

Leviathan's Knot: The High Priest's Sash as a Cosmological Symbol

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Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities* 3.154–156 unveils the following description of the high priest's sash:

This robe is a tunic descending to the ankles, enveloping the body and with long sleeves tightly laced round the arms; they gird it at the breast, winding to a little above the armpits the sash, which is of a breadth of about four fingers and has an open texture giving it the appearance of a serpent's skin. Therein are interwoven flowers of divers hues, of crimson and purple, blue and fine linen, but the warp is purely of fine linen. Wound a first time at the breast (καὶ λαβοῦσα τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς ἐλίξεως κατὰ στέρνον), after passing round it once again, it is tied and then hangs at length, sweeping to the ankles, that is so long as the priest has no task in hand, for so its beauty is displayed to the beholders' advantage; but when it behoves him to attend to the sacrifices and perform his ministry, in order that the movements of the sash may not impede his actions, he throws it back over his left shoulder. Moses gave it the name of *abaneth*, but we have learnt from the Babylonians to call it *hemian*, for so is it designated among them.¹

Several scholars have drawn attention to unusual features associated with the sacerdotal girdle. Crispin Fletcher-Louis, for example, notices several peculiar details in this description, including the comparison of the sash with the skin of the serpent (ὄφις) and the language of “twisting” (ἔλιξις), further supporting serpentine symbolism.² Analyzing these features, he concludes that “the lan-

1 Henry Thackeray, *Josephus*, LCL. 10 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press/London: Heinemann, 1967), 4.388–389.

2 Crispin Fletcher-Louis, “The High Priest as Divine Mediator in the Hebrew Bible: Dan 7:13 as a Test Case,” *SBLSP* 36 (1997): 161–193 at 191. See also Crispin Fletcher-Louis, “Priests and Priesthood,” in Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 698.

guage is reminiscent of that used of the ‘twisting’ serpent in Isa 27:1–2³ and the parallel passage in the Baal cycle (*CTA* 5.1.1–3) where, as we have seen, there is a reference to an ephod.”⁴ He also draws attention to another description of the sash in *Ant.* 3.185, in which Josephus again offers a novel interpretation of the priestly sash, though this time comparing it to the ocean which encompasses the earth:

The *essen*, again, he set in the midst of this garment, after the manner of the earth, which occupies the midmost place; and by the girdle where-with he encompassed it he signified the ocean (*ὠκεανόν*), which holds the whole in its embrace.⁵

In light of the sash’s associations with the serpent’s skin and with the watery substance, which in some mythological traditions was understood to be the traditional domain of the sea monster, Fletcher-Louis suggests that the sacerdotal sash might represent the defeated Leviathan. He also posits that Josephus in his passage likens the high priest to a divine warrior who defeats the sea monster, the sash here symbolizing victory over chaotic forces. Fletcher-Louis finishes his examination by noting the possibility that “the high priest wears a vanquished Leviathan: the sash hanging at his side evokes the image of a limp and defeated serpent in the hand of its conqueror.”⁶ Several other scholars have found Fletcher-Louis’ proposal plausible, agreeing that “the serpentine cloth from which the sash is made and its identification as the ocean do suggest that it is to be identified with the Leviathan.”⁷ Like Fletcher-Louis’ research, these studies also attempt to interpret Josephus’ description of the sash through the lenses of the divine warrior motif. Margaret Barker extends the use of this inter-

3 Isa 27:1 reads: “On that day the Lord with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea.”

4 Fletcher-Louis, “The High Priest as Divine Mediator,” 191.

5 Thackeray, *Josephus*, 4.405.

6 Fletcher-Louis, “The High Priest as Divine Mediator,” 191. Elsewhere he reiterates the same thesis by arguing that “the high priest’s ephod is probably the same kind of garment which Ba’al wears when he slays Leviathan (*CTA* 5.1.1–5). A passage in Josephus (*Ant.* 3.154–156) suggests his sash was worn to evoke the image of a slain Leviathan hanging limp at its conqueror’s side.” Crispin Fletcher-Louis, “Alexander the Great’s Worship of the High Priest,” in Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. Sproston North, eds., *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 71–102 at 87.

7 Andrew Angel, *Chaos and the Son of Man: The Hebrew Chaoskampf Tradition in the Period 515 BCE to 200 CE*, *LSTS* 60 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 183.

pretive framework to her analysis of Christian developments, such as the motif of the defeated waters found in the Book of Revelation. She notes that

the defeated waters occur, however, in two other places in Revelation: in the vision of the new heaven and the new earth there is “no more sea” (21.1) and in the vision of the risen Lord, when he is described as the heavenly high priest wearing a long robe with a golden girdle around his breast (1.13). Josephus tells us the significance of the high priest’s girdle: “This vestment reaches down to the feet and sits close to the body; ... it is girded to the breast a little above the elbows by a girdle often going round, four fingers broad, but so loosely woven that you would think it the skin of a serpent ... And the girdle which encompassed the high priest round signified the ocean ...” (*Ant.* 3.154, 185). The risen Lord wears the ocean like the skin of a dead snake, the encircler with seven heads!⁸

While the images of the divine warrior and the defeated sea monster are important for interpreting Josephus’ tradition regarding the high priest’s sash, other possibilities, especially ones arising from the sacerdotal dimension of the narrative, have been neglected. For example, there is good reason to think that the enigmatic serpentine sash might be closely related to the traditions of the cosmological temple, which loom large in the third book of Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities*. The sash’s association with the ocean suggests such a cosmological significance; in fact, this item may be envisioned as a part of the Temple of Creation. In the remainder of this essay, we will examine this cosmological imagery in more detail.

1 The High Priest as the Microcosmic Temple

In order to better understand a possible cosmological meaning of the priestly sash, we must examine its precise function in the broader context of Josephus’ description of the high priest’s accoutrement found in the third book of his *Jewish Antiquities*. This task is not easy, since this portion of *Jewish Antiquities* contains one of the most detailed descriptions of the high priestly vestments in early Jewish extra-biblical sources. In this lengthy and elaborate account, Josephus goes beyond the traditional biblical descriptions of the sacerdotal gar-

⁸ Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Soon Take Place (Revelation 1.1)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 220.

ments by unveiling the cosmological significance of the priestly accessories. It is important for our study to note that in Josephus' narrative, the garments of the high priest are linked both to the imagery of the earthly Temple, and to its cosmological counterpart in the form of the so-called "Temple of Creation." *Ant.* 3.178–187 provides the following interpretation of the sacred vestments:

Such is the apparel of the high priest. But one may well be astonished at the hatred which men have for us and which they have so persistently maintained, from an idea that we slight the divinity whom they themselves profess to venerate. For if one reflects on the construction of the tabernacle and looks at the vestments of the priest and the vessels which we use for the sacred ministry, he will discover that our lawgiver was a man of God and that these blasphemous charges brought against us by the rest of men are idle. In fact, every one of these objects is intended to recall and represent the universe, as he will find if he will but consent to examine them without prejudice and with understanding The high priest's tunic ... signifies the earth, being of linen, and its blue the arch of heaven, while it recalls the lightnings by its pomegranates, the thunder by the sound of its bells. His upper garment, too, denotes universal nature, which it pleased God to make of four elements; being further interwoven with gold in token, I imagine, of the all-pervading sunlight. The *essen*, again, he set in the midst of this garment, after the manner of the earth, which occupies the midmost place; and by the girdle wherewith he encompassed it he signified the ocean, which holds the whole in its embrace. Sun and moon are indicated by the two sardonyxes wherewith he pinned the high priest's robe. As for the twelve stones, whether one would prefer to read in them the months or the constellations of like number, which the Greeks call the circle of the zodiac, he will not mistake the lawgiver's intention. Furthermore, the headdress appears to me to symbolize heaven, being blue; else it would not have borne upon it the name of God, blazoned upon the crown—a crown, moreover, of gold by reason of that sheen in which the Deity most delights.⁹

9 Thackeray, *Josephus*, 4.403–407. In relation to Josephus' interpretation of the Temple imagery, Jon Levenson argues the following: "the affinity of Josephus' method of interpreting the Temple with Hellenistic allegory, Jewish and Gentile, and ultimately with Platonic philosophy, is unmistakable. This granted, however, it would be an error to see this allegory as the aberration of a Jew writing in Greek largely for the benefit of a mixed Hellenistic intelligentsia. For this sort of allegorical reading of the Tabernacle/Temple is also abundant in Rabbinic literature,

In this passage one finds at least three concepts of the sanctuary that are closely intertwined: first, the earthly shrine represented by the Jerusalem Temple; second, the macrocosmic Temple, whose sacred chambers corresponded to heaven, air/earth, and sea; and third, the microcosmic Temple embodied by the high priest and his sacerdotal garments. When compared to the biblical narratives, a distinctive feature of this description is Josephus' attempt to interpret the symbolism of the priestly garb not only through the prism of allusions to the earthly tabernacle or Temple, but also through their connections with cosmological realities. In this novel cosmological framework, each part of the priestly accouterment is linked not only to particular portions of the tripartite structure of the early sanctuary, but also with the respective sacred chambers of the Temple of Creation, which in Josephus' worldview correspond to heaven, air/earth, and sea.

These striking connections between elements of the priestly attire and parts of the earthly and cosmological sanctuaries have not gone unnoticed by scholars. Reflecting on these cultic correspondences, for instance, Gregory Beale says "it is, in fact, discernible that there are broadly three sections of the priest's garment that resemble the three sections of the temple."¹⁰ He further notes that, "given all this symbolism, one can easily understand the assertion in the *Letter of Aristeas* that anyone who saw the fully attired high priest 'would think he had come out of this world into another.'¹¹ Beale has drawn attention to the fact that these striking sacerdotal correspondences were not unique to Josephus, but rather hinted or openly attested in a broad range of the ancient Jewish sources, including the LXX, Philo,¹² and the Wisdom of Solomon, among others.¹³ Since the idea of the Temple of Creation is important for our investi-

written in Hebrew for a Jewish readership." Jon Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil. The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 96.

10 Gregory Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 39.

11 Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 39–40.

12 Philo, *Mos.* 11.117: "Such was the vesture of the high priest. But I must not leave untold its meaning and that of its parts. We have in it as a whole and in its parts a typical representation of the world and its particular parts." Francis Henry Colson and George Herbert Whitaker, eds., *Philo*, LCL. 10 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1929–1964), 5.505; *Spec.* 1.84: "The high priest is bidden to put on a similar dress when he enters the inner shrine to offer incense, because its fine linen is not, like wool, the product of creatures subject to death, and also to wear another, the formation of which is very complicated. In this it would seem to be a likeness and copy of the universe. This is clearly shewn by the design." Colson and Whitaker, *Philo*, 7.149.

13 Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 39.

gation of the high priest's sash in Josephus, a short excursus into the traditions of the cosmological temple is necessary.

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the idea of the cosmological temple, or the so-called Temple of Creation is attested in a variety of early Jewish and Christian sources.¹⁴ Such a macrocosmic sacred structure reflected the tripartite division of the earthly temple wherein heaven was conceived as the universal holy of holies, earth as the holy place, and the underworld (represented by the sea) as the courtyard. This concept of the cosmological temple, connecting creation and cult, is quite ancient, stemming from early Mesopotamian¹⁵ and Egyptian¹⁶ traditions. In early Jewish materials, this conceptual trend is often associated with a cluster of protological motifs in which the Garden of Eden functions as the celestial Holy of Holies¹⁷ where the first human minis-

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- 14 On this see Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: the History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991), 104–132; Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 29–79; Aldina A. de Silva, "A Comparison Between the Three-Levelled World of the Old Testament Temple Building Narratives and the Three-Levelled World of the House Building Motif in the Ugaritic Texts KTU 1.3 and 1.4," in George J. Brooke, Adrian H.W. Curtis, and John F. Healy, eds., *Ugarit and the Bible* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1994), 11–23; Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology*, WUNT 2.94 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 156–162; Richard Hayward, *The Jewish Temple: A Non-Biblical Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); Victor Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and North-West Semitic Writings* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 335–337; Craig Koester, *The Dwelling of God: the Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament*, CBQMS 22 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1989), 59–63; Jon Levenson, "The Temple and the World," *JR* 65 (1984): 283–298; idem, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985), 111–184; idem, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil. The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 87–88; Raphael Patai, *Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual* (2nd ed.; New York: KTAV, 1967), 54–139; John Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 148.
- 15 Bernd Janowski, "Der Tempel als Kosmos—Zur kosmologischen Bedeutung des Tempels in der Umwelt Israels," in Sibylle Meyer, ed., *Egypt—Temple of the Whole World—Ägypten—Tempel der Gesamten Welt. Studies in Honour of Jan Assmann* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 163–186 at 165–175. Jon Levenson notes that "the association of the Temple in Jerusalem with 'heaven and earth' is not without Near Eastern antecedents, nor is it limited in the Hebrew Bible to texts whose subject is creation. At Nippur and elsewhere in ancient Sumer, the temple held the name Duranki, 'bond of heaven and earth,' and we hear of a shrine in Babylon called Etemenanki, 'the house where the foundation of heaven and earth is.'" Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 90.
- 16 Janowski, "Der Tempel als Kosmos—Zur kosmologischen Bedeutung des Tempels in der Umwelt Israels," 175–184.
- 17 Cf. *Jub.* 8:19: "He knew that the Garden of Eden is the holy of holies and is the residence of the Lord." James VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, 2 vols. CSCO 510–511. Scriptores Aethiopicis 87–88 (Louvain: Peeters, 1989), 2.53. Regarding this tradition, Jacques van

tered as the high priest.¹⁸ Scholars have noted that a conception of the cosmological temple is already implicit in some biblical materials, including Ezekiel's formative depiction of the eschatological sanctuary which, paradoxically, juxtaposes cosmological and paradisaic imagery.¹⁹

As we have already learned in this study of Jewish lore, the chambers of the macrocosmic temple were respectively associated with heaven, earth, and sea.

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- Ruiten notes that in *Jubilees*, "[T]he Garden of Eden is seen as a Temple, or, more precisely as a part of the Temple: the room which is in the rear of the Temple, where the ark of the covenant of the Lord is placed, and which is often called 'Holy of Holies.'" Jacques van Ruiten, "Eden and the Temple: The Rewriting of Genesis 2:4–3:24 in the Book of Jubilees," in Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, ed., *Paradise Interpreted: Representations of Biblical Paradise in Judaism and Christianity*, TBN 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 76.
- 18 Understanding Eden as the temple presupposes the protoplast's role as a sacerdotal servant. Van Ruiten suggests that the author of *Jubilees* sees Adam acting as a prototypical priest who burns incense at the gate of the Garden of Eden. Van Ruiten draws a parallel between this description and a tradition found in Exodus: "[T]he incense is burned in front of the Holy of Holies. The burning of incense is a privilege given to the priests, namely the sons of Aaron." Van Ruiten also calls attention to another important detail related to the function of Adam as priest, namely, the covering of nakedness. He reminds us that covering one's nakedness is a condition for offering, since the priests are explicitly bidden to cover their nakedness. The author of *Jubilees* likewise lays emphasis on covering nakedness. Van Ruiten, "Eden and the Temple," 77–78. On sacerdotal Edenic traditions, see also James Davila, "The Hodayot Hymnist and the Four Who Entered Paradise," *RevQ* 17/65–68 (1996): 457–478; Florentino García Martínez, "Man and Woman: Halakhah Based upon Eden in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in Gerard Luttikhuisen, ed., *Paradise Interpreted: Representations of Biblical Paradise in Judaism and Christianity*, TBN 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 95–115 at 112–113; Ed Noort, "Gan-Eden in the Context of the Mythology of the Hebrew Bible," in Gerard Luttikhuisen, ed., *Paradise Interpreted: Representations of Biblical Paradise in Judaism and Christianity*, TBN 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 25; Donald Parry, "Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary," in Donald W. Parry, ed., *Temples of the Ancient World: Ritual and Symbolism* (Provo: Deseret, 1994), 126–151; Jacques van Ruiten, "Visions of the Temple in the Book of Jubilees," in Beato Ego et al., eds., *Gemeinde ohne Tempel/Community without Temple: Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum*, WUNT 118 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 215–228; Gordon Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Division A: The Period of the Bible* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 19–25 at 21–22; Michael Wise, "4QFlorilegium and the Temple of Adam," *RevQ* 15 (1991): 103–132.
- 19 Beale notes that "Ezekiel 32 explicitly calls Eden the first sanctuary, which substantiates that Eden is described as a temple because it is the first temple, albeit a 'garden-temple.'" Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 80. Some scholars argue that Solomon's temple was an intentional replication of the Garden of Eden, especially in its arboreal likeness. For this see Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 72; Lawrence Stager, "Jerusalem and the Garden of Eden," in *Festschrift for F.M. Cross*. Eretz Israel 26. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1999), 183–193; idem, "Jerusalem as Eden," *BAR* 26 (2000): 36–34.

An early kabbalistic tradition that circulated in the name of Rabbi Pinhas ben Ya'ir states that "the Tabernacle was made to correspond to the creation of the world The house of the Holy of Holies was made to correspond to the highest heaven. The outer Holy House was made to correspond to the earth. And the courtyard was made to correspond to the sea."²⁰ This arcane cosmological speculation is not a late invention, but rather a tradition with ancient roots. Thus, in *Ant.* 3.121–123, Josephus suggests that the tripartite division of the earthly sanctuary was a reflection of the tripartite structure of the entire creation,²¹ with its sacred chambers corresponding to heaven, earth, and sea:

Internally, dividing its length into three portions, at a measured distance of ten cubits from the farther end he set up four pillars, constructed like the rest and resting upon similar sockets, but placed slightly apart. The area within these pillars was the sanctuary; the rest of the tabernacle was open to the priests. Now this partitionment of the tabernacle was withal an imitation of universal nature; for the third part of it, that within the four pillars, which was inaccessible to the priests, was *like heaven* devoted to God, while the twenty cubits' space, even *as earth and sea* are accessible to men, was in like manner assigned to the priests alone.²²

Likewise, *Ant.* 3.180–181 affirms a similar tradition:

For if one reflects on the construction of the tabernacle and looks at the vestments of the priest and the vessels which we use for the sacred ministry, he will discover that our lawgiver was a man of God and that these blasphemous charges brought against us by the rest of men are idle. In fact, every one of these objects is intended to recall and represent the universe, as he will find if he will but consent to examine them without prejudice and with understanding. Thus, to take the tabernacle, thirty cubits long, by dividing this into three parts and giving up two of them to the priests, as a place approachable and open to all, Moses signifies *the earth and the sea*, since these too are accessible to all; but the third portion he reserved for God alone, because *heaven* also is inaccessible to men.²³

²⁰ Patai, *Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual*, 108–109.

²¹ Regarding the tripartite structure of the entire creation in the Jewish tradition, see Luis Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World—A Philological and Literary Study* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1970), 9.

²² Thackeray, *Josephus*, 4.373–375.

²³ Thackeray, *Josephus*, 4.403.

The idea that cult and creation correspond is also found in another prominent Jewish interpreter, Philo, who says that the holy temple of God represents the whole universe in his *Spec.* 1.66.²⁴ This belief that the earthly temple is a replica of the entire creation is rooted in biblical texts: the creation of the world in Gen 1–2 is set in conspicuous parallel with the building of the tabernacle in Exod 39–40.²⁵ According to Moshe Weinfeld, “Gen 1:1–2:3 and Ex 39:1–40:33 are typologically identical. Both describe the satisfactory completion of the enterprise commanded by God, its inspection and approval, the blessing and the sanctification which are connected with it. Most importantly, the expression of these ideas in both accounts overlaps.”²⁶ In view of these parallels, many

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- 24 *Spec.* 1.66 reads: “The highest, and in the truest sense the holy, temple of God is, as we must believe, the whole universe, having for its sanctuary the most sacred part of all existence, even heaven” Colson and Whitaker, *Philo*, 7.137. *Zohar* 11.149a conveys a similar tradition: “Said R. Isaac: ‘We are aware that the structure of the Tabernacle corresponds to the structure of heaven and earth.’” Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, eds., *The Zohar*. 5 vols. (London and New York: Soncino, 1933), 4.22. Cf. also *Zohar* 11.231a: “Now, the Tabernacle below was likewise made after the pattern of the supernal Tabernacle in all its details. For the Tabernacle in all its works embraced all the works and achievements of the upper world and the lower, whereby the Shekinah was made to abide in the world, both in the higher spheres and the lower. Similarly, the Lower Paradise is made after the pattern of the Upper Paradise, and the latter contains all the varieties of forms and images to be found in the former. Hence the work of the Tabernacle, and that of heaven and earth, come under one and the same mystery.” Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, 4.289; *Zohar* 11.235b: “Now, the lower and earthly Tabernacle was the counterpart of the upper Tabernacle, whilst the latter in its turn is the counterpart of a higher Tabernacle, the most high of all. All of them, however, are implied within each other and form one complete whole, as it says: ‘that the tabernacle may be one whole.’ The Tabernacle was erected by Moses, he alone being allowed to raise it up, as only a husband may raise up his wife. With the erection of the lower Tabernacle there was erected another Tabernacle on high. This is indicated in the words ‘the tabernacle was reared up (*hukam*),’ reared up, that is, by the hand of no man, but as out of the supernal undisclosed mystery in response to the mystical force indwelling in Moses that it might be perfected with him.” Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, 4.303.
- 25 Levenson notes that “collectively, the function of these correspondences is to underscore the depiction of the sanctuary as a world, that is, an ordered, supportive, and obedient environment, and the depiction of the world as a sanctuary, that is, a place in which the reign of God is visible and unchallenged, and his holiness is palpable, unthreatened, and pervasive. Our examination of the two sets of Priestly texts, one at the beginning of Genesis and the other at the end of Exodus, has developed powerful evidence that, as in many cultures, the Temple was conceived as a microcosm, a miniature world.” Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 86.
- 26 Moshe Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord—The Problem of the Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1:1–2:3,” in André Caquot and Mathias Delcor, eds., *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l’honneur de M. Henri Cazelles*, AOAT 212 (Kevelaer: Butzer & Bercker, 1981), 501–12.503. See Samuel Balentine, *The Torah’s Vision of Worship* (Minneapolis-

scholars suggest that the earthly sanctuary is envisioned as a microcosm of the world, imitating the sacerdotal structure of the entire creation.²⁷

2 The Sea as the Cosmological Courtyard

Especially important for this study is that the tripartite structure of the cosmological temple includes the sea, which corresponds in these traditions to the courtyard of the Temple of Creation. *Numbers Rabbah* 13.19 mentions the court encompassing the sanctuary just as the sea surrounds the world.²⁸ Likewise, *B. Sukkah* 51b tells how the white and blue marble of the temple walls were reminiscent of the waves of the sea.²⁹ The association between the sacred chamber and the sea may also be suggested by the symbolism of the bronze tank in the courtyard of Israel's temple, designated in some texts as the "molten sea."³⁰ It

lis: Fortress Press, 1999), 67–68; Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 60–61; Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Structure of P," *CBQ* 38 (1976): 283–286; Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken, 1979), 12; Victor Hurowitz, "The Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle," *JAOS* 105 (1985): 21–30; Peter Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25–40," *ZAW* 89.3 (1977): 375–387 at 375; Jon Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 143; idem, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 85–86; Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus*, *FAT* 25 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 54–58; Walton, *Genesis*, 149; Peter Weimar, "Sinai und Schöpfung: Komposition und Theologie der priesterschriftlichen Sinaigeschichte," *RB* 95 (1988): 337–385; Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," 19–25.

27 Jon Levenson suggests that "World building and Temple building seem to be homologous activities. In fact, some of the same language can be found in the description of 'the establishment of the sanctuary in the land and the distribution of the land among the tribes' in Joshua 18–19." Jon Levenson, "The Jerusalem Temple in Devotional and Visionary Experience," in Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality. Vol. 1: From the Bible through the Middle Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 32–61 at 52.

28 "... His offering was one silver dish, etc. The dish was in allusion to the court which encompassed the Tabernacle as the sea encompasses the world." Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 6.546. Concerning a similar tradition in *Midrash Tadshe*, see George MacRae, *Some Elements of Jewish Apocalyptic and Mystical Tradition and Their Relation to Gnostic Literature*. 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss.; University of Cambridge, 1966), 55.

29 "... The reference is to the building of Herod. Of what did he build it?—Rabbah replied, Of yellow and white marble. Some there are who say, with yellow, blue and white marble. The building rose in tiers in order to provide a hold for the plaster. He intended at first to overlay it with gold, but the Rabbis told him, Leave it alone for it is more beautiful as it is, since it has the appearance of the waves of the sea." Isidor Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino, 1935–1952), *Sukkah*, 51b.

30 1 Kgs 7:23–25 reads: "Then he made the molten sea; it was round, ten cubits from brim to

has been thought that “the great size of the tank ... in conjunction with the fact that no practical application is offered for the ‘sea’ during the time of Solomon, supports the supposition that the tank served a symbolic purpose.³¹ Either the ‘cosmic waters,’ or the ‘waters of life,’ which emanated from below the garden of Eden, or the ‘great deep’ of chaos is most often cited as the underlying symbolism of the molten sea.”³²

The depiction of the eschatological temple in the Book of Ezekiel also contains similar imagery insofar as it connects the sacred courtyard to living water. Viktor Hurowitz highlights the significance of this: “Ezekiel’s temple of the future has a river flowing from under the threshold (Ezek 47:1) ... The river envisioned by Ezekiel seems to replace the basins in Solomon’s temple—basins that may have symbolized the rivers of a divine garden.”³³ Ezek 47:1–8 offers the following description of the sacred waters:

Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. Then he brought

brim, and five cubits high, and a line of thirty cubits measured its circumference. Under its brim were gourds, for thirty cubits, compassing the sea round about; the gourds were in two rows, cast with it when it was cast. It stood upon twelve oxen, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south, and three facing east; the sea was set upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward.” (NRSV). See also 2 Kgs 16:17; 2 Kgs 25:13; 1 Chr 18:8; 2 Chr 4:2; Jer 52:17.

- 31 Elizabeth Bloch-Smith observes that “the exaggerated size of the structures of the Solomonic Temple courtyard would suggest that they were not intended for human use, but belonged to the realm of the divine.” Elizabeth Bloch-Smith “‘Who is the King of Glory?’ Solomon’s Temple and Its Symbolism,” in Michael David Coogan et al., eds., *Scripture and Other Artifacts. Essays on the Bible and Archeology in Honor of Philip J. King* (Louisville: Westminster, 1994), 19–31 at 21.
- 32 Bloch-Smith “‘Who is the King of Glory?’ Solomon’s Temple and Its Symbolism,” 20. See also Carol Meyers, “Sea, Molten,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:1061–1062.
- 33 Victor Hurowitz, “Inside Solomon’s Temple,” *Bible Review* 10.2 (1994): 24–36. Jon Levenson also draws attention to the creational symbolism of the molten sea by arguing that “the metal ‘Sea’ (*yam*) in its courtyard (1Kgs 7:23–26) suggests the Mesopotamian *apsu*, employed both as the name of the subterranean fresh-water ocean ... and as the name of a basin of holy water erected in the Temple. As the god of the subterranean freshwater ocean, *apsu* played an important role in some Mesopotamian cosmogonies, just as the Sea (*yam*) did in some Israelite creation stories (e.g., Ps 74:12–17; Isa 51:9–11). This suggests that the metal Sea in the Temple courtyard served as a continual testimony to the act of creation.” Levenson, “The Jerusalem Temple in Devotional and Visionary Experience,” 51.

me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and the water was coming out on the south side. Going on eastward with a cord in his hand, the man measured one thousand cubits, and then led me through the water; and it was ankle-deep. Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was knee-deep. Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was up to the waist. Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed. He said to me, "Mortal, have you seen this?" Then he led me back along the bank of the river. As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on the one side and on the other. He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh."

NRSV

The flowing rivers of this passage echo another account of the cosmological temple found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* in which the sea is depicted alongside rivers and their circles.³⁴ Like the great prophetic account, the *Apocalypse* is familiar with the paradisaic provenance of the sacred waters, connecting the Edenic tree to "the spring, the river flowing from it." In both passages, the waters of Paradise are portrayed as "flowing."³⁵ The origin of the paradisaic imagery of the circulating waters appears already in Gen 2:10,³⁶ where a river flows from Eden to water the garden.³⁷ In Ezekiel, however, the image of flowing Edenic waters receives a further cultic meaning. Yet, such an emphasis is not unique to Ezekiel. Gregory Beale points out³⁸ that similar sacerdotal imagery involving "rivers" can be found in the description of Israel's Temple

34 On the Temple of Creation in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* see Andrei A. Orlov, "The Cosmological Temple in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*," in idem, *Divine Scapegoats: Demonic Mimesis in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY, 2016), 37–54.

35 *Apoc. Ab.* 21:5; "I saw there the rivers and their overflows, and their circles;" Ezek 47:1: "water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple."

36 Regarding this biblical passage, Wenham observes that "the brief account of the geography of the garden in 2:10–14 also makes many links with later sanctuary design. 'A river flows out of Eden to water the garden.' ... Ps 46:5 speaks of 'a river whose streams make glad the city of God' and Ezekiel 47 describes a great river flowing out of the new Jerusalem temple to sweeten the Dead Sea." Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," 22.

37 "A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches." (NRSV). Regarding the rivers of paradise, see also 2 *En.* 8, 1QH 14 and 16.

38 Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 72.

in Psalm 36:8–9.³⁹ Scholars have additionally discerned⁴⁰ a similar sacerdotal motif of sacred waters associated with the temple settings in various Jewish extra-biblical accounts, including the *Let. Aris.* 89–91⁴¹ and *Jos. Asen.* 2.⁴² Christian sources also display acquaintance with the sacerdotal tradition of flowing waters. Rev 22:1–2, for example, portrays a river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God.⁴³

All these testimonies demonstrate that in early biblical and extra-biblical Jewish accounts, rivers, seas, and oceans have often received a cosmological significance being envisioned as a watery courtyard of the Temple of Creation which encompasses other, more sacred chambers of the cosmological sanctuary. It is in light of these traditions that the passage from *Ant.* 3.185, in which the high priest's girdle encompassed the priest as "the ocean, which holds the whole in its embrace,"⁴⁴ should be understood. Earlier we had noted how various parts of the high priest's accoutrement symbolically corresponded to various chambers in both the earthly and cosmological temples. The middle part of his multilayered attire, composed of several garments and undergarments, represented the Holy Place; this, in turn symbolized in cosmological lan-

39 "They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light." (NRSV).

40 Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 74.

41 "There is an uninterrupted supply not only of water, just as if there were a plentiful spring rising naturally from within, but also of indescribably wonderful underground reservoirs, which within a radius of five stades from the foundation of the Temple revealed innumerable channels for each of them, the streams joining together on each side. All these were covered with lead down to the foundation of the wall; on top of them a thick layer of pitch, all done very effectively. There were many mouths at the base, which were completely invisible except for those responsible for the ministry, so that the large amounts of blood which collected from the sacrifices were all cleansed by the downward pressure and momentum. Being personally convinced, I will describe the building plan of the reservoirs just as I understood it. They conducted me more than four stades outside the city, and told me to bend down at a certain spot and listen to the noise at the meeting of the waters. The result was that the size of the conduits became clear to me, as has been demonstrated." Robert Shutt, "Letter of Aristes," in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols (New York: Doubleday, 1983–1985), 2.7–34 at 18–19.

42 An image of overflowing water surrounding the Temple courtyard is found also in *Jos. Asen.* 2:17–20: "And there was in the court, on the right hand, a spring of abundant living water" Scholars have noted that "detailed description of [Aseneth's] garden clearly echoes Ezekiel's account of what he saw in his celebrated temple-vision (Ezek. 40–48)." Gideon Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1996), 68.

43 "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city." (NRSV).

44 Thackeray, *Josephus, Jewish Antiquities*, 4.405.

guage of the Temple of Creation as the “earth.” Here we should recall Josephus’ description of the priestly vestments:

The high priest’s tunic ... signifies the earth, being of linen, and its blue the arch of heaven, while it recalls the lightnings by its pomegranates, the thunder by the sound of its bells The *essen*, again, he set in the midst of this garment, after the manner of the earth, which occupies the mid-most place; and by the girdle wherewith he encompassed it he signified the ocean, which holds the whole in its embrace.⁴⁵

Akin to the earthly and cosmological sanctuaries, where the watery courtyards (represented respectively by the molten sea or the actual sea) surrounded the Holy Place (represented in the Temple of Creation by earth), in Josephus’ description, the belt-ocean encompasses the part of the high priest’s attire designated as the “earth.” How, though, does the Leviathan imagery fit into this set of sacerdotal traditions?

3 Leviathan as the *Circuitus Mundi*

As we noted at the beginning of this study, scholars are aware of the peculiar parallelism in which Josephus associated the priestly sash first with serpentine imagery and then with the ocean. This juxtaposition led scholars to believe that the serpent is in fact the sea monster—the Leviathan.⁴⁶ Both entities are said to encompass the part of the high priest’s accoutrement which, in Josephus’ description, was associated with the earth. Our study already demonstrated that the ocean, symbolized by the sash, encompasses here the microcosmic temple embodied by the high priest’s figure. But could the Leviathan imagery also be part of this sacerdotal symbolic framework? In this respect it is important that in Jewish lore not only the sea or ocean, but also its enigmatic inhabitant, Leviathan himself, was envisioned as the sacred courtyard that encompasses the Temple of Creation. In these traditions, the Leviathan is depicted as the one who encompasses the earth, acting as “*Circuitus Mundi*.”⁴⁷

William Whitney’s exhaustive research on the Leviathan legends demonstrates that in later Jewish materials, this idea is most clearly represented by

45 Ibid.

46 Fletcher-Louis, “The High Priest as Divine Mediator,” 698.

47 William Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism*, HSM 63 (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 118.

Rashbam in his commentary on *b. Bava Batra* 74b. In his interpretation of the famous talmudic passage dealing with the monsters, Rashbam reveals knowledge of a tradition about a female Leviathan who surrounds the earth.⁴⁸ Whitney draws attention to another specimen of this motif, found in *Midrash 'Aseret Had-dibberot* (ca. tenth century CE), which transmits the following portrayal of the Leviathan:

The Holy One (Blessed be He) wished to create the world. Immediately its length was a journey of five hundred years and its breadth a journey of five hundred years. And the great sea surrounded the whole world like an arch of a great pillar. And the whole world was encircled by the fins of Leviathan, who dwells in the lower waters. In them he was like a little fish in the sea.⁴⁹

The presence of this idea in relatively late Jewish materials does not necessarily mean that the tradition of the Leviathan as the *Circuitus Mundi* represents merely a rabbinic invention. Whitney notes that “the image of a serpent which encircles the cosmos, the *ouroboros* (tail-devourer), so named because it is usually represented with its tail in its mouth, is an ancient iconographic motif in the Mediterranean world occurring frequently in magical amulets and certain texts of the Greco-Roman period.”⁵⁰

Alexander Kulik's research on the Leviathan tradition in *3 Baruch* demonstrates that the idea of the primordial reptile as the *Circuitus Mundi* has ancient roots.⁵¹ A passage from Philo of Byblos' work *On Snakes*, preserved in Eusebius's *Pr. Ev.* 1.10.45–53, contains such a concept:

Moreover the Egyptians, describing the world from the same idea, engrave the circumference of a circle of the color of the sky and of fire, and a hawk-shaped serpent stretched across the middle of it, and the whole shape like our Theta, representing the circle as the world, and signifying by the serpent which connects it in the middle the good daemon.⁵²

48 Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 118.

49 Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 117; *BHM* 1:63.

50 Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 119. Whitney points out that an early example of the *ouroboros* motif appears in a silver Phoenician bowl found in an Etruscan warrior burial of ca. ninth-eighth century BCE at Praeneste in Italy. Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 119.

51 Alexander Kulik, “The Mysteries of Behemoth and Leviathan and the Celestial Bestiary of *3 Baruch*,” *Le Muséon* 122 (2009): 291–329 at 299.

52 Edwin Hamilton Gifford, ed., *Eusebius, Praeparatio Evangelica (Preparation for the Gospel)*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903; repr.: 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 1.43.

Pistis Sophia 3.126 also attests to this motif of the cosmic serpent that encompass the entire world: “The outer darkness is a great dragon whose tail is in its mouth, and it is outside the whole world and it surrounds the whole world.”⁵³

Kulik identifies yet another reference to a cosmic reptile who encompasses the world and is associated with the ocean, found in the *Acts of Thomas* 32:⁵⁴

The snake says to him: I am a reptile, the son of reptile, and harmer, the son of harmer: I am the son of him, to whom power was given over (all) creatures, and he troubled them. I am the son of him, who makes himself like to God to those who obey him, that they may do his will. I am the son of him, who is ruler over everything that is created under heaven. I am the son of him, who is outside of the ocean, and whose mouth is closed.⁵⁵

A crucial early testimony to the Leviathan as the *Circuitus Mundi* is found in Origen’s work, *Contra Celsum* VI.25:

It contained a drawing of ten circles, which were separated from one another and *held together by a single circle, which was said to be the soul of the universe and was called Leviathan*. The Jewish scriptures, with a hidden meaning in mind, said that this Leviathan was formed by God as a plaything. For in the Psalms we find: “Thou hast made all things in wisdom; the earth is filled with thy creation. This is the sea great and wide; there go the ships, small animals and great, this serpent which thou didst form to play with him.” Instead of the word “serpent” the Hebrew text read “Leviathan.” The impious diagram said that the Leviathan, which was clearly so objectionable to the prophet, is the soul that has permeated the universe. We also found that Behemoth is mentioned in it as if it were some being fixed below the lowest circle. The inventor of this horrible diagram depicted Leviathan upon the circumference of the circle and at its centre, putting in the name twice.⁵⁶

53 Carl Schmidt and Violet MacDermot, eds., *Pistis Sophia*, NHS 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 317.

54 Kulik, “The Mysteries of Behemoth and Leviathan,” 299.

55 Albertus Frederik Johannes Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction, Text, and Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 92–93.

56 Henry Chadwick, *Origen, Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 340.

Whitney's research underscores the complexity of the Leviathan imagery in this presentation of the Ophite diagram. In his judgment, the "circled" serpent (*ouroboros*) is portrayed as surrounding another "axial" serpent.⁵⁷

Finally, the most important passage suggesting the Leviathan's role as *Cir-cuitus Mundi* can be found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, a text usually dated to the second century C.E.⁵⁸ In this text Abraham is given a vision of the lower regions of creation where he is able to behold the domain of the Leviathan. *Апoc. Аб.* 21:1–5 reads:

And he said to me, "Look now beneath your feet at the expanse and contemplate the creation which was previously covered over. On this level there is the creation and those who inhabit it and the age that has been prepared to follow it." And I looked beneath the expanse at my feet and I saw the likeness of heaven and what was therein. 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 islands, 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. I saw there the rivers and their overflows, and their circles (круги ихъ).⁵⁹

Two details of this description are important for our study. First is the association of the Leviathan's domain with the water symbolism, including the sea

57 Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 122.

58 On the date of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, see George Herbert Box and Joseph Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham. Edited, with a Translation from the Slavonic Text and Notes*, TED 1.10 (London, New York: Macmillan, 1918), xv–xix; Belkis Philonenko-Sayar and Marc Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes*, Semitica 31 (Paris: Librairie Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1981), 34–35; Ryszard Rubinkiewicz and Horace Lunt, "Apocalypse of Abraham," in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1983–1985), 1.681–705 at 683; Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham en vieux slave. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et commentaire*, ŻM 129 (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1987), 70–73; Alexander Kulik, "К датировке 'Откровения Авраама,'" in N.M. Botvinnik and Je. I. Vaneeva, eds., *In Memoriam of Ja. S. Lur'e* (St. Petersburg: Fenix, 1997), 189–195; idem, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham*, TCS 3 (Atlanta: Scholars, 2004), 2–3.

59 Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 26; Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham*, 82–84.

and the rivers. Connecting the Leviathan to the rivers will become a prominent motif in later Jewish mysticism.⁶⁰ The second feature is the reference to the rivers' *circles* (Slav. круги),⁶¹ Such a reference might indicate the monster's role as the *Circuitus Mundi* in view of his association with these watery streams.

4 The High Priest as the Eschatological Adam

It is interesting that Josephus describes the high priest's sash as being somewhat different from the belts of ordinary priests, since it had a mixture of gold interwoven into it. In *Ant.* 3.159 he says:

The high priest is arrayed in like manner, omitting none of the things already mentioned, but over and above these he puts on a tunic of blue material. This too reaches to the feet, and is called in our tongue *meeir*; it is girt about him with a sash decked with the same gay hues as adorned the first, *with gold* (χρυσῶν) *interwoven into its texture*.⁶²

This description represents a departure from the biblical patterns, where the sash is not associated with gold.⁶³ However, the golden sash appears in the portrayal of Christ in Rev 1:13,⁶⁴ where some argue he is being depicted as the heavenly high priest.⁶⁵

If for Josephus the sash is associated with the symbolism of the protological monster, the golden nature of this priestly item brings to mind some Jewish traditions about the luminosity of the Leviathan's skin. *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana*, for example, describes the Leviathan's skin with the symbolism of shining gold that surpasses the splendor of the sun:

60 See, for example, *Zohar* 1.52a.

61 Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham*, 84.

62 Thackeray, *Josephus. Jewish Antiquities*, 4.390–391.

63 Ex 39:29: “and the sash of fine twisted linen, and of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, embroidered with needlework; as the Lord had commanded Moses.”

64 Rev 1:13: “and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash (ζώνην χρυσᾶν) across his chest.”

65 See Ross Winkle, “You Are What You Wear: The Dress and Identity of Jesus as High Priest in John's Apocalypse,” in Henrietta L. Wiley and Christian A. Eberhart, eds., *Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement in Early Judaism and Christianity: Constituents and Critique* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 344–345.

Lest you suppose that the skin of the Leviathan is not something extraordinary, consider what R. Phinehas the Priest ben Hama and R. Jeremiah citing R. Samuel bar R. Isaac said of it: The reflection of the Leviathan's fins makes the disk of the sun dim by comparison, so that it is said of each of the fins "It telleth the sun that it shines weakly" (Job 9:7). For *The [Leviathan's] underparts, the reflections thereof, [surpass] the sun: where it lieth upon the mire, there is a shining of yellow gold* (Job 41:22). It is said, moreover, that the words *Where it lieth upon the mire, there is a shining of yellow gold* (*harus*) mean [not only that the Leviathan's underparts shine, but] that the very place it lies upon is *harus*—that is, golden. Hence *Where it lieth upon the mire, there is a shining of yellow gold*. Still further it is said: Ordinarily, there is no place more filthy than the one where a fish lies. But the place where the Leviathan lies is purer even than yellow gold. Hence *Where it lieth upon the mire, there is a shining of yellow gold* (Job 41:22).⁶⁶

This depiction of the Leviathan's skin with the imagery of "shining of yellow gold" is important for our study, since the high priest's sash in Josephus and Rev 1 is also described with gold symbolism.

Furthermore, *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* speaks more specifically about the "glory" of the Leviathan:

On account of its glory, he [God] brings forth his defenders. (Job 41:7). Because he possesses a celestial glory, the Holy One (Blessed be He) says to the ministering angels, "Go down and wage war with it."⁶⁷

Reflecting on this striking narrative about the glory of the primordial reptile, Irving Jacobs notes that

the imagery and language employed in the opening lines of this passage require further evaluation, particularly the phrase "celestial glory." This

66 William Braude and Israel Kapstein, eds., *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana. R. Kahana's Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festal Days* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975), 467.

67 While Irving and Whitney render this passage with the formulae of "glory," Braude and Kapstein prefer use the term "pride" by rendering the passage in the following way: "The rows of his shields are his pride (Job 41:7). The Leviathan has the pride which is proper only to Him who is on high, and so the Holy One says to the ministering angels: Go down and wage war against him." Braude and Kapstein, *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, 468.

unusual formulation occurs, apparently, only in the above context, from which it is difficult to determine its precise significance. We may assume, however, that our unknown aggadist is alluding to an ancient tradition—possibly biblical in origin—that Leviathan is endowed with a supernatural splendour. According to an early tannaitic source, Leviathan's eyes are great orbs of light illuminating the depths of the sea. *Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana*, from which the quotation is taken, also records the tradition that Leviathan's fins alone could dim the light of the sun with their brilliance. In this respect, the splendour of Leviathan is comparable with that of the primordial light, which, according to rabbinic tradition, emanated from the mantle donned by God at the time of creation. Thus Leviathan radiates a heavenly splendour.⁶⁸

68 Irving Jacobs, *The Midrashic Process: Tradition and Interpretation in Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 160–162. Jacobs traces this attribute of glory to some Mesopotamian traditions, noting that the “interpretation of this obscure phrase is supported by a much older source, which may preserve the prototype for the awesome, luminous monster of Jewish tradition. The Babylonian creation epic contains a description of the dreadful dragons provided for Tiamat's army by Mother Hubur. These monsters are garbed with a *pulhu*, the awesome, fiery garment of the gods, and are crowned with a *melammu*, a dazzling, divine aureole, so that when they rear up—like Leviathan—none can withstand them.” Jacobs, *The Midrashic Process*, 162. Cf. *Enuma Elish* 1, lines 136–139; 11, lines 23–26; 111, lines 27–30, also lines 85–88 (J.B. Pritchard, *ANET*, pp. 62): “Roaring dragons she has clothed with terror, Has crowned them with haloes, making them like gods, So that he who beholds them shall perish abjectly, (And) that, with their bodies reared up, none might turn them back.” Jacobs, *The Midrashic Process*, 160–162. In a recent study, Shawn Zelig Aster defines *melammu* as “a quality of overwhelming and overpowering strength, and it can be defined as ‘the covering, outer layer, or outward appearance of a person, being, or object, or rays emanating from a person or being, that demonstrate the irresistible or supreme power of that person, being, or object.’ A god who possesses *melammu* is sovereign, a person who possesses *melammu* is unbeatable, and a force which possesses *melammu* cannot successfully be stopped. In second-millennium mythic texts the *melammu* is portrayed as a cloak or covering, which is often radiant. But many texts ascribe *melammu* to objects that are not radiant, and radiance is not an intrinsic element of *melammu* in most periods. Beginning in the Sargonic period (late eight century BCE), *melammu* can be used as a synonym for terms meaning ‘radiance,’ but it can also be used in its more traditional meaning. When used with this traditional meaning (the standard definition of which is given above), *melammu* does not necessarily indicate a radiant phenomenon.” Shawn Zelig Aster, *The Phenomenon of Divine and Human Radiance in the Hebrew Bible and in Northwest Semitic and Mesopotamian Literature: A Philological and Comparative Study* (Ph.D. diss.; University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 512–513. On the terminology of *melammu* and its application to the monsters and other antagonists, see Leo Oppenheim, “Akkadian *pul(u)h(t)u* and *melammu*,” *JAOS* 63 (1943): 31–34; Elena Cassin, *La splendeur divine: Introduction à l'étude de la mentalité mésopotamienne*, Civilisations

The legends about the glory of the Leviathan in rabbinic literature are not confined solely to these excerpts from *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana*, but also can be found in the talmudic passages. *B. Baba Batra* 74a, when describing the Leviathan's skin, also portrays it as a luminous entity: "The Holy One, blessed be He, will in time to come make a tabernacle for the righteous from the skin of Leviathan ... The rest [of Leviathan] will be spread by the Holy One, blessed be He, upon the walls of Jerusalem, and *its splendour will shine* from one end of the world to the other; as it is said: And nations shall walk at thy light, and kings at the brightness of thy rising."⁶⁹ A reference to the Leviathan's "glory" also appears in Qalliri's description of this primordial reptile: "Great fish dance about beneath him. Angels sing above him. They proclaim his splendor and his glory."⁷⁰ Scholars often equate "Leviathan's glory to the celestial splendor of the *pulhu*, the divine garment, and the *melammu*, the divine aureole, in which the dragons of Tiamat's army are garbed in *Enuma Elish*."⁷¹

One interesting detail which emerges from the aforementioned testimonies about the Leviathan's glory is the comparison of its radiance to the sun. Recall that *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* informs us how "the reflection of the Leviathan's fins makes the disk of the sun dim by comparison." Irving Jacobs noted that the same association is frequently present in rabbinic descriptions of Adam's glory.⁷² Indeed, from *b. Baba Batra* 58a we learn that "his [Adam's] two heels ... were like two orbs of the sun." Midrashim are also familiar with such comparisons. According to *Leviticus Rabbah* 20.2, "the apple of Adam's heel outshone the globe of the sun; how much more so the brightness of his face!"⁷³ Something similar is found in *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 8:1: "the ball of Adam's heel outshone the sun ... so was it not right that the ball of his heel should outshine the sun, and how much more so the beauty of his face!"⁷⁴

et Sociétés 8 (Paris and La Haye: Mouton, 1968); Shawn Zelig Aster, *The Phenomenon of Divine and Human Radiance*, 80–82; idem, *The Unbeatable Light: Melammu and Its Biblical Parallels*, AOAT 384 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012).

69 Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Baba Bathra*, 75a.

70 Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 134–135.

71 Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 137. *Enuma Elish* (ANET, 62–65) 1. 136–139; 2.23–26; 3.27–30, 85–88.

72 Irving, *The Midrashic Process*, 162.

73 Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah*, 10 vols. (London: Soncino, 1961), 4.252.

74 Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 8.213–214. See also *Zohar* 1.142b: "Said R. Jose: 'Can it really be so, that Jacob's beauty equaled that of Adam, seeing that, according to tradition, the fleshy part of Adam's heel outshone the orb of the sun? Would you, then, say the same of Jacob?'" Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, 2.57.

Such a juxtaposition of the motifs of the luminosity of the Leviathan and the protoplast is relevant for our study of the high priest's sash. In Jewish sacerdotal traditions, the high priest was often envisioned as the eschatological Adam who restores the cultic role of the protoplast, he who once was the high priest of the Garden of Eden. Interestingly, some Jewish traditions suggest the garments of the high priest were literally the protoplast's garments transmitted through successive generations until they reached Aaron.⁷⁵

The link between the high priestly attire and Adam's clothes is significant for our study of the cultic servant wearing the Leviathan's luminous skin, since it echoes some Jewish traditions in which the first humans were portrayed as God's creatures endowed with the glorious garments of demoted antagonists.⁷⁶ The transference of the glory of the demoted antagonist can be found, for example, in the *Primary Adam Books*, where Satan's lament about his lost glory is juxtaposed with the traditions about the glorious garments of the first humans. Of even greater importance for our study, however, is that some of these narratives convey how God made the luminous garments for his beloved protoplasts from the skin of the serpent. This is depicted, for instance, in the

75 *Numbers Rabbah* 4.8: "... Adam was the world's firstborn. When he offered his sacrifice, as it says: And it pleased the Lord better than a bullock that hath horns and hoofs (Ps. LXIX, 32)—he donned high priestly garments; as it says: And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and clothed them (Gen. III, 21). They were robes of honor which subsequent firstborn used. When Adam died he transmitted them to Seth. Seth transmitted them to Methusaleh. When Methusaleh died he transmitted them to Noah." Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 5.101. A similar tradition is also found in *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 24: "Rabbi Jehudah said: The coats which the Holy One, blessed be He, made for Adam and his wife, were with Noah in the ark." Gerald Friedlander, ed., *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (London: Bloch, 1916), 175.

76 For discussions about the luminous garments of the protoplasts, see David Aaron, "Shedding Light on God's Body in Rabbinic Midrashim: Reflections on the Theory of a Luminous Adam," *HTR* 90 (1997): 299–314; Sebastian Brock, "Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition," in Margot Schmidt, ed., *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, EB 4 (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1982), 11–40; April D. DeConick and Jarl Fossum, "Stripped before God: A New Interpretation of Logion 37 in the Gospel of Thomas," *VC* 45 (1991): 123–150 at 141; Nils Alstrup Dahl and David Hellholm, "Garment-Metaphors: The Old and the New Human Being," in Adela Yarbro Collins and Margaret M. Mitchell, eds., *Antiquity and Humanity: Essays on Ancient Religion and Philosophy: Presented to Hans Dieter Betz on his 70th Birthday* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 139–158; Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *HTR* 87 (1994): 171–195; Benjamin Marmorstein, "Adam, ein Beitrag zur Messiaslehre," *WZKM* 35 (1928): 242–275 at 255; Nissan Rubin and Admiel Kosman, "The Clothing of the Primordial Adam as a Symbol of Apocalyptic Time in the Midrashic Sources," *HTR* 90 (1997): 155–174; Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Garments of Shame," *HTR* 5 (1965/1966): 217–238.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Gen 3:21, a passage which treats the etiology of the first humans' glorious attire. According to this text, the original humans were endowed with luminous garments that had been stripped from the serpent:

And the Lord God made garments of glory for Adam and for his wife from the skin which the serpent had cast off (to be worn) on the skin of their (garments of) fingernails of which they had been stripped, and he clothed them.⁷⁷

Later midrashim are also cognizant of the enigmatic provenance of the proto-plasts' luminous garments. Thus, for example, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 20 reads:

Rabbi Eliezer said: From skins which the serpent sloughed off, the Holy One, blessed be He, took and made coats of glory for Adam and his wife, as it is said, "And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife coats of skin, and clothed them."⁷⁸

Still, other interpretive lines postulate that the clothing was made from the skin of the Leviathan.⁷⁹ In relation to this interpretive trajectory, William Whitney notes that "two late texts (*Minhat Yehuda* and *Sefer Hadar-Zeqenim*, both on

77 Michael Maher, ed., *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis*, ArBib 1B (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 29. Later rabbinic traditions also hold that the glorious garments of Adam and Eve were made from the skin of the female Leviathan.

78 Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, 144.

79 In relation to this tradition, Lambden notes that "in his *Legends of the Jews*, v, p. 103, n. 93 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955) Ginzberg drew attention to a probably early and 'unknown Midrash' recorded in mediaeval Jewish sources to the effect that the first couple's garments were made from the skin of Leviathan, a creature which figures in a rich variety of myths and traditions recorded in ancient Near Eastern and biblical texts as well as in certain rabbinic, Christian, Gnostic, magical and other ancient literatures. This tradition is of considerable interest in the light of Leviathan's being pictured in rabbinic sources as a creature of great glory (see for example *Pes. K.* [1876 on Job 41.7]; *b. B. Bat.* 74b) and the possibility that there existed an early (tannaicic [?]) branch of Jewish mysticism surrounding Behemoth and Leviathan (reflected in such Gnostic texts as the cosmological Diagram of the Ophians mentioned in Origen's *Contra Celsum* [6.25] [?]) There appears to be some connection between rabbinic Adam speculation and the traditions about Leviathan. Garment imagery and eschatological themes are connected with this complex of traditions." Stephen Lambden, "From Fig Leaves to Fingernails: Some Notes on the Garments of Adam and Eve in the Hebrew Bible and Select Early Postbiblical Jewish Writings," in Paul Morris and Deborah Sawyer, eds., *A Walk in the Garden: Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden*, JSOTSS 136 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 74–90 at 87–88.

Gen 3:21) also record a tradition in which the skin of the female Leviathan (preserved for the righteous in the world to come) was used to clothe Adam and Eve.”⁸⁰

In light of these traditions, the luminous skin of the Leviathan on the high priest may have additional eschatological and anthropological significance—namely, the re-clothing of the eschatological Adam in the form of the sacerdotal servant with the garment of light stripped from the Leviathan.

5 Conclusion

Finally, we need to draw attention to the eschatological significance of Leviathan’s skin, which again, is curiously linked to its function as the cosmological shell of the Temple. Thus, from the Babylonian Talmud, we learn that in the last times the luminous skin of the Leviathan will be used in the building material for the eschatological tabernacle:

Rabbah in the name of R. Johanan further stated: The Holy One, blessed be He, will in time to come make a tabernacle for the righteous from the skin of Leviathan; for it is said: Canst thou fill tabernacles with his skin. If a man is worthy, a tabernacle is made for him; if he is not worthy [of this] a [mere] covering is made for him, for it is said: And his head with a fish covering. If a man is [sufficiently] worthy a covering is made for him; if he is not worthy [even of this], a necklace is made for him, for it is said: And necklaces about thy neck. If he is worthy [of it] a necklace is made for him; if he is not worthy [even of this] an amulet is made for him; as it is said: And thou wilt bind him for thy maidens. The rest [of Leviathan] will be spread by the Holy One, blessed be He, upon the walls of Jerusalem, and its splendor will shine from one end of the world to the other; as it is said: And nations shall walk at thy light, and kings at the brightness of thy rising.⁸¹

Here, the already familiar motif of Leviathan’s skin is used as the outer shell of the tabernacle of the righteous in the time to come. And not only the tabernacle, but even the wall of the Holy City itself will be covered with the skin of the cosmological reptile.

⁸⁰ Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, 137. On this see also Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1909–1938), 5:42, note 123.

⁸¹ Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Baba Bathra*, 75a.

What is particularly curious in this talmudic excerpt, and something not often noticed by students of the Leviathan tradition, is the comparison between the covering for the worthy and the necklace around the neck for the unworthy. This difference might hint at two functions of the Leviathan's skin: one that surrounds the sacred structure akin to the necklace during the normal time, and one that will become its covering in the messianic time.

This eschatological tradition is important, because it reveals how the sacerdotal role of the Leviathan—which was a threatening force that surrounded and constantly jeopardized the Temple during the course of history—is finally affirmed positively in messianic times.