

# The Pteromorphic Angelology of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*

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IN THE *APOCALYPSE OF ABRAHAM*, a Jewish work composed in the early centuries of the Common Era,<sup>1</sup> God invites Abraham on a celestial journey to receive

<sup>1</sup> The *Apocalypse of Abraham* survived solely in its Slavonic translation. For the published Slavonic manuscripts and fragments of the text, see Ioan Franko, "Книга о Аврааме праотци и патриарси" [The Book about the Forefather and the Patriarch Abraham], in *Апокрифи і легенди з українських рукописів* [The Apocrypha and the Legends from the Ukrainian Manuscripts] (5 vols.; Monumenta Linguae Necnon Litterarum Ukraino-Russicarum [Ruthenicarum] 1-5; L'vov: Schevchenka, 1896-1910) 1. 80-86; Alexander I. Jacimirskij, "Откровение Авраама" [The Apocalypse of Abraham], in *Библиографический обзор апокрифов в южнославянской и русской письменности (Списки Памятников). Выпуск 1. Апокрифы ветхозаветные* [The Bibliographical Survey of Apocryphal Writings in South Slavonic and Old Russian Literature, vol. 1, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha] (Petrograd: Russian Academy of Sciences, 1921) 99-100; P. P. Novickij, ed., "Откровение Авраама" [The Apocalypse of Abraham], in *Общество любителей древней письменности* [The Society of Lovers of Ancient Literature] 99 (St. Petersburg: Markov, 1891); Ivan Ja. Porfir'ev, "Откровение Авраама" [The Apocalypse of Abraham], in *Апокрифическая сказания о ветхозаветных лицах и событиях по рукописям соловецкой библиотеки* [The Apocryphal Stories about Old Testament Characters and Events according to the Manuscripts of the Solovetzkij Library] (Sbornik Otdelenija russkogo jazyka i slovesnosti Imperatorskoj akademii nauk 17.1; St. Petersburg: Russian Academy of Sciences, 1877) 111-30; Belkis Philonenko-Sayar and Marc Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham: Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes* (Semitica 31; Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1981) 36-105; Alexander N. Pypin, *Ложные и отверженные книги славянской и русской старины, Памятники старинной русской литературы, издаваемые Графом Григорием Кушелевым-Безбородко. Том 3* [The False and Rejected Books of Slavonic and Russian Antiquity: Memorials of Ancient Russian Literature Edited by Count Gregory Kushelev-Bezborodko, vol. 3] (Slavic Printings and Reprintings 97; The Hague: Mouton, 1970) 24-36; Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham en vieux slave: Édition critique du*

heavenly and eschatological secrets.<sup>2</sup> To secure Abraham's celestial tour, the deity appoints Yahoel to be his *angelus interpres*. The pseudepigraphon describes the patriarch's angelic guide as a glorious creature whose body is reminiscent of sapphire<sup>3</sup> and whose face looks like chrysolite.<sup>4</sup> Scholars have previously noted that the peculiar imagery used in the depiction of Yahoel's physique recalls portrayals of the anthropomorphic Glory of God, the *kābôd*.<sup>5</sup> Such transference of the *kābôd* imagery to the angelic figures is not uncommon in Jewish apocalyptic writings and early mystical accounts, where the principal angels or the exalted patriarchs and prophets are often portrayed as representations or even measures (*Shi'ur Qomah*) of the glorious anthropomorphic extent of God.<sup>6</sup> What is, however, unusual and even puzzling in the tradition found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is that the work's authors seem to depart from the familiar anthropomorphic descriptions of angels by seeking to portray Yahoel as a pteromorphic creature who possesses the body of a griffin. This departure from the traditional angelic imagery does not appear coincidental. It has been previously observed that, despite the reliance of the authors on Ezekielian imagery in their descriptions of the celestial realm, they shun the book's explicit anthropomorphic references.<sup>7</sup> Instead of

*texte, introduction, traduction et commentaire* (Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego: Źródła i monografie 129; Lublin: Société des Lettres et des Sciences de l'Université Catholique de Lublin, 1987) 98-255; Izmail I. Sreznevskij, "Книги Откровения Авраама" [The Apocalypse of Abraham], in *Известия Императорской академии наук по отделению русского языка и словесности. Том 10* [Proceedings of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, Division of Russian Language and Literature, vol. 10] (St. Petersburg: Russian Academy of Sciences, 1961-63) 648-65; Nikolaj S. Tihonravov, *Памятники отреченной русской литературы* [Memorials of Russian Apocryphal Literature] (2 vols.; St. Petersburg: Obschestvennaja Pol'za, 1863) 1. 32-77.

<sup>2</sup> On the date of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, see George Herbert Box and Joseph I. Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham: Edited, with a Translation from the Slavonic Text and Notes* (Translations of Early Documents 1.10; London: SPCK, 1918) xv-xix; Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham*, 34-35; Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," *OTP*, 1. 681-705, here 683; idem, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham en vieux slave*, 70-73; Alexander Kulik, "К датировке 'Откровения Авраама'" [About the Date of the Apocalypse of Abraham], in *In Memoriam: Памяти Я. С. Лурье* [In Memoriam: In Memory of Ja. S. Lur'e] (ed. N. M. Botvinnik and Je. I. Vanceva; St. Petersburg: Feniks, 1997) 189-95; idem, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (Text-critical Studies 3; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004) 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Slav. *сапфиръ*. Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham*, 60.

<sup>4</sup> Slav. *хрусолитъ*. Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham*, 60.

<sup>5</sup> Jarl E. Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (WUNT 36; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985) 319.

<sup>6</sup> On this tradition, see Andrei A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (TSAJ 107; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 165-76; idem, "The Face as the Heavenly Counterpart of the Visionary in the Slavonic *Ladder of Jacob*," in idem, *From Apocalypticism to Merkabah Mysticism: Studies in the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha* (JSJSup 114; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007) 399-419.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Rowland, for example, notes that the shift from anthropomorphism is apparent

depicting God in the form of a glorious anthropomorphic extent enthroned in heaven, the Slavonic apocalypse persistently portrays the manifestations of the deity as the formless voice coming in a stream of fire.<sup>8</sup>

In view of some anti-anthropomorphic tendencies detected in the Slavonic pseudepigraphon, it is possible that its authors' agenda might go beyond the distinctive noncorporeal depictions of the deity and encompass the imagery of other celestial beings found in the book. The purpose of this article is to explore the anti-anthropomorphic features of the angelological developments in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

### I. Yahoel, the Bird of Heaven

One of the clues to understanding the mysteries of the text's angelology might lie in the rather cryptic conceptual developments surrounding the figure of Abraham's celestial guide, Yahoel. This angelic character first appears in chap. 10 as "the namesake of the mediation of God's ineffable name."<sup>9</sup> The close association of the chief angelic protagonist with the office of mediation of the divine Name does not seem coincidental in light of the work's engagement of aural symbolism in its depiction of the deity as the divine Sound or Voice driven by the authors' aforementioned anti-anthropomorphic tendency to find a viable alternative to the visionary *kābôd* paradigm.<sup>10</sup> It is this divine Voice that in chap. 10 appoints the

in the portrayal of the divine throne in chap. 18. Notwithstanding the many allusions to Ezekiel 1 in the depiction of the throne room in *Apocalypse of Abraham* 18–19, Rowland highlights a radical paradigm shift in the text's description of the deity, noting "a deliberate attempt . . . to exclude all reference to the human figure mentioned in Ezekiel 1." For Rowland this shift entails that "there was a definite trend within apocalyptic thought away from the direct description of God" (*The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* [New York: Crossroad, 1982] 86–87).

<sup>8</sup> Such polemical development, which attempts to confront the anthropomorphic understanding of the deity with alternative depictions of God through the imagery of the divine Voice or Name, has its roots already in the biblical materials, particularly in the Book of Deuteronomy and later Deuteronomistic developments. On these traditions, see Oskar Grether, *Name und Wort Gottes im Alten Testament* (BZAW 64; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1934) 1–58; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 191–209; Trygve N. D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies* (ConBOT 18; Lund: Glöckers, 1982) 124–32; Ian Wilson, *Out of the Midst of Fire: Divine Presence in Deuteronomy* (SBLDS 151; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 1–15; Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (AGAJU 42; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 1998) 51–123. On the divine name traditions in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, see Andrei A. Orlov, "Praxis of the Voice: The Divine Name Traditions in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*," *JBL* 127 (2008) 53–70.

<sup>9</sup> Scholars trace the origin of Yahoel's figure to the biblical imagery of the Angel of Yhwh found in Exodus. On this connection, see Fossum, *Name of God*, 318.

<sup>10</sup> Scholars have previously noted the formative role of the figure of the Angel of the Name (or the Angel of Yhwh) in the conceptual framework of the Deuteronomistic and Deuteronomistic

angel Yahoel as a celestial guide of the exalted patriarch. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 11:2-3 unveils further features of the angel's unique identity by providing a depiction of his physique:

The appearance of the griffin's (*ногуево*)<sup>11</sup> body was like sapphire, and the likeness of his face like chrysolite, and the hair of his head like snow, and a turban on his head like the appearance of the bow in the clouds, and the closing of his garments [like] purple, and a golden staff [was] in his right hand.<sup>12</sup>

The Slavonic word *ногуево*, used in the description of Yahoel's body, has puzzled scholars for a long time. It can be translated as "his leg" (*ногу его*), but this rendering does not fit the larger context of Yahoel's description. Previous translators therefore preferred to drop the puzzling word and translate the first sentence of Yahoel's description as "the appearance of his body was like sapphire."<sup>13</sup> Recently Alexander Kulik offered a hypothesis that the Slavonic term *ногуево* might derive from the Slavonic *ногъ* or *ногуи*, "a griffin."<sup>14</sup> He proposes that the whole phrase can be translated as "the appearance of the griffin's [*ногуева*] body" and thus refers to the birdlike body of Yahoel. He further suggests that Yahoel might even be a composite creature, a man-bird, since he is depicted in *Апос. Аб.* 10:4 as the angel who is sent to Abraham in "the likeness of a man." Kulik argues that since Yahoel has "hair on his head" and also hands (he is able to hold a golden staff), it appears that "only the torso of Yahoel must be of griffinlike appearance, while his head is like that of a man."<sup>15</sup> To provide evidence of such puzzling angelic imagery, Kulik points to some examples of "griffinlike" angels in the Hekhalot writings.

Kulik's hypothesis about the pteromorphic features of Yahoel has recently been supported by Basil Lourié, who provides references to the tradition of trans-

Šem ideologies. According to one of the hypotheses, the figure of the Angel of Yhwh (or the Angel of the divine Name) found in the Book of Exodus constituted one of the conceptual roots of the Šem theology. Mettinger (*Dethronement*, 124-25) observes, "[I]t appears that when the deuteronomic theologians chose *šem*, they seized on a term which was already connected with the idea of God's presence. Exod 23:21 tells us how God warned Israel during her wanderings in the desert to respect his angel and obey his voice, 'for my name is in him.'"

<sup>11</sup> The reading is supported by mss. A, C, D, I, H, and K. It is omitted in mss. B, S, and U. For the sigla of the known manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, see Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 97.

<sup>12</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>14</sup> Izmail Sreznevskij in his dictionary (*Материалы для словаря древнерусского языка по письменным памятникам* [Materials for a Dictionary of Old Russian Language] [3 vols.; St. Petersburg: Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1883-1912] 2. 462) traces the Slavonic terms *ногъ* and *ногуи* to the Greek word γρούψ. See also R. I. Avanesov, *Словарь древнерусского языка (XI-XIV вв.)* [The Dictionary of the Old Russian Language of XI-XIV Centuries] (10 vols.; Moscow: Russkij Jazyk, 1988-) 5. 429.

<sup>15</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 83.

porting angels in the form of griffins.<sup>16</sup> Both Kulik's and Lourié's findings are important for understanding the Yahoel imagery. Although some Jewish visionary accounts indeed contain references to psychopomps and some other angelic servants possessing pteromorphic physiques, the primary angels in the apocalyptic and Merkabah materials are usually depicted as anthropomorphic creatures. Further, as has been already mentioned, these primary angels often serve as representations or even "mirrors" of the anthropomorphic glory of God.<sup>17</sup> The tendency of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* to depict the primary angel in the form of a bird looks quite unusual in this respect. What is even more intriguing is that, in the case of the angel Yahoel and his composite ptero-anthropomorphic corporeality, one can possibly witness polemical interaction with the anthropomorphic traditions of the divine Glory. In addition, it appears that the remnants of the underlying anthropomorphic traditions are not entirely abandoned by the authors of the Slavonic apocalypse and can be clearly detected in the text. Drawing on the account offered in *Apoc. Ab.* 10:4 that God sent Yahoel to Abraham "in the likeness of a man,"<sup>18</sup> Jarl E. Fossum observes that "the mention of human likeness is a constant trait in the representation of the Glory."<sup>19</sup> He further notes that other depictions of Yahoel bring to mind various traditions of the divine Glory as well. Thus, for example, *Apoc. Ab.* 11:2-3 depicts Yahoel's body as "like sapphire, and the likeness of his face like chrysolite, and the hair of his head like snow, and a turban on his head like the appearance of the bow in the clouds, and the closing garments [like] purple, and a golden staff [was] in his right hand."<sup>20</sup> Fossum suggests that

this description contains adaptations of various portraits of the Glory. The radiant appearance of the body of the Glory is mentioned already in *Ez.* i.27. In the Book of Daniel, the angel Gabriel, who is represented as the Glory, is in one place described in the following way: "His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like gleam of burning bronze . . ." (x.6). In the *Shi'ur Qomah* texts, there is frequent reference to the shining appearance of the body of the Glory, and chrysolite is even used expressly to describe it: "His body is like chrysolite. His light breaks tremendously from the darkness." . . . The rainbow-like appearance of Yahoel's turban is reminiscent of *Ez.* i.28, which says that

<sup>16</sup> Basil Lourié (review of Alexander Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, *JSP* 15 [2006] 229-37, here 233) points to "a medieval legend of the ascension of Alexander the Great, which goes back to the Hellenistic era. In the legend Alexander reaches the heaven (or even heavenly Jerusalem) transported by four griffins. This motif suggests that the griffins as the psychopomps transporting visionaries to heaven were not an invention of the authors of the hekhlot literature but were a part of the early Jewish environment."

<sup>17</sup> On these traditions, see Orlov, *Enoch-Metatron Tradition*, 165-76; idem, "Face as the Heavenly Counterpart," 399-419.

<sup>18</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Fossum, *Name of God*, 319.

<sup>20</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 19.

"the appearance of the brightness round about" the Glory was "like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain."<sup>21</sup>

It is noteworthy that in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* these spectacular features of the anthropomorphic divine Glory came to be applied to the composite creature that combines anthropomorphic and pteromorphic features, which clearly demonstrates the polemical character of the text's angelology.

## II. The Turtledove and the Pigeon: Pteromorphic Psychopomps

Suggestions about Yahoel's possession of the griffin body deserve careful attention, since in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* pteromorphic imagery appears to be applied to other angelic beings as well. Another example can be found in chaps. 12 and 13, where Yahoel conveys to Abraham the following instructions about the sacrifices:

And he said to me, "Slaughter and cut all this, putting together the two halves, one against the other. But do not cut the birds. And give them [the halves] to the two men whom I shall show you standing beside you, since they are the altar on the mountain, to offer sacrifice to the Eternal One. The turtledove and the pigeon you will give me, and I shall ascend [*возиду*] in order to show to you [the inhabited world] on the wings of two birds. . . ." And I did everything according to the angel's command. And I gave to the angels who had come to us the divided parts of the animals. And the angel took the two birds. (*Apoc. Ab.* 12:8–13:1)<sup>22</sup>

Although this description appears to rely on the Abrahamic traditions found in Genesis,<sup>23</sup> it also contains some important additions to the biblical narrative.<sup>24</sup> The birds that in the Genesis account serve merely as sacrificial objects appear to have some angelic functions in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Yahoel, who requests two

<sup>21</sup> Fossum, *Name of God*, 319-20.

<sup>22</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 19-20; Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham*, 64.

<sup>23</sup> Genesis 15:8-12 reads: "But he said, 'O LORD God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?' He said to him, 'Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.' He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him."

<sup>24</sup> Scholars have previously noted that the patriarch's offerings are reminiscent of Genesis 15, "with an allusion to Genesis 22 insofar as the sacrifices are located on a high mountain." See John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 226. Box and Landsman (*Apocalypse of Abraham*, xxiv) note that "the apocalyptic part of the book is based upon the story of Abraham's sacrifices and trance, as described in Gen. xv." Both in Genesis and in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the patriarch is asked to prepare sacrifices, and the content of the sacrifices is also very similar.

birds from Abraham, mentions that later the birds will serve as the psychopomps of the visionary and his celestial guide. Yahoel's prediction about the birds is fulfilled in *Apoc. Ab.* 15:2-4, where the seer and his angelic guide are depicted as traveling on the wings of the pigeon and the turtledove:

And the angel took me with his right hand and set me on the right wing of the pigeon and he himself sat on the left wing of the turtledove, since they both were neither slaughtered nor divided. And he carried me up to the edge of the fiery flame. And we ascended <like great winds to the heaven which was fixed on the expanses. . . . > (*Apoc. Ab.* 15:2-4)<sup>25</sup>

In view of the established tradition of angelic psychopomps in the apocalyptic accounts, it appears that the pigeon and turtledove here fulfill functions traditionally performed by angels.

### III. Fallen Angel Azazel, the Impure Bird

Another important feature in the text's angelology that provides further support for the hypothesis about the pteromorphic, eagle-like body of Yahoel and for the general polemical tendency of the text against anthropomorphic portrayals of celestial beings is that the negative angelic protagonist in the text, the fallen angel Azazel, also is depicted as a pteromorphic creature—an impure bird (Slav. *nmuca nechustaja*).<sup>26</sup> Azazel first appears in chap. 13, which deals with the story of the patriarch's offering of animal sacrifices to God. As in the case of the sacrificial birds refashioned into angelic psychopomps, the authors of the apocalypse again try to expand here the details of the biblical story of Abraham's sacrifices that

<sup>25</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 22.

<sup>26</sup> On Azazel's traditions, see Jacqueline C. R. De Roo, "Was the Goat for Azazel Destined for the Wrath of God?" *Bib* 81 (2000) 233-41; Charles L. Feinberg, "The Scapegoat of Leviticus Sixteen," *BSac* 115 (1958) 320-31; René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (trans. Y. Frecco; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Lester L. Grabbe, "The Scapegoat Tradition: A Study in Early Jewish Interpretation," *JSJ* 18 (1987) 165-79; Bernd Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen: Studien zur Sühnetheologie der Priesterschrift und zur Wurzel KPR im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (WMANT 55; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982); Benedikt Jürgens, *Heiligkeit und Versöhnung: Levitikus 16 in seinem literarischen Kontext* (Herders biblische Studien 28; Freiburg/New York: Herder, 2001); Ralph D. Levy, *The Symbolism of the Azazel Goat* (Bethesda, MD: International Scholars Publication, 1998); Oswald Loretz, *Leberschau, Sündenbock, Asazel in Ugarit und Israel* (Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur 3; Altenberge: CIS, 1985); Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology* (SJLA 36; Leiden: Brill, 1983); Hayim Tawil, "Azazel the Prince of the Steppe: A Comparative Study," *ZAW* 92 (1980) 43-59; Moshe Weinfeld, "Social and Cultic Institutions in the Priestly Source against Their ANE Background," in *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983) 95-129; David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (SBLDS 101; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987).

refers to birds of prey coming down on the carcasses of the patriarch's offerings. Thus, Gen 15:11 relates that birds of prey came down on Abraham's sacrifices and he drove them away. In the Slavonic apocalypse, however, the reference to the birds of prey becomes appropriated into the book's angelology. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:2-6 reads:

And I waited for [the time of] the evening offering. And an impure bird [*нмуща нечистая*] flew down on the carcasses, and I drove it away. And an impure bird spoke to me and said, "What are you doing, Abraham, on the holy heights, where no one eats or drinks, nor is there upon them food of men. But these will all be consumed by fire and they will burn you up. Leave the man who is with you and flee! Since if you ascend to the height, they will destroy you." And it came to pass when I saw the bird speaking I said to the angel, "What is this my lord?" And he said, "This is iniquity, this is Azazel!"<sup>27</sup>

It is intriguing that later in chap. 23, which deals with the story of the fall of the protoplasts, Azazel is described as a composite creature—a serpent with human hands and feet and with wings on his shoulders:

And I saw there a man very great in height and terrible in breadth, incomparable in aspect, entwined with a woman who was also equal to the man in aspect and size. And they were standing under a tree of Eden, and the fruit of the tree was like the appearance of a bunch of grapes of vine. And behind the tree was standing, as it were, a serpent in form, but having hands and feet like a man, and wings on its shoulders: six on the right side and six on the left. And he was holding in his hands the grapes of the tree and feeding the two whom I saw entwined with each other. (*Apoc. Ab.* 23:5-8)<sup>28</sup>

Since this description is given in the middle of the Adamic story, it is not entirely clear whether this composite physique represents Azazel's permanent form or whether it is just a temporal manifestation acquired during the deception of the protoplasts. It is possible that here the authors of the Slavonic apocalypse are drawing on the cluster of traditions reflected in the Primary Adam Books, where the tempter uses the serpent's form as a proxy in his deception of Adam and Eve. It is interesting, though, that the pteromorphic features of the negative protagonist are reaffirmed in the description found in the Slavonic apocalypse that portrays Azazel as a winged creature.

Along with Adamic motifs, the descriptions of Azazel found in the *Apocalypse* appear to provide some hints that the text's authors were cognizant of the broader traditions about Asael/Azazel found in the Enochic materials. Scholars have previously noted that some details in the story of the punishment of

<sup>27</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 20; Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham*, 64.

<sup>28</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 27.



Asael/Azazel in *1 Enoch* 10,<sup>29</sup> where the fallen angel is tied as a sacrificial animal and thrown into the hole in the desert, are reminiscent of the ritual of the scapegoat, with its release of the sacrificial animal into the wilderness. This may be one of the first attempts of the angelological reinterpretation of the scapegoat myth. The authors of the Slavonic apocalypse, who are also reinterpreting the Azazel story in angelological terms, appear to be familiar with the early Enochic developments. Some Enochic motifs appear in chaps. 13 and 14, where Yahoel delivers a lengthy speech condemning Azazel and instructing Abraham how to deal with the “impure bird.”

In Yahoel’s discourse one can find several peculiar details pertaining to the anti-hero story that seem to provide some allusions to the Enochic traditions about the Watcher Asael and his angelic companions, who according to the Enochic myth decided to abandon their celestial abode and descend to earth. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:8 says the following about Azazel: “Since *you have chosen it* [earth] to be your dwelling place of your impurity.”<sup>30</sup> The passage refers to the voluntary descent of the anti-hero to earth, which might hint at the Enochic provenance of the tradition. In contrast to the Enochic mythology of evil, the Adamic etiology, reflected in the Primary Adam Books, insists that their negative protagonist, Satan, did not descend of his own accord but rather was forcefully deposed by the deity into the lower realms after refusing to venerate Adam.<sup>31</sup>

The reference to impurity is intriguing also in view of the defiling nature of the Watchers’ activities on earth. Further, there also seems to be a hint about Asael/Azazel’s punishment in the abyss. In *Apoc. Ab.* 14:5, Yahoel offers the patriarch the following incantation to battle Azazel: “Say to him, ‘May you be the fire brand of the furnace of the earth! Go, Azazel, into the untrodden parts of the earth. . . .’”<sup>32</sup> Here one might have an allusion to the aforementioned tradition from *1 Enoch* 10, where the place of Azazel’s punishment is situated in the fiery abyss. Similarly, the authors of the Slavonic apocalypse seem here to combine traditions about the scapegoat and the fallen angel by alluding to the motif of the wilderness in the form of “untrodden parts of the earth.”

There is also a possible allusion to the Watcher Azazel’s participation in the procreation of the race of the Giants. In *Apoc. Ab.* 14:6, Yahoel teaches Abraham the following protective formula against the “impure bird”: “Say to him . . . since your inheritance are those who are with you, *with men born with the stars and*

<sup>29</sup> *1 Enoch* 10:4: “And further the Lord said to Raphael: ‘Bind Azazel by his hands and his feet, and throw him into the darkness. And split open the desert which is in Dudael, and throw him there’” (Michael A. Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: A New Edition in the Light of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments* [2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1978] 2. 87).

<sup>30</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 20.

<sup>31</sup> For the comparison of two mythologies of evil (Adamic and Enochic), see John C. Reeves, *Exploring Early Jewish Mythologies of Evil* (forthcoming).

<sup>32</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 21.

clouds, and their portion is in you, and they come into being through your being. . . ."<sup>33</sup> The reference to human beings "born with the stars" is intriguing, since the *Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch* conveys the descent of the Watchers through the peculiar imagery of the stars falling from heaven and subsequently depicts the Watchers as participants in the procreation of the new race of the Giants.

In conclusion, the aforementioned parallels demonstrate that the authors of the Slavonic apocalypse, in their reinterpretation of Azazel's figure, seem to rely on a certain angelological understanding of Azazel as found in the Enochic materials. Yet, although Enochic tradition envisions Azazel and his angelic companions as anthropomorphic creatures capable of seducing women of the earth to procreate the new race of the Giants, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* insists on the pteromorphic physique of the fallen angel. As in the case of Yahoel and the pteromorphic psychopomps, the peculiar imagery used for depicting Azazel signals the authors' reluctance to attribute to the celestial beings the traditional humanlike appearance, which seems to reflect the pseudepigraphon's anti-anthropomorphic tendency.

#### IV. Invisible Angels

The anti-anthropomorphic thrust of the pseudepigraphon's angelology seems to be reflected also in the text's insistence on the invisibility of certain classes of angelic beings. The reader encounters this trend already in the beginning of the apocalyptic section of the work, in the cryptic statement of Yahoel that follows immediately the description of his unusual birdlike physique. There the angel reveals to Abraham that his strange composite body is just a temporal manifestation that will not last long and that he will become invisible soon:

And he said, "Let my appearance not frighten you, nor my speech trouble your soul! Come with me and I shall go with you, visible until the sacrifice, but after the sacrifice invisible [*невидим*] forever." (*Apoc. Ab.* 11:4)<sup>34</sup>

This deconstruction of the visible form of the primary angel and the insistence on his eternal incorporeality seem to reveal some persistent, deliberate motifs deeply connected with the notion of God's own incorporeality. It unveils a striking contrast with the visual ideology of the Merkabah tradition, where the body of the primary angel is often envisioned as God's *Shi'ur Qomah*—the measurement and visual reaffirmation of the deity's own anthropomorphic corporeality. Yet in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* one can see a quite different picture.

It does not appear coincidental that, as the story unfolds and the visionary progresses in his celestial journey to the upper firmaments and the abode of the bodiless deity, the references to the incorporeal or "spiritual" angels occur more

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 19; Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham*, 62.

and more often. In fact, the idea of the incorporeality of the angelic hosts inhabiting the upper firmaments looms large in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Thus, according to 19:6-7, in the upper firmaments the seer beholds

a multitude of incorporeal [бесплотное множество] spiritual [духовныхъ] angels, carrying out the orders of the fiery angels who were on the eighth firmament. . . . And behold, neither on this expanse was there any other power of other form, but only the spiritual angels.<sup>35</sup>

Yet here again, as in the previous descriptions, one can see the transitional nature of the pseudepigraphon's angelology. With a new incorporeal understanding of the celestial retinue, these new angelological developments also preserve some anthropomorphic details of the *kābôd* paradigm. Thus, in addition to insisting on the incorporeality of angelic beings, the authors occasionally designate celestial servants—for example, the angels who received the sacrifices from Abraham—as “men.” This once again appears to indicate the fluidity of angelic imagery in the Slavonic apocalypse, which in many ways stays on the threshold of the *kābôd* and *šem* traditions, sharing both conceptual worlds.

## V. Conclusion

Thirty years ago Christopher Rowland suggested that the tendency to spiritualize angelic beings and depict them as bodiless and pure spirits in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* might be part of the authors' polemical stand against the anthropomorphic understanding of God.<sup>36</sup> It seems to be no coincidence that these anti-anthropomorphic developments took place in the pseudepigraphon written in the name of the hero of the faith known in Jewish lore for his fight against the idolatrous statues.

That the authors' choice of the hero is purposive can be seen already in the first eight chapters of the pseudepigraphon, which take the form of a midrashic elaboration of the early years of Abraham, who is depicted as fighting against the idolatrous practices of his father, Terah. Well aware of the broader extrabiblical context of Abraham's biography, the authors of the apocalypse appropriated the patriarch's story for their anticorporeal agenda.<sup>37</sup> In depictions of the idol Bar-

<sup>35</sup> Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 25; Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham*, 80.

<sup>36</sup> Christopher Rowland, “The Vision of God in Apocalyptic Literature,” *JSJ* 10 (1979) 137-54, here 151.

<sup>37</sup> For understanding the background of this story in the *Book of Jubilees*, Josephus, Philo, and the later rabbinic materials (*Gen. Rab.* 38:13; *Tanna debe Eliahu* 2:25; *S. Eli. Rab.* 33), see Box and Landsman, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, 88-94; Rubinkiewicz, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham en vieux slave*, 43-49.

Eshath ("the Son of Fire") and some other anthropomorphic statues whose features are strikingly reminiscent of the corporeal portrayals of the deity in Ezekiel and other biblical and pseudepigraphical accounts, one can detect a subtle polemic against the divine body traditions.

It has been previously proposed that the authors of the Abrahamic pseudepigrapha directed their polemics beyond the classical theomorphic and angelomorphic depictions found in the Book of Ezekiel and possibly targeted the afterlife of these anthropomorphic developments as they were manifested in the Enochic tradition. In this respect, it is no coincidence that in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* many peculiar Enochic "iconic" portrayals of God and angels were reinterpreted in the new anti-anthropomorphic way. Moreover, the iconoclastic story of Abraham was the ideal literary playground for such deconstructions. The anti-anthropomorphic polemical potential of Abraham's story is not limited solely to the *Apocalypse of Abraham* but includes also other pseudepigrapha circulating in the name of the patriarch.

Philip Munoa observes that the *Testament of Abraham* exhibits anti-anthropomorphic tendencies in highlighting God's invisibility, repeatedly emphasizing God's unseen (ἀόρατος) nature.<sup>38</sup> It appears, however, that the *Testament of Abraham* is even more radical and denies the visionary the possibility of close contact with the deity. Whereas in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* the visionary has access to the deity through the audible revelations of the voice of God speaking in the fire, in the *Testament of Abraham* this audible aspect of divine revelation appears to diminish.<sup>39</sup> Munoa stresses that in the *Testament of Abraham* Abraham never hears the voice of God while alive but only after death (20:13-14)—and even then without certainty.<sup>40</sup>

In light of the aforementioned developments detected in the Abrahamic pseudepigrapha, the repeated tendency to challenge the traditional anthropomor-

<sup>38</sup> He illustrates this tendency by referring to the passage from chap. 16, where the following tradition about the invisibility of God can be found: "When Death heard, he shuddered and trembled, overcome by great cowardice; and he came with great fear and stood before the unseen Father, shuddering, moaning and trembling, awaiting the Master's demand. Then the unseen God said to Death . . ." (*T. Ab.* 16:3-4) (Philip Munoa, *Four Powers in Heaven: The Interpretation of Daniel 7 in the Testament of Abraham* [JSPSup 28; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998] 141).

<sup>39</sup> Munoa, similar to Rowland, sees the *Testament of Abraham* and other Abrahamic pseudepigrapha as ongoing polemics against the anthropomorphic thrust of the Enochic literature. He observes that in contrast to *1 Enoch*, another Hellenistic Jewish text that makes use of Daniel 7, recension A of the *Testament of Abraham* gives prominence to Abel as the enthroned judge without making any reference to Enoch. Recension B does refer to Enoch, but his role is subservient to that of Abel (11:3-10). Munoa concludes that these two apocalyptic works (*Testament of Abraham* and *1 Enoch*) "may be witness to the competing interpretations of different communities—each championing their mediators" (Munoa, *Four Powers in Heaven*, 145).

<sup>40</sup> Munoa, *Four Powers in Heaven*, 141.

phic portrayals of celestial beings with the alternative pteromorphic depictions found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* does not appear coincidental. Yet, along with insistence on the invisibility of some classes of angelic beings and even the deity, the dynamics of the patriarch's celestial trip unavoidably require the protagonist's interaction with other characters of the story. The authors of the apocalypse therefore cannot keep the angelic figures of the narrative completely invisible as the story unfolds, and the plot requires the interaction between the visionary and other characters of the celestial realm. In this context pteromorphic angelic imagery seems to serve as a useful device for sustaining the anti-anthropomorphic agenda of the pseudepigraphon without interrupting the dynamics of the patriarch's celestial trip.