

*Towards a Theology of the Tabernacle and its Furniture*

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper began as attempt to answer why it is that the priestly source – which is generally not prolix and tends to abbreviate wherever possible (compare Lev 5:8-9, with 10a; the latter is so abbreviated because a law already exists to which it can refer [Lev 1:14-17]) – is so intentionally repetitive about the instructions for the Tabernacle. Especially striking is the tendency to list the appurtenances of the Tabernacle whenever it has the occasion to do so (see Exod 31:7-11). As Haran remarked, “the priestly writers find the subject so fascinating that [... they are] prompted to recapitulate the list of its appurtenances time and again. Their tendency to indulge in technicalities and stereotyped repetitions has here reached its furthest limits.” My own thesis about this is that the furniture of the Tabernacle possessed something of the very being of the God of Israel. As such it bears careful and repeated repetition whenever the occasion arises, not unlike the piling of up of divine epithets in a psalm of praise or descriptions of the beloved from the pen of the lover. Mesopotamian scribes could mark temple appurtenances as divine with the DINGIR-sign, the Bible did so by way of repetition.*

*This is not the occasion to prove this thesis for the Biblical period, though some background will be necessary. My essay concerns the role the temple and its furniture assume in the Second Temple period and beyond. I hope to show (1) that the furniture of the temple was treated as quasi-divine in Second Temple Jewish sources of both a literary and iconographic nature; (2) the high valuation put on these piece of furniture made them dangerous to look at but at the same time, and quite paradoxically, desirous or even compulsory to contemplate; and (3) the fact that it was impossible to divide with surgical precision the house of God from the being of God led to the adoption of this Jewish theologoumenon by early Christians as a means of clarifying how it was that Jesus could be both God and man.*

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 DRAFT VERSION – NOT FOR CITATION!

*Three times a year all your males shall behold the Sovereign, the Lord. (Exod 23:17)*

*Whence do we know that for everyone who fulfills the command of "seeing" it is as if he received the face of the Shekinah? From the text: "three times a year..." (PT Hagigah 1.5/66A)*

*The Word because flesh and tabernacled among us, and so we have seen his glory. (John 1:14)*

*If everyone had the ability to come, as Moses did, inside the cloud, where Moses saw what may not be seen [...] there would be no need for the appearance of our God in flesh. (Gregory of Nyssa, To Theophilus, Against the Apollinarians)*

**I. Seeing God in the Bible**

Anyone who has worked on the problem of the cult in the Bible knows that there is a highly realistic quality to the language used therein. The Temple is God's home and so the spot where he dwells among men. In order to breathe life into this theologoumenon, the Bible enacts legislation that declares how to prepare the home for God's dramatic entrance, how to provision this God with food in a way that befits his dignity and finally, how to keep his home clean so that he will remain there and offer his blessings to the worshipers and pilgrims who desire the occasion to revere Him.<sup>1</sup> And not unlike other ancient Near Eastern kings, the king of kings

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<sup>1</sup> The best account of the "real presence" (to borrow a term from the pages of Lutheran theology) of God in the Tabernacle is that of M. Haran, Temples and Temple Service. For a fine treatment of the theme in Mesopotamia, see the classic essay of L. Oppenheim, "The Care and Feeding of the Gods" in Ancient Mesopotamia (Chicago, 1964) 183-198. On the statue itself, E. Matsushima writes ("Divine Statues in Ancient Mesopotamia: their Fashioning and Clothing and their Interaction with the Society," in E. Matsushima ed. Official Cult and Popular Religion in the Ancient Near East, 209), "These statues played a central role in many important rituals and religious ceremonies in the temple area and sometimes even outside the temple. The cult statue of the god was fully identified with the god in question and was considered by the worshippers

will, from time to time, make a personal appearance. And, like other devout subjects of the imperial realm, Israelites are urged to appear before him periodically so as to demonstrate their fealty (Exod 23:17 and parallels).<sup>2</sup>

The texts that bring this theophanic aspect most vividly to light are the laws for the pilgrimage festivals. According to Exod 23:17 (and parallels), Israelites must appear three times a year at the Temple in order "to see the face of the Lord." As noted already by Luzzato in his commentary on Isaiah<sup>3</sup>, but seconded by Geiger<sup>4</sup>, Dillman<sup>5</sup> and most moderns, the Massoretic vocalization of the verbal stem ra'ah as a niphal ("to present oneself [before the face of the Lord]") is not likely the original reading. Luzzato notes the following problems: first, nowhere in the Bible do we find the expected combination of the passive stem "to appear" with an indirect object (liphne YHWH); rather this passive stem somewhat anomalously is conjoined to a direct object ('et pene YHWH or pene YHWH). And, more significantly, in every text where the context is some sort of personal appearance – with the exception of those involving God – we invariably find the infinitival form of the N-stem "to appear" spelled with a heh after the lamedh (e.g. II Sam 17:17 or I Kings 18:2). But in Isaiah 1:12, Exod 34:24 and Deut 31:11, texts that concern coming to the Temple, we find the infinitive spelled without the heh. Since the infinitive of N-stem is regularly spelled in a plene fashion in biblical texts and only in rabbinic Hebrew do we find regular elision of the intervocalic heh, the simplest solution is to assume that the Massorettes have mis-vocalized these texts. And if these texts have been mis-vocalized

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to be actually a living being, able to do whatever a human being does, for example, sleep, wake, or eat, even though the statue was always motionless and dumb."

<sup>2</sup> Appearance before a king was a sign of beatitude and favor. See the story of Absalom's banishment from the court of his father, King David. Begrudgingly David accedes to Joab's plea to normalize relations and allow Absalom to return. David, for his part, lets Absalom know that things are still not well by telling Joab: "Let Absalom return to his house; but my face let him not see. So Absalom returned to his house, but the face of the king he did not see" (II Sam 14:24). The expression, "my face let him not see," uses the exact same idiom as that found in Exod 23:17. In Akkadian texts as well, the idiom amaru pani "to see the face of PN" means to encounter either the king or the god in a face-to-face fashion. In the case of an audience with the god, the idiom refers to beholding the cult statue.

<sup>3</sup> Sefer Yeshayahu (1867) ad Isa 1:12.

<sup>4</sup> Ha-Miqra' we-turgemav (Jerusalem, 1949) 218-19.

<sup>5</sup> Das Bücher Exodus und Leviticus (Leipzig, 1897) 276.

then there is a high probability that Exod 23:17 has been as well. The most likely reading of this verse is that the Israelites must come "to see the face of the Sovereign" three times a year. But having made the case for such a reading we have created a new problem. If the command demands that Israel "see the face of God" how was it fulfilled? The dramatic theophany that Israel was witness to at the completion of the Tabernacle (Exod 40:34-35) was certainly not standard fare at every pilgrimage festival. What exactly did the pilgrims see when they ascended the mountain of the Lord?

The most obvious answer would be the ark. As scholars have long noted, the ark is regularly identified with the Lord's presence and at one time in its history was the subject of ceremonial processions. This is certainly implied by the liturgical refrain of Num 10:35-36,

When the Ark was to set out, Moses would say:

Advance, O Lord!

May your enemies be scattered,

And may your foes flee before you!

And when it halted he would say:

Return, O Lord,

Unto the ten thousands of Israel!

A similar identification of the Ark with the being of God is presumed by the entrance liturgy of Psalm 24:7-10, "O gates, lift up your heads! Up high, you everlasting doors, so that the King of glory may come in..." According to Frank M. Cross this portion of Ps 24 is "an antiphonal liturgy used in the autumn festival ... [and it] had its origin in the procession of the Ark to the sanctuary at its founding, celebrated annually in the cult of Solomon and perhaps even of David. On this there can be little disagreement."<sup>6</sup>

The power that this piece of cultic furniture was thought to possess is nicely illustrated in the story of the battle with the Philistines that would eventually lead to its capture. Having

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<sup>6</sup> Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic, 93

been routed badly in an initial exchange of hostilities the Israelite militia regrouped to prepare a new strategy. "Let us fetch the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord from Shiloh," they decided, "[for] thus He will be present among us and will deliver us from the hands of our enemies" (I Sam 4:3). The response to the Ark's entry into the Israelite war camp reveals how close was the attachment of God's being to this piece of furniture. "When the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord entered the camp, all Israel burst into a great shout, so that the earth resounded. The Philistines heard the noise of the shouting and they wondered, 'Why is there such a loud shouting in the camp of the Hebrews?' And when they learned that the Ark of the Lord had come to the camp, the Philistines were frightened; for they said, 'God has come to the camp.' And they cried, 'Woe to us! Nothing like this has ever happened before. Woe to us! Who will save us from the power of this mighty God?'" (I Sam 4:5-8). The highly realistic tenor of the language here must not be overlooked. Though God is not fully reducible to (i.e. coterminous with) the Ark, his presence is nevertheless so closely interwoven with it that one can point to the Ark as it approaches in military processions and say, "here comes God."<sup>7</sup>

This entire scene – which demonstrates the rash and ill-considered efforts of the Israelites to misuse this divine image – must be contrasted with the story of David's ignominious retreat from Jerusalem in the wake of Absalom's revolt. As David departs, Zadok appeared along with a group of Levites bearing the Ark. Given that the odds in favor of David's reclaiming his kingdom did not seem high, Zadok drew the only possible conclusion: David's future would depend on divine assistance and the easiest way to assure this would be

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<sup>7</sup> It may be worth pointing out that in the [Chicago Assyrian Dictionary](#) the entry *ilu* or "god" has as its seventh meaning: "image of the deity." For the way this works itself out in Second Temple Judaism one might note the important and wide spread theme that the most valuable temple furniture (notably the ark) was hidden prior to the Babylonian destruction and will be revealed at the eschaton. There will not be time in this essay to go into any of the details but clearly implied here is the notion that just as God himself was not as fully present in the Second Temple neither was his full array of furniture. Like a summer beach house, the provisions of that reconstructed building were of a lower grade than the furniture of one's true home. Strikingly the Temple Scroll from Qumran includes instructions for the almost all the furniture and in the glory of its original condition. See the essay by L. Schiffman, "The Furnishings of the Temple According to the Temple Scroll," [The Madrid Qumran Congress](#) (Leiden: Brill, 1992) 621-34. He does not discuss the relationship of the instructions to build this furniture with parallel traditions that await their revelation at the end of time.

to bring God along for the departure.<sup>8</sup> David, however, will have none of this. Not because he views such a strategem as rooted in a 'magical' concept of the Ark. Quite the reverse, David believes himself to be in the process of paying the price for past sins (II Sam 12:7-15) and willingly takes upon himself this period of exile from his city and his God. His own words are most revealing: "Take the Ark of God back to the city. If I find favor with the Lord, He will bring me back and let me see it and its abode" (II Sam 15:25-26). Favor with the deity will be symbolized not only by restoration to his kingdom but by being granted the privilege of seeing the ark.

This high valuation on seeing the representation of the deity should not surprise anyone familiar with ancient Near Eastern practice. As early as 1924 [and even before], F. Nötscher, in his book Das Angesicht Gottes schauen, argued that references to seeing God in pilgrimage laws and the Psalter were to be understood against the background of the act of displaying the statue of the god or goddess in non-Israelite cultures. Although Israel's cultic life was without a direct and immediate representation of God himself, the Ark and other pieces of the Tabernacle furniture supplied an almost exact parallel. No better witness to the close nexus between temple appurtenance and the presence of God could be seen than in the priestly rules about how to disassemble the Tabernacle prior to the Israelite camp moving to a new destination in the wilderness. The rules are carefully laid out with one goal in mind: the prevention of inappropriate Levitical groups from laying eyes on the holiest parts of this structure. "Let not [the Kohathites] go inside and witness the dismantling of the sanctuary," our writer warns, "lest they die" (Num 4:20).<sup>9</sup> In this text seeing the furniture is analogous to seeing the very being of God.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> On the theological and political importance of the cult-image to the identity of a people, see P. Miller and J. Roberts, The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of I Samuel (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> In a representation of a procession from Palmyra in the first century C.E. a portable sanctuary is borne by a camel that is covered by a piece of red cloth. The worshippers greet the artifact with upraised arms as though the deity himself sat astride the camel. See O. Keel, The

Finally, I might mention Psalm 48, a text that describes in considerable detail the circumambulation of the city of Jerusalem after the destruction of enemy forces that foolishly attempted to overtake it. Having exhorted the inhabitants of Zion and the surrounding province of Judah to stream forth in pilgrimage to celebrate this event, the Psalmist urges them to make a close visual inspection of the architecture of the city. "Walk about Zion, go round about her," he urges, "number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels; that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever." It is the last line that should occasion some surprise. For here our author seems to take his paean of praise to unimaginable heights. It is these buildings he claims that testify to the very being of God. As even the very traditional commentator Amos Hacham puts it, "[Regarding the phrase] 'this is God,' the word 'this' [zeh] is similar in meaning to 'look here.' It is an expression of palpable excitement and its point is that the one who sees the Temple in its splendor and glory feels within himself as if he saw, face to face, the glory (kavod) of the Lord. He cries, 'this [sc. this building] is God, our God.'" <sup>11</sup>

What I would like to suggest is that this language is not solely a result of the excess or superfluity that often characterizes the genre of praise (though obviously this is a factor). Rather, these materials give witness to a deeply held view in ancient Israel that God really dwelt in the Temple and that all the pieces of that building shared in some fashion in his tangible and visible presence. To use a modern metaphor, one might imagine the Temple as giant electrical generating plant that powered the land of Israel. In its core was a nuclear reactor in which the radioactive rods emitted divine energy that was absorbed by the entire infrastructure of the building. Though the glow was brightest at the center, even the periphery

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Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997) 326.

<sup>10</sup> In one Rabbinic tradition, this law was promulgated because the Kohathite clan was in the habit of "feasting their eyes on the Shekinah" who dwelt among the furniture. This illustrates nicely the attraction that the temple appurtenances were felt to possess as well as their attendant danger.

<sup>11</sup> Tehillim, vol 1, Da'at Miqra, ad loc.

had to be entered and handled with caution. Not even the thickest cement wall or lead surface could prevent these divine energies from overwhelming their boundaries and radiating divinity upon whatever stood in its vicinity.<sup>12</sup>

Again Mesopotamian texts are of considerable help here. For it is not only the case that the statue of the god is imbued with the veritable presence of the god in question, but even the furniture and other appurtenances dedicated to the temple come to share in this divine aura.<sup>13</sup> The whole building pulsed with the veritable presence of the god. Mesopotamian texts had a decisive grammatical advantage over their biblical brethren; they could mark the overflow of the divine energies by attaching a DINGIR sign (the cuneiform sign that marks a person or object as divine) to lists of temple furniture.<sup>14</sup> The structure of the temple itself literally shared in the presence of the divine.

As we shall see shortly, this deeply rooted ancient Near Eastern tendency to link the appurtenances of the building to the central cultic image had a vibrant afterlife in post-Biblical Judaism. But perhaps even at this point some examples would be in order. In the Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice from Qumran there is regularly some confusion as to whether a particular title

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<sup>12</sup> Compare the observations of W. G. Lambert, ("Ancient Mesopotamian Gods: Superstition, Philosophy, Theology," Revue de l'Histoire des Religions 207 (1990) 129), "The aura of a god in his temple could so attach itself to the temple, or architectural parts of it in particular, also to implements he used, and to the city which housed the temple, in such a way that these various things also became gods and received offerings as a mark of the fact."

<sup>13</sup> Note the concluding observations of Gebhard Selz remarkable essay, "The Holy Drum, the Spear, and the Harp. Towards an understanding of the problems of deification in the third millennium Mesopotamia" (in I. Finkel and M. Geller eds., Sumerian Gods and their Representations (Grönigen: Styx Publications, 1997) 184), "A statue of a god was an independent entity, because it stood on a holy place, and had the name of a god, the appearance of a god, and so on. It was these qualities of a statue, including its partaking in certain rituals, which left no doubt that it was the god himself. The same holds true for the "cultic objects"; it is their function and their special attributes, including their participation in holy rites, which made them god-like (italics, mine). Compare also the essay of K. van der Toorn, "Worshipping Stones: On the Deification of Cult Symbols," Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages 23 (1997) 1-14.

<sup>14</sup> See the section of the essay by Selz that is titled, "'Cultic objects' and gods in the Neo-Sumerian period", 176-179.

identifies the Holy One, the God of Israel, or one of his angelic host.<sup>15</sup> Such syntactic difficulties are regular enough that one has a hard time imagining that it is the gulf of many centuries between composition and commentary that is creating the problem. The text itself seems to enjoy the confusion it creates, from time to time, between the two categories. The most likely explanation for this phenomenon is to be found in the Bible itself. As James Kugel has recently outlined with such clarity, the angel of the Lord will frequently, in course of a theophany, fade into the person of God Himself. "The fact that [this confusions occurs] in text after text (even if, after a time, it became conventional)," Kugel explains, "suggests that there was something essential about this confusion. It represents the biblical authors' most realistic sense of the way things actually are. The spiritual is not something tidy and distinct, another order of being. Instead, it is perfectly capable of intruding into everyday reality, as if part of this world."<sup>16</sup>

But it is not only the case that angels bleed into God and vice versa; the same syntactic difficulties attend the sanctuary as well. As Carol Newsom has argued, these 13 Songs are organized around the important seventh composition.<sup>17</sup> And, as in the sixth and eighth songs that flank this centerpiece, the number seven is itself crucial to its compositional structure. This song opens with seven highly ornate exhortations to the angelic priesthood to commence their praise. Having done this, we move from voices of the angelic host to the sanctuary itself bursting into song.

/41/ [and along with the seven groups of angels who were exhorted to sing praise]<sup>18</sup> let all the [foundations of the holly] of holies praise, the uplifting pillars of the supremely exalted abode, and all the corners of its structure. Sin[g praise] /42/ to Go[d who is dr]eadful in

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<sup>15</sup> See in particular the commentary of Carol Newsom on the seventh Sabbath Song, *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*, 213-225. Note also her comment on p. 24: "Many occurrences of *elohim* in the Shiroth are ambiguous and might refer to God or to the angels [...]."

<sup>16</sup> James Kugel, *The God of Old* (New York: The Free Press, 2003) 36.

<sup>17</sup> *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*, 13-17.

<sup>18</sup> The use of *hallelu* as an imperative call to praise marks the beginning, middle and end of the seventh song (see 4Q403 1 i:30, 41 and ii:15). First the angels are called to offer praise, then temple itself and finally chariots of the inner sanctum.

power[, all you spirits of knowledge and light ] in order to [exa]lt together the splendidly shining firmament of [His] holy sanctuary. /43/ [Give praise to Hi]m, O god-[like] spirits, in order to pr[aise for ever and e]ver the firmament of the upper[m]ost heaven, all [its] b[eams ] and its walls, a[l]l its [for]m, the work of /44/ [its] struc[t]ure. The spir[it]s of holie[st] holiness, living god-like beings[, spir[it]s of [eter]nal holi[ness] above /45/ all the hol[y ones...<sup>19</sup>

By having the building break into song in this fashion, the difference between the angelic host and the building in which they serve has been dramatically eclipsed. But even more striking is the vacillation the text demonstrates over just what precisely is the object of praise. Whereas with the angels one is never in doubt that they are the ones who must offer praise, it is occasionally the case that the divinized temple not only offers praise, but becomes itself the object of praise. "Give praise to Him, O god-like spirits" our text exhorts, "so that you might confess/praise (le-hodot) [...] the firmament of the uppermost heaven, all its beams and walls."

Indeed the last sentence of the text we have cited – "The spirits of holiest holiness..." – is difficult to parse grammatically. How exactly is it related to its immediate antecedent, that is, the list of architectural features of the Temple? Newsom's commentary is revealing,

The expression ruhey qodesh qodashim may mean either "most holy spirits" [...] or spirits of the holy of holies." However the title is construed, these angelic spirits are in some way associated with the heavenly sanctuary which has just been described, either as attendants or as the animate spiritual substance of the heavenly temple itself (italics, mine).<sup>20</sup>

No matter which way we go with these two options we reach essentially the same destination. Either the temple is such an overpoweringly holy structure that angelic spirits literally ooze from its various surfaces or those surfaces themselves slip into the realm of divine being itself. Hebrew constructions such as elohim hayyim ("the living God") that one would normally

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<sup>19</sup> 4Q403 41-45.

<sup>20</sup> Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice, 233.

construe as divine titles now become attributes of the supernal temple ("a living pulsating godlike [building]").

Although the end of the seventh song is fragmentary, enough remains such that Newsom can conclude that the praise moves from the outer parts of the heavenly sanctuary to its inner sanctum, the *debir* and its furnishings. As such, the structure of this crucial middle song anticipates "to a certain extent the structure and content of the ninth through the thirteenth songs."<sup>21</sup> And not surprisingly, in these latter songs the structural edifice of the supernal temple again comes to life so as to voice its praise. Strikingly, Newsom notes, is the fact that the 13<sup>th</sup> and final Song appears to conclude with a systematic list of the contents and structures of the heavenly temple.

The fact that these Sabbath Songs seem to feel no embarrassment about ascribing divine qualities to the Temple provides a striking piece of data against which we can contextualize how the Samaritan version of the Pentateuch and Septuagint handle several texts in Exodus that speak of seeing God. We have already mentioned the command to visit Jerusalem during the three pilgrimage festivals in order to fulfill the obligation of "seeing the face of the Sovereign, YHWH." The Massoretes smoothed over this striking phrase by rendering "to see" in the passive "to be seen/ appear." The Samaritan found another way around the problem. Building on the common confusion of daleth and resh it read the line: "to see the presence of the Ark (aron in place of adon) of the Lord." Though generally dismissed by scholars as a secondary reading – no doubt correctly – it should not be dismissed as a window into early Biblical exegesis.<sup>22</sup> What this reading minimally demonstrates is that seeing the Ark was tantamount to seeing God. Maximally it is evidence that in the Second Temple period pieces of the furniture

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<sup>21</sup> Carol Newsom, Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition (HSS 27; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 9.

<sup>22</sup> The importance of this textual variant for the practices of Second Temple Judaism have already been noted by I. Knohl, "Post-Biblical Sectarianism and the Priestly Schools," Tarbiz 60 (1991) 140-41.

of the Temple were taken out of the building and displayed before the eyes of earnest pilgrims.<sup>23</sup>

Though the Septuagint anticipates what the Massoretes will do with this verse by rendering the verb "to see" in the passive form, in a couple of other places it replaces the difficult construction of "seeing God" with the notion of beholding the structure in which he dwells. Compare for example Exod 25:8 wherein Moses is told that the entire purpose of building the Tabernacle is so "that I may dwell among [the people Israel]." The Septuagint replaces the idiom of dwelling in favor of that of vision; build the sanctuary, Israel is exhorted, "so that I may be visible among you." Similarly in Exod 24:9-11 where the MT declares that Moses and the select group that ascended to the top of Mt Sinai "saw the God of Israel," the Septuagint introduces a rather significant qualification, "they saw the place where the God of Israel stood." The common denominator that binds all these examples together is that of seeing the sanctuary as a fit replacement for seeing the face of God.

## II. The Evidence of Post-Biblical Judaism

In Mishnah Hagigah 1.1 we have a piece of halakhah as to who must make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem,

All are subject to the command to appear [before the Lord] excepting a deaf-mute, an imbecile, a child, one of doubtful sex, one of double sex, women, slaves that have not been freed, a man that is lame or blind or sick or aged, and one that cannot go up [to Jerusalem] on his feet.

In the Tosephta we find a baraita that attempts to explain just how the various categories described herein are related to the Biblical text which states simply that every male must go up to Jerusalem to see the face of God. According to R. Yehudah "even the blind man [is exempt] because scripture states that '[every one of your males] must see [the face of God] (Exod 23:17).'"

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<sup>23</sup> See the argument of I. Knohl below.

The striking detail here, is the reading of ra'ah as a qal. This prompts the intervention of Rabbi who presumes that the verb should be read in the niphal and cites in his support I Sam 1:22 the only text in the Bible where the niphal reading is unambiguous in regard to the pilgrimage to the Temple.<sup>24</sup> This unit of the Tosephta comes to a close with the notice that the sages inclined the scales of judgment in favor of R. Yehudah's rendering. What is remarkable here, as Shlomoh Naeh takes considerable care to point out, is that there is no discussion of a dispute between the ketiv and qere; no invocation of the technical terms that are so familiar to this sort of discourse ha-im em la-massoret / ha-im em la-miqra? Rather the ambiguity of the consonantal text is the subject of dispute and R. Yehudah believes that the simplest reading – the qal – has the added advantage of providing a scriptural support for a piece of Mishnaic legislation. Unless Israel is obligated "to see God" how are we to understand the Mishnah's exemption of the blind? Certainly the blind were able "to appear" before God if that is what the Torah demanded.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to considering how the Biblical text is used in relationship to several other Rabbinic texts, Naeh has a very illuminating remark as to just what all of this might mean historically,

It is possible that the cause for the textual differences is not solely due to tikkune soferim but also rooted in historical practice. Perhaps what is seen here are two ancient customs or conceptualizations of the command to go up for pilgrimage and "see." According to one, the pilgrims entered the Temple building and receive the presence of the Shekinah; according to the other they were not authorized to enter the Temple proper but to bring a sacrifice and "appear" in the courtyard. A similar dispute regarding the participation of the gathered throng of pilgrims at the Temple liturgy during the festival existed between the

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<sup>24</sup> I am not following the text as printed but rather the reconstruction of S. Naeh, "Ha-im em la-massoret?" Tarbiz 61 (1992) 413.

<sup>25</sup> In addition to the discussion of Naeh, see the recent article by A. Shemesh ("The Holy Angels are in their Council': The Exclusion of Deformed Persons from Holy Places in Qumranic and Rabbinic Literature," Dead Sea Discoveries 4 (1997) 179-206) on these exemptions and their relation to law at Qumran.

Pharisee/Sages party and the various sects at the close of the Second Temple period (see Sussman and Knohl<sup>26</sup>). It is likely that this dispute was a longstanding one in as much as it reflects two of the most fundamental positions regarding Temple worship and its place in the life of the community. It is possible that the Talmudic terminology re'iyat panim and re'iyat qorban reflects these two variant conceptualizations.<sup>27</sup>

It is worth noting that the morphology of the MH vocable re'iyah derives from the qal stem. As a result, the expression re'iyat panim, "seeing the face" must be original and re'iyat qorban "appearing with a sacrifice" reflects a latter semantic extension of the term.

In a recent article, Israel Knohl has taken this idea of "seeing God" a step further. He begins with a citation of Mishna Kelim 1:8-9,

The court of the priests is more holy (than the court of the Israelites) for the Israelites cannot enter therein except to fulfill sacrificial obligations such as the laying on of hands, slaughter, and hand waving. The area between the porch and the altar is more holy (than the court of the priests) for no priest who is blemished or has unkempt hair can enter therein.

These boundaries are transgressed during the pilgrimage festivals. First of all, the temple vessels which normally belong solely to the inner sanctum move out to the courtyard and the people who generally are restricted to the outer court can now move into the more sacred area in order to view the vessels.

How do we know that the vessels were displayed in this fashion? Here things are a bit more ambiguous and require some development. According to Mishnah Hagigah 3.8, the question is asked: "How did they enter upon the cleansing of the temple court? They immersed the vessels that were in the temple and said to them: 'take care not to touch the table [or lamp] so as to render them unclean'." This Mishnah is quite unclear about just what is meant. The two talmuds however provides a plausible context. They declare that it was customary on

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<sup>26</sup> Sussman, "The History of the Halakhah and the Dead Sea Scrolls," Tarbiz 59 (1990) 65-68 and Knohl, "Post-Biblical Sectarianism," Tarbiz 60 (1991) 139-46.

<sup>27</sup> Naeh, 417.

festival days to bring the table out of the Temple into the courtyard and to display it to the pilgrims.<sup>28</sup>

As Knohl observes, this ritual is at variance with scriptural law. For according to Num 4:18-20 even the Levitical priests who had greater privileges than the laity to enter sacred space, put their lives at risk when they gazed upon the sacred furniture of the Tabernacle. Knohl's explanation of this problem is suggestive,

It seems to me that the Sages departed from convention and permitted the display of the temple furniture before the pilgrims so as to allow them to fulfill their obligation "to see the face." Or to put it another way, the presentation of these holy items before the large assembly created the experience of a public theophany. The Israelites who had longed for the Temple courts and asked "when may I come to see the face of God" went up to the temple at the pilgrimage feast and gazed upon the vessels of the Temple-service that were brought out of hiding. In this way their spiritual thirst was slaked and they fulfilled the commandment of the Torah that "three times a year each male must see the face of the Sovereign, the Lord, the God of Israel (Exod 34:23)."<sup>29</sup>

However we might wish to assess the historical problem as to whether the temple appurtenances were put on display or not, we can certainly conclude that one significant strand of Rabbinic literature assumes as much. And in doing so, these rabbinic texts involve themselves in a logical contradiction. On the one hand the furniture itself, owing to the power accorded it in Num 4:18-20, became in Rabbinic thought articles of considerable power. As Daniel Schwartz has argued, it seems that the midrash ascribed the power of the Israelite armies in Num 31:6 to Phineas' shrewd use of the Ark to overwhelm the enemy.<sup>30</sup> When the attacking Midianites fell upon Israel Phineas would display the Ark before them, and being unworthy of its sight, they were instantly slain. A similar understanding is found in the MT of I Sam 6:19, a

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<sup>28</sup> PT Hagigah 3.8 (79d) and BT Hagigah 26b.

<sup>29</sup> Knohl, 140-41.

<sup>30</sup> "Viewing the Holy Utensils (P. Ox V,840)," *NTS* 32 (1986) 155-56.

text that appears secondary and may reflect an attempt to bring the traditions of Num 4 into alignment with the care needed when taking the Ark into a public domain.<sup>31</sup> However that might be, the lesson is clear, the Ark is not just a symbol for God; in some very real sense it contains God and gazing indiscreetly upon it is the occasion for instant death.

Yet the other side of the equation ignores the dangers altogether, at least within the context of the religious festival. According to BT Yoma 54,

[A] R. Judah contrasted the following passages: "And the ends of the staves were seen" and it is written "but they could not be seen without" (I Kings 8:8) — how is that possible? — They could be observed, but not actually seen. Thus was it also taught: "And the ends of the staves were seen." One might have assumed that they did not protrude from their place. To teach us [the fact] Scripture says: "And the staves were so long." One might assume that they tore the curtain and showed forth; to teach us [the fact] Scripture says: "They could not be seen without" How then? They pressed forth and protruded as the two breasts of a woman, as it is said: "My beloved is unto me as a bag of myrrh, that lieth betwixt my breasts" (Song of Songs 1:13).

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

This remarkable text engages in the most radical form of anthropomorphism. In the first unit [A] the Ark of the Covenant is imagined as the veritable body of God that beckons the Israelite forward through the power of erotic attraction. Only the veil prevents a full frontal view of a radically feminized form of the deity. Having quickened these carnal desires, the veil is thrown

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<sup>31</sup> According to I Sam 6:19, when the Philistines had tired of holding the Ark, they sent it back with the indemnity penalty of the notorious "golden hemorrhoids." But when the Ark had made its way back to Beth-shemesh the local townsmen, according to the MT, made the mistake of gazing upon it. "[The Lord] struck at the men of Beth-shemesh," the text explains, "because they looked into the Ark of the Lord; He struck down seventy men among the people [and] fifty thousand men."

aside [B] so that the pilgrim might behold his God, here described not as an invisible being who sits upon the Ark ("enthroned above the Cherubim" in biblical parlance) but rather as one of the Cherubim themselves. God is, for the purposes of this text, this particular golden artifact. There is no danger in viewing the Godhead here; quite the contrary, this unveiling of the Godhead seems to be the central rite of the pilgrimage festival itself.

It is tempting to read this sugya of the Bavli in parallel with a tradition found in the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael.<sup>32</sup> In view of the command (Exod 20:23) not to make "gods of silver or gods of gold" to stand "beside the Lord," the Mekhilta moves in a surprising direction. One might expect that the normal invective against idols would be standard here. And indeed the Mekhilta begins its discussion of this verse with traditions precisely of this sort. But at the conclusion of its rather lengthy discussion of this verse, the Mekhilta abruptly turns in another, quite surprising, direction. The reference to "gods of silver and gods of gold" is no longer understood in terms of idolatrous images pure and simple. It now refers to aberrant means of producing the Cherubim. Lest you think that you can fashion them out of silver in place of gold, the Torah declares: "don't make beside me gods of silver." Moreover, should you entertain the idea of making four cherubim instead of two then you would commit the sin of making "gods of gold." The turn taken by the Mekhilta regarding the last phrase of the verse is most striking. It reads,

""[gods of gold] do not make for yourselves.' This is written so that you would not think that because the Torah has given permission to make them for the Temple so I will make them for the synagogues and houses of study. Accordingly, the Torah teaches: "do not make [these gods of gold] for yourselves."

Now admittedly in my translation, I have reconstructed in brackets the object of the verb "to make" in accord with the only possible antecedent provided by the Biblical text – elohe zahav. One could, however, read the text as Rashi does and supply a different object – the Cherubim --

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<sup>32</sup> See the edition of H. S. Horovitz, p. 241.

so that there is no mistaking what is intended. I sincerely doubt whether the author of our unit in the Mekhilta would reprove Rashi for this explanatory gloss. For certainly "elohe zahav" does not mean "God conceived of as a piece of gold;" that would be idolatry pure and simple. But it is striking, just the same, that the Mekhilta is not as worried as Rashi seems to be about the ambiguity of the antecedent. Indeed this whole unit of the Mekhilta only works if we presume that the line between "a portion of God's being represented in golden form" and a "god of gold" is a rather fine one.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, I see no reason why one could not gloss the turn taken by the Mekhilta this way: "a golden object that partakes of the divine essence do not make for yourselves [i.e. to put in your synagogues]." The usage here is a prosaic adaptation of the more poetic language of the Sabbath Songs that did not shrink from describing the supernal temple as elohim hayyim. This text comes tantalizingly close to making explicit what was implied by Bavli Yoma. The Cherubim that have been placed in the holy of holies are, in some real sense, representations of God's true presence in the temple. The historian of religion will wish to ask how different this is from the Mesopotamian practice of marking the divinity of temple furniture with the DINGIR-sign? Or, for that matter, the words of the Psalmist who exclaimed when gazing upon the architecture of Jerusalem: "this is God!"<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps most striking of all the examples I have found is a tradition found in the Midrash on Proverbs. Here the Israelite, in terms very similar to Philo's aphorism, is defined as the individual who gazes upon the face of God.

The Queen of Sheba brought circumcised and uncircumcised persons before Solomon. They were of similar appearance, height, and dress. She said to him, "Distinguish for me the circumcised from the uncircumcised." Immediately Solomon gestured to the high priest and

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<sup>33</sup> It offers an intriguing parallel, perhaps, to the Kuzari's somewhat apologetic reading of the sin of the golden calf. Israel, he argued, was expecting Moses to bring down some sort of image for veneration. Israel's problem was not venerating a material thing; it was guessing wrong at the divinely approved form.

<sup>34</sup> Strikingly, not even John Calvin – that Genevan reformist who could not bear the statues and images of the Catholic church – disapproved of this sentiment in the Old Testament. In his commentary on Psalm 24 he gladly approves such forms of piety as appropriate to their respective age.

he opened the Ark of the Covenant. Those who were circumcised bent over half-way but no more so that their faces might be filled with the radiance of the Shekinah. The uncircumcised promptly fell to the ground upon their faces. Solomon said to her, the former ones are the circumcised and the latter are the uncircumcised. She said how do you know this? He said to her, "Is it not written about Balaam, 'he who gazes upon the sight of the Almighty, [fallen (partly over) but with eyes unveiled]?' (Num 24:4). Had he fallen completely to the ground, he would not have seen anything."<sup>35</sup>

How then are we to understand this radical disjuncture between a high-charged Ark of the Covenant that spells immediate death for anyone who would cast eyes upon it and the definition of an Israelite as one who can gaze directly at its center? Certainly Knohl's suggestion is appropriate here, that during the pilgrimages, all Israel is temporarily raised to the status of priest so that they can behold the sacred furniture. Evidently, however, not all Second Temple circles were of one mind on this matter. As Knohl observes, Talmudic tradition has it that the Sadducees and Boethusians opposed the display of temple furniture before the laity. Confirmation of the historical accuracy of a charge such as this can be found in the Temple Scroll that emphatically rules out the ritual act of carrying the Table of Presence from its home within the Temple-building itself.<sup>36</sup>

Additional confirmation of the practice of displaying the furniture can be gathered from a puzzling piece of tradition found in Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840. The text reads,

2.1 And having taken them he brought them into the place of purification and was walking in the temple. 2.2 And having approached, a certain Pharisee, a chief priest, whose name was Levi, joined them and said to the Savior: Who gave you permission to enter this place of purification and to see these holy vessels, when you have not washed yourself, nor have your disciples surely bathed their feet? 2.3 But

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<sup>35</sup> Midrash Mishle, ed. B. Visotsky (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1990) 6.

<sup>36</sup> Within a list of the Temple appurtenances we read: "[...the altar of] incense; but the table [...] shall not depart from the Temple. And its bowls shall be of pure gold."

you, in a defiled state, have entered this temple, which is a pure place that no one enters nor dares to view these holy vessels without having first washed themselves and changed their clothes.

2.4 And immediately the Savior stopped, and standing with his disciples answered: Are you then pure in your present state here in the temple? 2.5 And he replied to him: I am pure, for I have washed myself in the pool of David, and having descended by one staircase I came up by another; 2.6 and I have put on white and pure clothes, and only then did I come and lay eyes on these holy vessels.

2.7 The Savior answered him saying: Woe unto you, O blind ones...<sup>37</sup>

As Daniel Schwartz has argued the key point in this text is the claim that only persons of sufficient purity should be allowed to enter the Temple precincts to view the sacred vessels. Like Knohl, Schwartz is inclined to see this argument as to who may view the vessels and under what sort of conditions as rooted in and inner-Jewish dispute over the display of the Temple vessels to the laity. "On this background," Schwartz concludes, "it is not unreasonable to assume that [the] practice associated with festive celebrations in the Temple, the exhibition of Temple utensils before the crowds of pilgrims, should be understood in [this] way: it was an attempt [by the Pharisees] to let the public share in what priests had claimed as their own prerogatives."<sup>38</sup> The fact that Jesus desires to see the temple vessels in this text leads Schwartz

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<sup>37</sup> For the text and translation, see F. Bovon, "Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840, Fragment of a Lost Gospel, Witness of an Early Christian Controversy over Purity," *IBL* 119 (2000) 705-728. Bovon makes a very strong case that the text should not be read as a window into the world of first century Palestine and hence another piece of information relevant to the quest for the historical Jesus. All of the pieces of this text fit better within the realm of emerging 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century church. Though I would agree, in the main, with his assessment that every detail in the text that looks Jewish is better understood in the framework of early Christianity there is one piece of data which just does not work: the presumption that gazing on the sanctuary vessels is a holy act (p. 720). There is simply no Christian liturgical counterpart that even remotely parallels it. In private conversation, Professor Bovon confirmed that parallels he adduced are not quite satisfactory.

<sup>38</sup> "Viewing the Holy Utensils (P. Ox V,840)," *NTS* 32 (1986) 156.

to the conclusion that we have before us "another rare instance of Jesus' participation in Pharisaic criticism of the same overemphasis on the part of the priests."<sup>39</sup>

But from the perspective that I have adopted in this essay, the most interesting part of this article derives from his discussion of Josephus. For here we have a writer who claims a very good priestly pedigree. When writing about the entrance of Pompey into the Temple in 63 B.C.E, Schwartz observes that Josephus

lays special emphasis on the fact that he saw the Temple utensils; indeed, he states that "of all the calamities of that time none so deeply affected the nation as the exposure to alien eyes of the Holy Place, hitherto screened from view" (B.J. 1.7.6 § 152). Here, indeed, he is speaking of the Sanctuary or the Holy of Holies; nevertheless, the emphasis on sight rather than entry is remarkable. This point is further developed with specific reference to the holy utensils, in the parallel account in Antiq. 14.4.4 71-72 (although this development is counterbalanced by some new compliments for Pompey): "And not light was the sin committed against the sanctuary, which before that time had never been entered or seen. For Pompey and not a few of his men went into it and saw what it was unlawful for any but the high priests to see. But though the golden table was there and the sacred lampstand and the libation vessels..."<sup>40</sup>

Nor indeed is this the only occurrence of this remarkable point of emphasis. In some half-dozen examples one can point to a similar interest in gazing upon the temple and its furniture as over against an interest in physical entry or even touch.

The emphasis that Josephus puts on "seeing" can be set in best perspective through the evidence of Jewish coinage from the early second century, C.E. In a recent article on the typology of the coins that hail from the revolt of Bar Kokhba, Dan Barag writes,

In a series of large and important silver coins, Bar Kokhba stamped the image of a Temple-façade along with the words, "Jerusalem" or "Shimon." On the reverse side he stamped an

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<sup>39</sup> "Viewing the Holy Utensils," 157.

<sup>40</sup> "Viewing the Holy Utensils," 154.

image of a lulav and etrog along with the words, "Year one of the redemption of Israel." [...] The Temple that appears on these coins [...] has four pillars. In the middle of the façade is an object whose identity remains a riddle. It is obvious that this object or symbol possessed tremendous significance, for in contemporary coins of this period we frequently find images of the Temple in whose center is stationed a god or goddess.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed we can be even a bit more emphatic here. The god or goddess so depicted is the patron of the Temple in question and as such was represented in those Temples by his or her statue. As Price and Trell remark, in their book on the subject, the statue of the god was normally out of view of the worshipers and so the coins do not reflect what one would have seen if one went to the respective cities and compared the image on the face of the coin to the Temple façade itself. Indeed the artist often has to widen "the space between the central columns [...] to accommodate the image which usually identifies the shrine with no possible ambiguity."<sup>42</sup> So, one purpose of bringing the statue forward was to signify just whose town this coin hailed from and under which divine auspices it drew its authority. But equally important, Price and Trell observe, is the manner by which this identification of god and Temple takes place – the presentation of the god at the door of the Temple "would suggest the age old custom of [an] epiphany, a god appearing in person before his worshipers."<sup>43</sup>

Barag concludes that the symbolism of the Bar-Kokhba coins is unambiguous: the Table between the two columns on the front side of the coin "symbolizes the renewal of the liturgy of regular Temple-service: 'You shall the bread of presence upon the Table before me on a regular basis' (Exod 25:30, cf. Lev 25:8) and the lulav and etrog on the reverse side of the coin represent the aspiration to renew the pilgrimage festivals, and in particular, that of Sukkot."<sup>44</sup> In a

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<sup>41</sup> Barag, "The Table of the Bread of Presence and the Façade of the Temple upon the Coins of the Bar Kokhba War," *Qadmoniot* 20 (1987) 22.

<sup>42</sup> M. Price and B. Trell, *Coins and their Cities: Architecture on the Ancient Coins of Greece, Rome, and Palestine* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977) 19.

<sup>43</sup> *Coins and their Cities*, 19.

<sup>44</sup> Barag, "The Table of the Bread of Presence," 24.

subsequent exchange of letters Asher Grossberg mentions the Talmudic interpretations of the Mishnah in Hagigah 3:1 as well as the supporting evidence of P. Oxyr. 840.<sup>45</sup> In Grossberg's opinion the two sides of the coins represent a single reality. The Table was paired with the lulav and ethrog because the Table was that piece of Tabernacle furniture that was displayed before pilgrims during the feast of Sukkot. These coins denote a longing to fulfill the commandment of seeing the presence of God during Sukkot. In Barag's opinion, however, the Talmudic evidence that Grossberg cites (a set of texts that overlap with those cited by I. Knohl) is purely aggadic in character and bears no historical weight. Although Barag correctly notes that the mishnah in Hagigah is by no means a clear reference to the practice of showing the table to pilgrims (indeed Albeck saw the text in a much more pedestrian fashion: the warnings were issued solely to priests attending to the pieces of furniture and had nothing to do with the festivals proper), it is hard to deny the fact that the coins have placed the Table exactly where statues of the god would go in nearly all of the parallel coins found in pagan contexts.<sup>46</sup> Also the combination of evidence from P. Oxyr 840, the Temple Scroll, as well as more circumstantial evidence such as the Samaritan version of Exod 23:17, the importance the LXX puts on seeing the Tabernacle as a means of seeing God, and the witness of Josephus to the importance of seeing the appurtenances of the Temple. Though Josephus does not, as Barag observes, mention the ritual of displaying the furniture on festivals, he does remark that the curtains of

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<sup>45</sup> Asher Grossberg, *Qadmoniot* 21 (1988) 81-82.

<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting as well that Josephus, in his description of the Tabernacle, remarks that the veils could be pulled aside on festival so that they would not obstruct the view. As the Biblical text itself offers no reason to suggest such things, many historians have cited this passage as an indication that viewing the temple furniture was a well-known custom of the Second Temple period. The text in question (JA 3. 124-25, 127-128) reads: "The tabernacle was covered with curtains woven of fine linen, in which the hues of purple and blue and crimson were blended. Of these the first (veil – *paroket*) measured ten cubits either way and was spread over the pillars which divided the temple and screened off the sanctuary; this it was which rendered the latter invisible to the eyes of any. [...] A second (veil – *masak*), corresponding to the first in dimensions, texture and hue, enveloped the five pillars that stood at the entrance, supported by rings at the corner of each pillar, it hung from the top to the middle of the pillar; the rest of the space was left as a passage for the priests entering beneath it. Above this was another covering of linen, of the same dimensions, which was drawn by cords to either side, the rings serving alike for curtain and cord, so that it could either be outspread or rolled together and stowed into a corner, in order that it should not intercept the view above all on the great days."

the Tabernacle were constructed in such a way that they could be pulled back so that an unobstructed view would result. Since the Torah gives no hint of such a thing, where would Josephus have derived such a detail if not from some sort of contemporary practice? At the very least – however we might sort out the historicity of the Talmudic sources about the display of Tabernacle furniture – I think it would be fair to say that the image of the Table of Presence at the door of the Temple indicates for the person who struck this coin that this piece of furniture bore some resemblance to the identity of the God who dwelled therein. If we set this coin next to the Rabbinic evidence we can at least say that a goodly number of Rabbinic materials imagine that the furniture shares enough of the divine presence such that seeing it constitutes a fulfillment of the command, "to see the face of God."

### III. The New Testament and Beyond

This third section of my essay will promise more than it can deliver. To treat the subject of seeing God in the NT and early Christianity would take a multivolume work. And though my own work on these sources is still in its infancy, I do see a framework emerging around which I plan to organize these sources. What I would like to focus on is the question how seeing God in the person Jesus Christ is explained in terms of the tabernacle traditions. In brief, to what degree was Jesus like the Temple?

The only proper place to begin with these qualifications in view is John 1:14. "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth." The key clause here, as one might presume, is the phrase, "he dwelt among us" as the Gk verb skenoō is clearly borrowed from the story of the Tabernacle in Exodus and served to translate the Hebrew word shakan/mishkan. As Raymond Brown remarks, "we are being told that the flesh of Jesus Christ is the new localization of God's presence on earth, and that Jesus is the replacement of the ancient Tabernacle."<sup>47</sup> And as such

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<sup>47</sup> The Gospel According to John, I-XII (AB 29) 33.

this idea nicely dovetails with another major feature of this Gospel, that is that Jesus is "the replacement of the Temple (2:19-22)," which Brown adds, is simply "a variation of the same theme."

Brown also notes the very important join between the "tenting" of the Word and its becoming visible to the naked eye. "In the OT," he observes, "the glory of God (Heb. kabod; Gr. doxa) implies a visible and powerful manifestation of God to men." Then, having reviewed several Biblical texts that describe the appearance of God at the site of a Temple he concludes that "it is quite appropriate that, after the description of how the Word set up a Tabernacle among men in the flesh of Jesus, the prologue should mention that his glory became visible."<sup>48</sup>

Brown's observation, however, was made solely on the basis of the Exodus narrative and as such grounds the theology of the prologue in a singular act, the moment when the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle on the day of its completion. What we have shown in this essay is that this momentous theophany was routinized in the daily life of the cult. It was not only the Israelites of Moses' day who saw God as he entered his newly dedicated Tabernacle, every Israelite could see God as they ascended to the Temple to participate in the rite of the furniture.<sup>49</sup> What the post-biblical Jewish materials we have examined provide is a more phenomenological, or even cultic, background against which we can set John's own theology of a visible and tabernacle-like presence of the logos.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Gospel according to John, 34.

<sup>49</sup> No study of the prologue to John's Gospel and Jewish Tabernacle/Temple traditions has evidenced any knowledge of the role the temple furniture played in Jewish sources. Compare, for example, the recent and exhaustive survey of C. Koester, The Dwelling of God. The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and then the New Testament (CBQMS 22; Washington: CBA, 1989) 100-115.

<sup>50</sup> One should also compare the dramatic action, in the book of Revelation (11:15-19), that attends the blowing of the seventh and final trumpet; the inauguration of the Kingdom has arrived: "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever.' Then the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, singing, 'We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and all who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who

As is well known, the theme of the God being visible to the eye was extremely important to Philo. One of his favorite definitions of the Jewish people is that of a people who have the unique gift of being able to see God.<sup>51</sup> So salient was this definition for Philo, that G. Delling writes at the conclusion of his own study that "whoever says 'Israel' says 'seeing God.' The etymology of the name Israel opens the possibility for Philo to express that which is specific of the Jewish religion in a siglum that points to the special relationship between the one God and the Jewish people. For him it attests the uniqueness of the revelation of God and with it the uniqueness of knowing, of seeing God, that it accords."<sup>52</sup> What is perhaps worthy of further study is how Philo relates this ability to see God, to the revelation of God within the Temple. One of Philo's proof texts for this concept derives from Exod 24:11, a text in which the Israelites who have ascended the heights of mount Sinai are said to see God amid their festal meal.<sup>53</sup> But more to our point is how Philo relates the logos to the Tabernacle structure,

What is the meaning of the words, "Thou shalt set apart the veil between the Holy of Holies" (Exod 26:33b)? I have said that the simple holy (parts of the tabernacle) are classified with the sense-perceptible heaven, whereas the inner (parts), which are called the holy of Holies (are classified) with the intelligible world. The incorporeal world is set off and separated from the visible one by the mediating Logos as by a veil. But may it not be that this Logos is the tetrad, through which the corporeal solid comes into being? For this is classified with the invisible intelligible things while the other (parts of the tabernacle) is divided into three

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destroy the earth.' Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightening, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail."

<sup>51</sup> See G. Delling, "The 'One who Sees God' in Philo," in Nourished with Peaces: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984) 27-41.

<sup>52</sup> "One who Sees God," 41.

<sup>53</sup> The text in question (Confusion of Tongues 56) reads: "For we are the 'race of the Chosen ones of that Israel,' who sees God, 'and there is none amongst us of discordant voice'" (Exod 24:11), that so the whole world, which is the instrument of the All may be filled with the sweet melody of its undiscording harmonies." Strikingly, the notion of "seeing God" only works in light of the MT; the verb in the LXX is a passive. Perhaps Philo has in mind both verses 10 and 11, for in verse 10 the LXX declares that the elders could see the spot wherein God dwells, i.e. they could contemplate the temple and/or its furniture but not God himself.

and is connected with sense-perceptible things, so that there is between them something (at once invisible and visible of substance (*italics, mine*)).<sup>54</sup>

This remarkable text notes that the Tabernacle neatly divides what is perceptible to the senses (the three pieces of furniture that sit in the "holy") from what is beyond all vision (i.e. the being of God himself who resides in the holy of holies). Upon four pillars (the tetrad) rests a veil that represents the logos and as such the logos mediates in visible form what remains invisible to the naked eye. This veil would have been seen every day by the priests appointed to tend the menorah and the incense altar. Can we extrapolate from this text that Philo's definition of Israel as a nation that can see God includes the notion that through the cult the logos has become a mediator in visual form of the Holy One of Israel who is beyond all human knowledge?<sup>55</sup>

The Johannine theme that God became visible in flesh of Jesus had an extraordinary nachleben in early Christianity. For Irenaeus, the primary reason for God becoming man was that the world could see him (see Against Heresies IV.20). For to see God was to be drawn into the divine realm. Tertullian reaches the same destination but via a slightly different path.<sup>56</sup> He was bothered by the fact that God regularly makes himself visible to Israel in the Old Testament yet says at the same time that anyone who gazes upon his face will die (Exod 33:20). How can these be reconciled? For Tertullian, the Gospel of John provides the key, for while it affirms that no human being has seen the Father (John 1:18), it concedes that human beings can see the Word (1:14). When one reads, then, in the Old Testament of appearances of God to various holy individuals, these are to be understood as nothing other than appearances of the Word of God prior to his full incarnation. Like Irenaeus, the purpose of the incarnation is to make God visible to human eyes.

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<sup>54</sup> Quaes Exod 2.94.

<sup>55</sup> Compare the lengthy treatment of the concept in J. Z. Smith's essay, "The Prayer of Joseph," found in Map is Not Territory (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1978) 37-39.

<sup>56</sup> Against Praxeas, 14-16.

Perhaps even more emphatic about this theme was Gregory of Nyssa. He writes that "if everyone had the ability to come, as Moses did, inside the cloud, where Moses saw what may not be seen, or to be raised above three heavens as Paul was and to be instructed in Paradise about ineffable things that lie above reason, or to be taken up in fire to the ethereal region, as zealous Elijah was, and not be weighed down by the body's baggage, or to see on the throne of glory, as Ezekiel and Isaiah did, the one who is raised above the Cherubim and glorified by the Seraphim – then surely if all were like this, there would be no need for the appearance of our God in flesh."<sup>57</sup> Why then did Jesus become flesh according to John 1:14? For Nyssa the answer resides in what Jewish thought would call hiddardarut ha-olam. Because of the overall weakness of the human race at this time, no one could any longer see as Moses saw. Therefore, like a physician matching his cure to the infirmity of the patient, God took dramatic measures and became visible in human flesh.

There is one more twist in the story though that is worth attending to. If Jesus inhabits flesh the way God will inhabit the Temple, just how might we understand the relationship of the Godhead to the building in which it rests. Is the relationship an intrinsic one? By this I mean: is the entire body of Jesus, in all its carnality, divinized by this indwelling? Or to use the Jewish metaphors we have followed: Is the body of Jesus like the temple walls in the Sabbath Songs that are so infused with the divine energies that they come to life (and are called elohim hayyim) during moments of angelic praise? or like the Table of Presence that is presented before the pilgrims in order to fulfill the obligation to see God, or the veil that separates the visible portions of the temple from the invisible? All of these Jewish metaphors bespeak an intrinsic relation in as much as it is not possible to divide or separate fully the being of God from the objects he inhabits.

The other option is to consider the relationship of the Word to Jesus in a more extrinsic in nature. The carnal flesh of Jesus, on this view, is a dispensable vehicle through which the

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<sup>57</sup> To Theophilus, Against the Apollinarians. For the text see F. Mueller, ed. *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* III.1 (Leiden: Brill, 1958) 123-24.

divine medicine has been administered and as such can and indeed must be ignored by spiritual adept in order to attend to true source of divinity here, namely the logos that resides within? This question, of course, is not idle matter; the proper way of rendering John 1:14 became one of the major forks in the road for early Christianity.<sup>58</sup>

For St. Athanasius (4<sup>th</sup> century) there was only one answer to that question: the flesh of Jesus participates in the divinity of the indwelling logos (what later Christian thought would term, the communication of properties [communicatio idiomatum]). The manner by which Athanasius arrives at this conclusion depends on a construal of the Biblical temple as a structure that participates in the life of the God who inhabits it. In this document Athanasius is concerned about the readiness of the Arians "to divide" the person of Christ into two, his human side and his divine side. But to do so, Athanasius claims would be idolatrous for when Christians prostrate themselves before Jesus they do so before the whole person, flesh and body. If the two are divisible then the human act of venerating the person Jesus results in the worship of a creature. "And we do not worship a creature," Athanasius declares. "And neither do we divide the body from the Word and worship it by itself; nor when we wish to worship the Word do we set Him far apart from the flesh, but knowing, as we said above, that 'the Word was made flesh' (John 1:14) we recognize Him as God also, after having come in the flesh." And how can an argument for this point be derived from scripture? By attending to the practice of the Jewish pilgrimage feasts.

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<sup>58</sup> On the one side of the fence was the docetic option that claimed that the word did not so much become flesh as it was made manifest in the flesh. For the problem of rendering the Greek see G. Richter, "Die Fleischwerdung des Logos im Johannesevangelium," Novum Testamentum 13 (1971) 81-126 and 14 (1972) 257-76 (who argues 1:14 declares that word truly became flesh) and the response of K. Berger, "Zu 'das Wort ward Fleisch' Joh. 1:14a," Novum Testamentum 16 (1974) 161-66. For Berger, the meaning of the Greek is the opposite of what Richter maintains: "Erscheinen in einer Gestalt, ohne damit diese zu 'werden.'" Strikingly, he compares this extrinsic connection of logos to flesh to the way God inhabits a Temple (p. 164): Das Erscheinen des Christus im Fleisch und das Wohnen unter/in der Gemeinde bedeutet also nicht, dass der Kyrios mit diesen Menschen identisch wird, sondern dass er in ihnen als in einem heiligen Tempel wohnt (so wie man es sonst vom Pneuma sagt)." This precise question, whether God appeared in the flesh or became that very flesh, was the subject of enormous disagreement in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century Christological controversies.

But we should like your piety to ask [the Arians] this question. When Israel was ordered to go up to Jerusalem to worship at the temple of the Lord, where the ark was, "and above it the Cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat" (Heb 9:5) did they do well or not? If they were in error, how is it that those who despised this law became liable for punishment? For it is written that "if a man make light of this command and not go up, he shall perish from among his people" (Num 9:13). But if they were correct in this practice and so proved themselves well-pleasing to God, then are not the Arians abominable and the most shameful of any heresy, even many times more worthy of destruction? For they approve the former people (the Jews) for the honor paid by them to the Temple, but they will not worship the Lord who is in the flesh as a God indwelling a temple. [...] And [the Jews] did not, when they saw the temple of stones, suppose that the Lord who spoke in the temple was a creature; nor did they set the Temple at nought and retire far off to worship. But they came to it according to the Law, and worshipped the God who uttered His oracles from the Temple. Since this was so, how can it be other than right to worship the body of the Lord, all-holy and all-reverend as it is, announced by the Holy Spirit and made the vestment of the Word. [...] Therefore, he that dishonors the Temple dishonors the Lord in the Temple; and he that separates the Word from the Body sets at nought the grace given to us in Him.<sup>59</sup>

Athanasius's point is crystal clear. Just as the Jews had complete justification in prostrating themselves before a building of stone and not dividing the God from the house in which he dwelt – for though they knew God was not limited to the stones nor the furniture at the same time they use that limitation as license for not going up to Jerusalem – so the Christian has complete justification in prostrating himself before Jesus and not dividing the indwelling God from the flesh that contains him.

Given the importance of Athanasius in the church one might have expected that this "temple-theology" would have had a long afterlife itself. But in fact it ends with Athanasius

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<sup>59</sup> Ad Adelphium 7-8. PG 26, 1080-82.

himself. This is because of what happens within the school of Antiochene Christianity. There, already with the figure of Theodore of Mopsuestia, it is propounded that God abandons Jesus at his passion and lets the man suffer on his own. Though the textual justification is grounded in a textually problematic verse from Hebrews (for this, see n. 61 below), the larger thematic argument comes from the metaphor of a temple. For though God can indwell a temple such that his presence infuses even the furniture and masonry, He can also depart from a temple and go into exile.<sup>60</sup> Pursuing this model to its logical end, Theodore, and later most notoriously Nestorius (early 5<sup>th</sup> century) argued that the indwelling of God in Jesus' body like a Temple is a wholly extrinsic affair. In some parts of the Gospel story we see only the weak human body that Jesus inhabits, in others the deity bursts on to the scene. At the crucifixion, God literally departs from his temple and leaves the man Jesus to die on his own.<sup>61</sup> Proper Gospel interpretation requires the ability to divide the human figure from the divine being who indwells him.

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<sup>60</sup>See the discussion of Theodore in his commentary on the Nicene Creed (Homily VI, section 6). Throughout this text he distinguishes what happened to the man Jesus – here described as the material framework of the temple – in contrast to God who resided within him – here understood like the glory of the Lord that sits atop the ark and is free to come and go as it pleases. "It is not Divine nature that received death, but it is clear that it was that man who was assumed as a temple to God the Word which was dissolved and then raised by the one who had assumed it. And after the Crucifixion it was not Divine nature that was raised but the temple which was assumed, which rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and sat at the right hand of God; nor is it to Divine nature – the cause of everything—that it was given that every one should worship it and every knee should bow, but worship was granted to the form of a servant which did not in its nature possess (the right to be worshipped). While all these things are clearly and obviously said of human nature he referred them successively to Divine nature so that his sentence might be strengthened and be acceptable to hearers. Indeed, since it is above human nature that it should be worshipped by all, it is with justice that all this has been said as of one, so that the belief in a close union between the natures might be strengthened, because he clearly showed that the one who was assumed did not receive all this great honor except from the Divine nature which assumed Him and dwelt in Him." For photographs of the Syriac original see R. Tonneau, *Les homélis catéchétiques de Théodore de Mopsueste* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1949) 140-43.

<sup>61</sup>Theodore grounded this remarkable assertion in a textual variant of Hebrews 2:9. "And in order to teach us why He suffered and became 'a little lower [than the angels]' he said: 'Apart from God [in place of, 'by the grace of God'] He tasted death for every man.' In this he shows that Divine nature willed that He should taste death for the benefit of every man, and also that the Godhead was separated from the one who was suffering in the trial of death, because it was impossible for Him to taste the trial of death if (the Godhead) were not cautiously remote from Him."

In the aftermath of the Nestorian controversy we see several things: the rejection of the Temple metaphor as a means of understanding the incarnation (see Leo the Great, Sermon 23<sup>62</sup>) and its transferal to the person of the Virgin Mary (Leo the Great, Sermon 22.2<sup>63</sup>) for with Mary the extrinsic element of the Temple metaphor is altogether apt and fit. She does not become God but she does "house" God in the most intimate way imaginable. Here, the extrinsic manner of relating God to Temple is put to good use. In late Byzantine hymns to Mary the Tabernacle/Temple imagery reaches new heights.<sup>64</sup> The cult of Mary in the medieval period is greatly indebted to this development.

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<sup>62</sup>Leo the Great, Sermon 23.1 [3.1]: "For this wondrous child-bearing of the holy Virgin produced in her offspring one person which was truly human and truly Divine, because neither substance so retained their properties that there could be any division of persons in them; nor was the creature taken into partnership with its Creator in such a way that the One was the in-dweller, and the other the dwelling (nec sic creatura in societatem sui Creatoris est assumpta, ut ille habitator, et illa esset habitaculum; sed ita ut naturae alteri altera misceretur); but so that the one nature was blended with the other. And although the nature which is taken is one, and that which takes is another, yet these two diverse natures come together into such close union that it is one and the same Son who says both that, as true Man, 'He is less than the Father,' and that as true God 'He is equal with the Father.'" For Leo it is crucial that there be no division between God and man in the person of Jesus Christ. As a result the temple-metaphor as deployed by the Antiochene school is allowed no place at the table. In Leo's mind, Nestorius had effectively divided the in-dweller (God the Son) from the dwelling (Jesus as man) and hence ruled out any direct comparison of Jesus to the temple. For the Latin original see Léon le Grand, *Sermons* (SC 22 [2<sup>nd</sup> edition]; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1964) 94-99. The note appended by Dom René Dolle the editor of the text is worth citing (p. 97, n. 3): "C'était là, en effet, une expression employée par Nestorius pour caractériser l'union du Verbe divin avec l'homme Jésus. Dans une lettre à S. Cyrille, il écrivait: <<Il est exact et conforme à la tradition évangélique, d'affirmer que le corps du Christ est le temple de la divinité >> (PG 77, 49), texte qui pouvait certes s'entendre dans un sens orthodoxe mais qui prenait un sens très particulier dans le contexte de pensée nestorienne; par ailleurs le XI<sup>e</sup> Anathématisme de saint Cyrille s'exprimait ainsi: <<Quiconque ne confesse pas que la chair du Seigneur donne la vie et qu'elle est la propre chair du Logos divin, mais prétend qu'elle appartient à un autre que lui, qui ne lui est uni que par la dignité et qui a servi de demeure à la divinité..."

<sup>63</sup>Leo the Great, Sermon 22.2, "For the uncorrupt nature of Him that was born had to guard the primal virginity of the Mother, and the infused power of the Divine Spirit had to preserve in spotlessness and holiness that sanctuary which He had chosen for Himself: that Spirit (I say) who had determined to raise the fallen, to restore the broken, and by overcoming the allurements of the flesh to bestow on us in abundant measure the power of chastity: in order that the virginity which in others cannot be retained in child-bearing, might be attained by them at their second birth." For the Latin, see Léon le Grand, *SC* 22, 80-81.

<sup>64</sup>The florid use of temple imagery to fill out the figure of Mary is nicely illustrated in the collection (7<sup>th</sup> century and later) of Patristic homilies on the feast of the Dormition of Mary assembled by B. Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998). What had once been standard predications of Christ (see the text of Athanasius above) now become standard for the figure of the Virgin.

The other direction that will be taken recalls the words used by the Septuagint translator wherein Moses and the elders of Israel ascend mount Sinai so as to see "the place where the God of Israel stood." The father of negative theology, St. Denys the Areopogite, made this the centerpiece of his mystical theology and as such it became the foundation of much mystical theology. The reader will note how dependent Dionysius is on the Septuagintal rendering of Exod 24:10-11 that we discussed earlier. On this note I will close,

It is not for nothing that the blessed Moses is commanded to submit first to purification and then to be separated from those who have not undergone this (Exod 24:15ff). When every purification is complete (his forty days of fasting) he hears the many-voiced trumpets (Exod 20:18). He sees the many lights, pure and with rays streaming abundantly (ibidem). Then, standing apart from the crowds and accompanied by chosen priests, he pushes ahead to the summit of the divine ascents (25:1ff). And yet he does not meet God Himself, but contemplates, not Him Who is invisible, but rather where He stands (Exod 24:9-11 [LXX] and Exod 25:1ff). This means, I presume, that the holiest and highest of things perceived with the eye of the body or the mind are but the rationale which presupposes all that lies below the Transcendent One. Through them (i.e. the physical appurtenances of the Tabernacle in Exod 25ff.), however, His unimaginable presence is shown, walking the heights of those holy places to which the mind at least can rise.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The Mystical Theology 1.3, translation taken from C. Luibheid [with P. Rorem], Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 136-37. For the Greek, see PG 3, 1021-23.