22:21 ("I will send you") must be derived from Isa 6:8 ("Whom shall I send") and Isa 6:12 ("until the LORD has sent everyone far away"). Here, then, is the account of Paul's apostolic commission to the Gentiles, in the context of the messianic vision of Christ as kairos in the celestial sanctuary, to which 2 Cor 12:1-12 refers (as, probably, does 1 Cor 9:1).

Acts 22:18 ("they will not accept your testimony") seems to reflect Isa 6:9-13, verses that are fundamental to Paul's theological theory of "hard-hearted Israel" (compare Acts 28:25-28). In the context of this speech, the simple reference to these verses of condemnation of Israel and predicted destruction of the Jewish state amounts to a statement that the divine glory (Christ) has abandoned Israel in favor of the nations. Thus, whereas Isaiah was sent to Israel, Paul is sent to the Gentiles. This radical reinterpretation of the prophetic account explains the anger of his listeners (Acts 22:22), and it is intriguing to note that this is expressed in language reminiscent of m. Hag. 2:1c: "And whoever is not careful about the glory of his creator, it was fitting for him that he had not come into the world."

Robert Jewett has objected that Paul's public description of the vision in the temple in Acts 22 contrasts so strongly with his reticence in 2 Corinthians 12 that the two visions are unlikely to be the same. This objection, however, overlooks the fact that the speech on the temple steps, which provides the context in which the public description occurs, is almost certainly a Lukan composition. Several commentators have believed this to be true of the vision itself, arguing that it reflects Luke's concern to legitimize gentile Christianity by emphasizing its continuity with Judaism. Betz regarded it as a Lukan commentary on the Damascus road event and believed it to be a literary device intended to place Paul's authority on the same level as that of the Twelve, to whom the risen Jesus had appeared in the Holy City.

On the other hand, Hans Conzelmann believes it to be an alternative version of the conversion/call story, derived by Luke from a nonhistorical tradition that associated the event with Jerusalem rather than Damascus. Christoph Burchard has rightly disputed the suggestion of a tradition that was ignorant of the Damascus road story or denied its veracity, but he has

---

(Endnotes)

1Jewett, Chronology, 54-55.


3Betz, "Die Vision des Paulus im Tempel.

also maintained that the story of the temple vision is derived from a
communal tradition, the origins of which he believed to be beyond a

was also influenced by the idea that Paul’s conversion occurred in
Jerusalem, three years after the event described in Acts 9:1-22. This
suggestion is based on the tradition that Paul had a vision on the
mountain of Tmolus, which is near Jerusalem. Paul’s conversion is
discussed in Acts 17:10-15, where it is said that he was taken up to
heavenly visions and heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Jesus, son of
David, why do you doubt me?” Paul’s conversion is also described in
Galatians 1:16, where he states that he was called by the Lord and
appeared to him three times. These accounts suggest that Paul’s
conversion was a significant event in his life, and it is likely that it
occurred in Jerusalem, three years after the event described in Acts 9:1-22.
with what we know of Paul’s career: there is no evidence that he preached to the Gentiles, or claimed apostolic authority, during the three intervening years. Moreover, it seems inherently probable that it was the experience of Jewish opposition to the gospel that caused him to interpret Isaiah 6 in such radical terms and that this vision, at least in part, a product of his event to suggest it was the cause of this radical departure from his Jewish purpose behind the initial revelation.\(^3\) Rom 15:15-20 confirms this picture.

But I have written to you in part boldly, to remind you, on account of the grace given to me by God \(^4\) to be a servant of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, administering the gospel of God as a priestly service. \(^5\) For the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. \(^6\) In Christ, then, I have my boast in the things pertaining to God, for I accomplished through me for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and around to Illyricum the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on another’s foundation.

Here, Paul characteristically emphasizes the independence of his apostolate from any human authority (Rom 15:20) but places the beginning of the Gentile mission in Jerusalem (Rom 15:19). Moreover, he describes his apostolate to the Gentiles as the exercise of a priestly ministry (Rom 15:16). The references to boasting (Rom 15:17) and works of power (Rom 15:18-19) are reminiscent of 2 Corinthians 12.

Obviously, this finding has significant implications for the vexed question of the Pauline chronology. Broadly speaking, it tends to support a reconstruction based on the Epistles, rather than Acts, as proposed by John Knox, Donald Wayne Riddle, John Coolidge Hurst, Charles Henry Buck and Greer Taylor, Robert Jewett, and Gerd Ludemann.\(^4\) Since Gal 2:1 specifies a fourteen-year interval between the first visit to Jerusalem (when the parable/temple vision occurred) and the second (the “Jerusalem conference”), 2 Corinthians 10–13 must have been written at about this time. As we observed above, both letters seem to have been written in the heat of the crisis over Paul’s apostolic authority and hence concern the validity of the Gentile mission. Since 2 Corinthians 10–13 does not refer to the Jerusalem meeting, it may have been written shortly before this event, and Galatians shortly afterward. This complex issue, however, cannot be discussed in detail here. It is sufficient to have shown that the ecstatic ascent to paradise, the temple vision, and the apostolic commission to the Gentiles were one and the same revolutionary event. The impact of merkabah mys-

\(^3\) See Knox, “Fourteen Years Later,” exp. 341; idem, “The Pauline Chronology,” exp. 23-26; idem, Chapters in a Life of Paul (revised ed.: 1987; see n. 67 above) exp. 3-52; Riddle, Man of Conflict, exp. 13-20 and 185-223; Buck and Taylor, Saint Paul, exp. 3-19; Jewett, Chronology, exp. 7-24; John Coolidge Hurst, Jr., “Chronology, Pauline,” IDB 1 (1962) 166-67; idem, The Origin of 1 Corinthians (New York: Scribner, 1957); 3-42; idem, “Pauline Chronology and Pauline Theology,” in W. R. Farmer, C. P. D. Moule and R. R. Nicholls, eds., Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John N. Sanders (London: New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 225-44; and idem, “The Sequence of Paul’s Letters,” CTF 14 (1968) 188-200; Gerd Ludemann, Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). See now John Knox, “On the Pauline Chronology: Buck-Taylor-Hurd Revisited,” in Robert T. Forman and Beverly R. Gaventa, eds., The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990) 238-74. Since these scholars have tended to discount Acts as a source of reliable data, it is perhaps hardly surprising that none of them has identified the ascent to paradise with the temple vision, but the identification is consistent with, or requires only small adjustments to, the reconstructions that they have proposed. It allows the expression ἀνάληψις ἐπιστροφῆς τοῦ ναοῦ in Gal 2:1 to be taken as conclusive (with rather than inclusive of) “μετὰ τῆς ἐπιστροφῆς” in Gal 1:18, as seems most natural. Thus, Gal 1:15-17 refers to the conversion; Gal 1:18 states that Paul went up to Jerusalem three years after this event; and Gal 2:1 places the second visit to Jerusalem (the “Jerusalem conference”) fourteen years later. It is probable that Gal 2:11-14 is not part of this chronological sequence, but refers to an earlier event (see Ludemann, Paul, 20-21). It should be noted that Paul’s statement at Gal 1:21 implies that a different account of these events was being promulgated by his opponents, and this could be the basis of the muddled chronology of Acts.

\(^4\) The reconstruction proposed by James D. G. Dunn (“The Incidenst at Antioch” in “Gal 1:11-18,” JNT 38 [1983]: 3-57, reprinted in idem, Jesus, Paul and the Law, [London: SPCK, 1990]) 129-81) rests on the assumption that Gal 2:11-14 continues the chronological sequence of Gal 1:13-2:10. Gies (“Nouvelles remarques,” 335-40) has argued that Gal 1:18, ἐπιστρεφομένου μετὰ τῆς ἐπιστροφῆς, means three years after Paul’s stay in Damascus, the length of which is not specified, so that more than three years elapsed between the conversion and the first visit to Jerusalem, but this reading of the text seems very strained.
ticism upon human history has therefore been considerable, for it was at the very heart of Paul's experience and apostolic claim. Moreover, his merkabah vision of the enthroned and glorified Messiah provided the inspiration for his "gospel to the nations."

Lyric Autobiography: John Donne's 
*Holy Sonnets*

Frederick J. Ruf
Georgetown University

In her admirable study of autobiography, Janet Varner Gunn argued that the religious significance of the form "lies not in its literary function but in its anthropology," that is, in its role in articulating and creating human experience. She also stated that much literary discussion of autobiography serves to conceal its "strangeness" and "unruly behavior."

Both of these points seem to me to be important, particularly if it is true that the human self is protean and receives a multiplicity of shapes according to the cultural forces that mold it. To adapt a figure used by William James, the mind is formed much as a stone is shaped by a sculptor: "In a sense the statue stood there from eternity. But there were a thousand different ones beside it, and the sculptor alone is to thank for having extricated this one from the rest." Surely one of the central cultural sculptors is autobiography, the form that claims above all others to possess the shape of the self. It follows that any claims to the "proper" or "best" form of

*The writing of this article was supported by a Landegger Summer Research Grant in 1992.
Ibid., 11.

HTR 86.3 (1993) 293–307