

RESURGENT MYTH: ON THE VITALITY OF THE WATCHERS
TRADITIONS IN THE NEAR EAST OF LATE ANTIQUITY

John C. Reeves

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

It was once considered uncontroversial for scholars to declare that the contents of the books which comprise modern editions of the Jewish Tanakh or Hebrew Bible were bereft of ‘myth,’ a largely suspect category of religious thought which functioned most often as a dismissive shorthand for ‘polytheism’ or ‘paganism.’ Some prominent modern scholars read this alleged absence of mythopoesis through a linguistic and even a racial lens, asserting that ‘the Semites’ (by which they meant ancient Hebrews and Arabs and contemporary Jews) lacked the fertile imagination or mental wherewithal to fashion a complex mythology.¹ During the course of the twentieth century, however, it became fashionable for scholars to extol what they perceived as the logical and moral superiority of a world-view that posited a transcendent monotheistic deity, one whose existence was supposedly revealed in the Bible. The Bible’s portrait of the heroic struggles of the proponents of this one true God against competing world-views which personalized and ‘fetishized’ the forces of nature and/or material objects (branded as ‘heathenism’ or ‘paganism’) was a testament to the inevitable triumph of rationalism over infantile obsessions with and subjection to delusive fantasies, base drives, and raw emotions.² A demythologized; i.e., depersonalized universe was viewed as a key contribution of biblical writers to the progressive evolution of human mentality and to the advent of

¹ The French orientalist Ernest Renan was expressing a widely held opinion when he intoned ‘the Semites never had a mythology’; englished from his *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques* (4th ed.; Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1863), 7; a pronouncement masterfully rebutted by Ignaz Goldziher, *Der Mythos bei den Hebräern und seine geschichtliche Entwicklung* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1876). See the chapters devoted to these two scholars in Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century* (trans. Arthur Goldhammer; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 51-81; 115-35. For more on Renan and his milieu, see Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science* (trans. Sonia Wichmann; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 91-123; Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 30-33.

² Yehezkel Kaufmann, “The Bible and Mythological Polytheism,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 70 (1951): 179-97; James Barr, “The Meaning of ‘Mythology’ in Relation to the Old Testament,” *Vetus Testamentum* 9 (1959): 1-10, esp. 7-10.

what were approvingly deemed ‘scientific’ or ‘philosophical’ modes of thinking.³ A supposed dearth of myth and debunking of superstitious fantasy were lauded as the chief contributions of biblical religiosity and the intellectual gift of Israel (primarily in its Christian guise) to the progress of western civilization.

Fortunately we rarely find chauvinistic sentiments of these sorts expressed in contemporary biblical scholarship. Thanks to the archaeological discoveries of the past two centuries, the fortuitous recovery and study of important manuscript evidence from wilderness caves, synagogue genizas, village cemeteries, urban garbage dumps, and modern libraries, and the careful employment of more sophisticated methods in the study of written texts and material evidence, we now know that the kinds of stark dichotomies which scholars uncritically assumed about or projected onto the religious life of ancient Israel and its surrounding cultures cannot be sustained. Those responsible for composing and transmitting the literature which comprises modern Bibles did not essentially differ in their world-views, institutions, or daily manner of living from the members of the various ‘pagan’ societies among whom and alongside whom they dwelt. The book known to us as ‘the Bible’ is in fact replete with the types of assumptions, characters, stories, and motifs which scholars customarily subsume under the label of ‘myth’: indeed, it would not be possible for a religion to express its basic understanding of the world and the human role within it in a meaningful way without making use of the structures and language of myth.⁴ Myth is an essential product of the religious enterprise inasmuch as its defining characteristic is its discursive attempt to establish that a particular social group’s distinctive activities, customs, beliefs, institutions, and practices are ones that are firmly rooted in what is being represented as the ‘natural’ order of things.⁵ One important example of a myth within the canon of Jewish scriptures is the story about the sexual exploitation of human women by divine beings in Genesis 6:1-4.

³ See the programmatic chapters by Henri and H. A. Groenewegen Frankfort in the influential anthology entitled *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago, 1946; repr., Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 3-27; 363-88.

⁴ ‘... [M]ythical language is the basic language of religion.’ This insightful observation belongs to Ithamar Gruenwald, “God the ‘Stone/Rock’: Myth, Idolatry, and Cultic Fetishism in Ancient Israel,” *Journal of Religion* 76 (1996): 430.

⁵ My understanding of how (and why) religions must construct and use myth is heavily indebted to the magisterial works of Bruce Lincoln, especially his *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) and his *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999). See also the brief remarks about myth made by Georges Dumézil as reported in Maurice Olender, *Race and Erudition* (trans. Jane Marie Todd; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 81.

Re-visioning the Sources of Genesis 1-9

The story of the angelic Watchers, a tale whose main episodes we know thanks to their repeated recountal in a variety of literary settings misleadingly designated apocryphal or ‘re-written Bible,’ is a myth that explains how the divinely created order – a world that is explicitly characterized as ‘good’ in the canonized creation account now found in Gen 1:1-2:4a – became infested with obvious flaws like deceit, homicidal violence, bloodshed, and moral corruption. It offers a very different explanation for the presence of these social disruptions of human society than what is advanced in the myth of the first human family (Gen 2:4b-4:16), a separate mythical cycle widely recognized as being originally independent of the seven-day creation account found in Gen 1:1-2:4a. Careful readers of the Bible recognize that the series of stories now found in Genesis 1-9 (which together with chapters 10 and 11 form what scholars term the Primeval History) was one that was artificially assembled from at least two older sequences of traditional tales, each of which can be convincingly distinguished on the basis of their characterization, imagery, linguistic styles, and particular interests. Historically scholars assign these two proposed source documents to the so-called Yahwistic (J) and Priestly (P) authors, usually differentiating the two by the way they refer to the deity as a character in their respective stories and by their allegedly different thematic concerns.⁶

For the purposes of the present essay, I have chosen to demarcate the different sources used in Genesis 1-9 by number (i.e., source 1; source 2; etc.) instead of letter in order to discourage their inadvertent contamination with ideas that are commonly associated by many critical scholars with supposed extracts from the J or P sources gathered from other places in the Hexateuch.⁷ Table 1 below provides my proposed chapter-and-verse breakdown of the first nine chapters of the biblical Book of Genesis (following the contents and arrangement of its Samaritan, Masoretic, Old Greek, and their respective daughter versions) into not two but three arguably more primitive sources, each of which can be read horizontally across the table as an independent and coherent narrative entity. I would argue that these three hypothetical sources supply the primary building blocks out of which the present textual form of Gen 1:1-9:29 was

⁶ The standard modern critical commentaries to Genesis – those by Dillmann, Gunkel, Skinner, Speiser, von Rad, and Westermann – differ in only minute details over how these sources are distributed.

⁷ The distinction between the J and P sources in Genesis 1-11 has achieved a quasi-canonical status in the critical literature. I do not dispute the very real differences which are certainly discernible between these sources, only the larger unproven presumptions with which scholars burden the labels ‘J’ and ‘P.’

constructed. I deem this initial analytical operation methodologically necessary because the results imply that the supposedly non-biblical myth of the Watchers – including many of the narrative elements long associated with its supposedly post-biblical ‘afterlife’ – implicitly governs and is thus presupposed by the present editorial structure of Genesis 1-11.

Table 1
Genesis 1:1-9:29

Source 1	1:1-2:4a			5:1-28, 30-32	<i>1 Enoch</i> 6-11? ⁸	a Flood story	9:1-17, 28-29
Source 2		2:4b-4:24 ⁹		5:29		a Flood story	9:18-27
Source 3?		[an Adam & Eve creation story w/o Eden and/or Cain & Abel?] ¹⁰	4:25-26? ¹¹	[generation of Enosh become idolators]	<i>Jub.</i> 4:15b; 5:1-10?	[a Flood story]	6:3? ¹² <i>Jub.</i> 10:1-14?

According to Source 1, the created order is totally good (Gen 1:31) and humans are god-like in appearance and form (so Gen 1:26-27; 5:2-3; 9:6). There is hence no narratological motivation or temptation for humans to decide to become ‘like the gods’ by eating the fruit of a prohibited Tree (as is found in Source 2). This implies that Source 1 lacked anything corresponding to the Garden of Eden story

⁸ Surviving in the final redaction of the Masoretic Text (and kindred versions) of Genesis in a thoroughly refracted form only as Gen 6:1-2, 4.

⁹ Both the Eden and the Cain and Abel episodes need not necessarily be represented here. Structurally they are the same story providing an answer to the same question; namely, how does ‘death’ enter the created order? Their combination and mutual adjustment in the final redaction of Genesis 3:1-4:24 reinforces this etiological motif, but also directs attention to the horrific crime of mortal bloodshed. For a detailed discussion, see John C. Reeves, “Some Explorations of the Intertwining of Bible and Qur’ān,” in *Bible and Qur’ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality* (ed. John C. Reeves; Atlanta/Leiden: Society of Biblical Literature/Brill, 2003), 43-60.

¹⁰ Examples of such in fact appear in *1 En.* 85:3-86:6; *4 Ezra* 3:4-11; CD 2:14-21.

¹¹ Gen 4:25-26 presently functions in the Masoretic Text (and kindred versions) of Genesis as an editorial bridge linking the tales about Cain and his line with the names associated with the Sethian line of human descendants. But in the formal absence of a Cain and Abel pericope, a more primitive form of these verses could have supplied a narrative prolegomenon to the invention of idolatry that is traditionally associated with the generation of Enosh.

¹² Gen 6:3 parallels *in function* the divine establishment of a natural lifespan motif in the *Atrahasis* and *Gilgamesh* epics, and thus would have originally appeared in proto-Genesis editions *after* – not *before* – the Flood. Its isolated position in *Jub.* 5:8 (note 5:1!) confirms its original independence from its present biblical location.

and/or the rivalry between Cain and Abel. How then, given their originally perfect state, did the world and its inhabitants become defective? The answer to this question ‘survives’ in the so-called Enochic literature, whose myth featuring the angelic Watchers was originally a part of this source. Evil invades God’s perfect terrestrial order from the realm of heaven itself via the rebellious Watchers (Shemhazai, ‘Azazel, and their minions – much as is depicted in Enochic literature, pre-eminently the *Book of Watchers*). Overcome by lust, the Watchers defile mortal women and also reveal to humans a variety of nefarious instructions and technologies that promote criminal actions and moral corruption. Bloodshed and chaos ensue when their bastard progeny, the Giants, wreak further havoc on earth. In order to repair the damage, God is forced to take action against these rogue angels and their monstrous brood. He imprisons the rebel angels while sending other loyal angels and the Flood to wipe out both the Giants and the animate life on earth which they irrevocably damaged. The institution of the new world order is overseen by Enoch, who may have originally been this source’s Flood-hero.¹³ His great-grandson Noah becomes in turn the new Adam (Gen 9:1; cf. 1:28).

By contrast, Source 2 represents the created order as an idyllic park. Botanical imagery is heavily exploited within this particular story-line, where the world is described as a pleasure garden (*Gan Eden*) originally planted by God himself. God creates and installs humanity as supervisory gardeners within this paradise and subjects them to only one simple condition for their permanent residence there. Human disobedience of God’s caveat about consuming the fruit of a particular Tree however results in the forfeiture of immortality¹⁴ and a punitive degradation (the ‘curses’) of the initial idyllic state of existence. The ground will no longer produce food spontaneously for human sustenance. Humanity is then expelled from the Garden. After humanity’s relocation, a more heinous offense is committed by the primal couple’s first-born son Cain; namely, that of the murder of his brother Abel. Cain’s crime initiates a chain of events which signals a spiraling cycle of bloodshed and social mayhem (Gen 4:23-24). Disgusted with this

¹³ Traditions about an occulted Enoch who resides at ‘the ends of the earth’ à la the Utnapishtim of Babylonian Flood-myth fame are visible in *IEn.* 65:2-12; 66; 76:14 (?); 106:8; 107:3, most of which stem from R. H. Charles’s hypothetical ‘book’ or ‘apocalypse of Noah’; see his *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch* (rev. ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), xlvi-xlvii; Albert-Marie Denis, *Introduction à la littérature religieuse judéo-hellénistique* (2 vols.; Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 1:93-96. Note also 1QapGen 2.19-26. Other more widely attested traditions about Enoch’s final domicile apart from human society in Eden (e.g., *Jub.* 4:23-26) or elsewhere are probably a reflex of this same notion.

¹⁴ As recognized by *Midr. Tanh.*, *Berešit* §6: ‘for if he (Adam) had prevailed (over temptation), he would have lived and endured forever.’

deteriorating turn of events, God sends the Flood to wipe out a tainted humanity. The institution of the new world order is overseen by Noah, who also functions as this source's Flood-hero. He reverses the curse laid on the ground brought about by Adam's disobedience and also effects appeasement for the crimes of Cain and his progeny (Gen 8:20-22). The botanical imagery favored by this narrative continues with the postdiluvian story about Noah's planting of the vineyard (Gen 9:20-27), a tale which unsurprisingly reprises the narrative movement and a number of the motifs (e.g., the 'nude/shrewd' syndrome) featured earlier in the Eden story in Genesis 3.

There is also barely enough textual evidence for us to hypothesize the existence of a third early independent mythical complex which can be termed Source 3.¹⁵ The likelihood of this third source is suggested by the extensive attestation of what would have been its component characters and episodes within a variety of 'biblically' affiliated collections of lore surrounding the figures and events of the antediluvian age. The otherwise colorless biblical character named 'Enosh' appears to play a central role in this particular cycle of legends: since his name, like that of Adam's, simply means 'human being,' it seems possible that there may have once been a variant cycle of myths about 'the first human' wherein Enosh acted out the role that is assigned to Adam in Sources 1 and 2. Be that as it may, it is clear from later Jewish sources that the figure of Enosh radiates a toxic aura:¹⁶ the descent of the angelic Watchers to earth is occasionally situated within Enosh's (as opposed to Yared's or Enoch's) generation,¹⁷ he and his contemporaries are frequently charged with the invention of idolatry,¹⁸ and their voluntary defection from God's service results in the divinely imposed punishment of a flood that engulfs 'one-third of the world.'¹⁹ But what is of primary importance for our present purposes is the likely emplotment within Source 3 of what is a distinctly variant yet popular form of the tale of the angelic Watchers. Unlike the aggressive story

¹⁵ See Table 1 above.

¹⁶ Unlike his typical depiction in Christian and 'gnostic' works, where Enosh was judged positively. See Steven D. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Postbiblical Interpretation* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984); John C. Reeves, "Enosh," in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow; Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 590-91.

¹⁷ Rashi *ad* Num 13:33; cf. also Rashi's commentary to *b. Nid.* 61a.

¹⁸ *Tg. Ps.-J.* Gen 4:26; *b. Šabb.* 118b; *Midr. Berešit Rabbati* (ed. Albeck), 41.

¹⁹ *Mek., Bahodeš* §6 (ed. Horovitz-Rabin, 223.13-14); *Sifre Deut* §43 (ed. Finkelstein, 97.2-3); *Midr. Tanh.*, *Noah* §18; Rashi *ad* Amos 5:8. Mandaic literature – a late antique Mesopotamian written corpus of biblically rooted scriptural traditions – is also familiar with this motif (i.e., the synchronization of Enosh and a Deluge): Mark Lidzbarski, ed., *Ginzā: Der Schatz oder das grosse Buch der Mandäer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1925), 27.19-28.7; 45.22-46.6.

presupposed in Source 1 and promoted by *1 Enoch* 6-16 and related works, the coming of the Watchers to earth in this tale-type was explicitly sanctioned by God and originally has a benevolent intent; namely, to instruct newly created humanity in the proper worship and service of God and in the wider promulgation of justice and righteousness.²⁰ This plan however goes tragically astray when the Watchers who are sent to earth become ‘infected’ with human drives and desires, a turn of events which leads to the perversion of justice, general moral corruption, and the cultivation of disreputable practices like ‘magic’ and idolatry. The denouement of this tale plays out in a fashion similar to what we find in Source 1, where the existence of evil in the world was also predicated upon actions that are initiated by celestial entities conceived of as alien to the terrestrial order.

If the foregoing dissection of the background of the narrative structure of what is now transmitted as Genesis 1-9 is cogent, several important conclusions press upon us. First, it would seem that the Enochic story of the Watchers circulated pre-canonically in at least two distinct forms. One of these forms accorded the Watchers a divinely sanctioned didactic or instructional role during the early generations of human existence on earth, one reminiscent of that played in certain ancient Mesopotamian myths by the so-called *apkallus*.²¹ The other form of the story was a militaristic tale of conquest and violent oppression and emphasized the sexual subjection and criminal corruption of humanity by a rogue collective of quasi-divine beings. Interestingly we find both of these forms of the story already fused together in the early versions of ‘the tale of the Watchers’ that we find in extra-canonical literature like *1 Enoch* 6-16²² and *Jubilees* 4-5, and this circumstance alongside the severe truncation of the myth by the redactors of Gen 6:1-4 has affected how scholars typically read and understand what they often erroneously construe as a uniform

²⁰ Note *Jub.* 4:15b: ‘the angels of God descended to earth, those who are named Watchers, in order to instruct human beings and to act (with) justice and righteousness upon earth’; also *Jub.* 5:6: ‘and against His angels whom He had sent to earth He grew very angry: He eradicated them from every position of authority, and He told us that we were to imprison them in the earth’s depths; and lo, they are captives within them and are in solitude.’

²¹ These are semi-divine figures, sometimes recorded as seven in number, who were dispatched by the gods to earth in order to instruct humanity in a variety of civilizing technologies. A brief survey with valuable references to the primary sources and earlier discussions is James C. VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition* (CBQMS 16; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1984), 45-51. Note also Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (rev. ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 327-28 s.v. ‘Seven Sages’; J. C. Greenfield, “Apkallu,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (2d rev. ed.; ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 72-74.

²² Scholars have long recognized the composite nature of the myth of the Watchers found in *1 Enoch* 6-16. For a comprehensive discussion, see George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36; 81-108* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 165-275.

Enochic ‘tale of the Watchers.’ This early fusion of distinct forms also influences how the different mythical characters mentioned in Gen 6:1-4 – ‘divine beings,’ the mysterious Nefilim, and ‘giants’ – are to be connected with one another and to these putative sources.

Second, tales featuring rivalry between angels and human beings seem to have once been an integral component of the traditional mythological cycle of narratives about the initial generations of humankind on earth. As we have seen above, two of our three hypothesized sources underlying the present version of Genesis 1-9 apparently utilized traditions about the angelic Watchers in their formally separate rehearsals of primeval history, and they arguably lurk in the shadows surrounding the Eden story (Source 2) as well.²³ This means that stories about the Watchers need not be read as late interpretative expansions or re-writings of the terse lines of Gen 6:1-4 that are found in its Masoretic or related versions. Since the redactors of what has become Genesis 1-9 have deliberately shifted the blame for the corruption of humanity from angelic malfeasance to human disobedience and bloodshed,²⁴ there is no longer a role for angels to play in the retooled text. Gen 6:1-4 is therefore an artificially constructed bridging passage whose purpose is twofold: (1) to span the yawning narrative gap that the editorial scissors are in the process of opening between the increasingly corrupt behavior of the progeny of Adam and the imminent onset of a universal Deluge; and (2) to invite the reader/hearer of the freshly fashioned Genesis 1-9 to adopt a ‘new’ reading of the undoubtedly ancient phrases *beney ha-elohim* ‘divine beings’ and *benot ha-adam* ‘mortal women’ that were retained in Gen 6:2 and 6:4.

The relatively early emergence of this interpretive move – what some have felicitously termed a ‘euhemerizing’²⁵ of the tale of the Watchers – represents a third important point that emerges from a close reading of Genesis 1-9 in its Masoretic Hebrew and kindred versions. The sudden enjambment within the confines of Gen 4:17-6:4 of two separate listings of Adam’s descendants as traced through the lines of his sons Cain (4:17-24) and Seth (5:1-32)—one of whom has become corrupt and the other of whom is profiled as ‘god-like’ (5:1-3)—immediately prior to the enigmatic Gen 6:1-4 encourages a novel non-supernaturalist reading for this key sequence of verses, one with immense narratological and theological repercussions.

²³ Note Gen 3:22, where the ‘us’ that humans now resemble as a result of eating the forbidden fruit refers back to the angelic retinue of 1:26.

²⁴ Reeves, “Intertwining,” 52-58.

²⁵ Euhemerus was a fourth-century BCE philosopher who argued that the gods were originally human beings who had accomplished great things for early society. As time passes, their feats and their persons acquire ‘superhuman’ and eventually divine status.

The sexual interaction between the ‘divine beings’ and ‘mortal women’ of Gen 6:1-4 was not one that illicitly mixed the inhabitants of the heavenly and earthly realms. It was instead a purely human series of marriages contracted between the offspring of Seth (*beney ha-elohim*) and those of Cain (*benot ha-adam*), a disastrous union whose deleterious social effects (Gen 6:5-7, 11-13) caused the coming of the Flood. This particular exegesis of those two Hebrew phrases will in fact become the dominant lens through which Gen 6:1-4 is read in the Christian East, and beginning in the third century, throughout Christian communities in the West as well. But this reading is not, as is sometimes claimed, a Christian innovation: the final Hebrew language redactors of what will become the ‘canonical’ Genesis text are encouraging the reader to make that identification, and as Guy Stroumsa has convincingly shown, first-century Jewish writers like Philo and Josephus are clearly cognizant of this particular way of reading the traditional narratives about the early generations of humanity.²⁶ What we can discern at work here is the development of a deliberate exegetical strategy which was designed to subvert and undermine the older ‘angelic’ readings of these ancient myths, a strategy whose eventual success can be measured by the almost complete marginalization of the figure of Enoch and the associated Watchers traditions among most circles of emergent rabbinic Judaism and classical Christianity after the third century.²⁷

Stories about the Watchers however did not simply disappear. They continued to be transmitted as part of the traditional cycle of tales associated with the pre-Flood generations of humanity among a variety of groups and factions who while ethnically or culturally affiliated with an ideology that expressed itself using a ‘biblical’ lexicon of characters and events were nevertheless unconcerned with or even resistant to the powerful set of social processes that would eventually produce a relatively uniform ‘canonical’ Bible. Shared custody of a large number of the individual entries comprising this cultural idiom – and in some cases of a scriptural production itself – by dozens of overlapping communities of believers and users meant that individual attempts to ‘change’ or ‘alter’ a longstanding tradition, regardless of justification, were readily detectable. The frequency of this kind of accusation during the first Christian millennium among the users and heirs of a biblically based religiosity is usually judged by modern scholars to be a rhetorical

²⁶ Gedaliahu A. G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 125-34, esp. 130-31.

²⁷ For a comprehensive presentation of the history of these traditions, see especially Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

ploy with no basis in reality, but in light of what we have observed above with regard to what appears to be the deliberate displacement and effacement of the tale(s) of the Watchers, there may actually be some cogency to the charge. It is surely not coincidental that two of the more important prophetic leaders to emerge in the Near East after the mission of the first-century Jesus in Palestine – Mani in Babylonia and Muḥammad in central Arabia, each of whom explicitly linked themselves to biblical forms of religious expression – were both adamant in their insistence that Jews and Christians had deliberately altered what each community was promulgating as ‘scripture’ and, moreover, that an essential facet of their own prophetic missions was the restoration of its earlier pristine form. Of special interest in this regard is the use made by both Mani and Muḥammad (and wider Manichaean and Muslim parascriptural lore) of the traditions belonging to the cycle of tales associated with Enoch and the angelic Watchers.

Mani’s Use of the Watcher Myth

Both ancient observers and modern scholars have repeatedly remarked the important role that Jewish Enochic lore played in the genesis and elaboration of Manichaeism, the religion which Mani founded in the third-century in southern Mesopotamia and whose geographic spread over the next few centuries mirrored and outpaced that of nascent Christianity, its bitter rival and ‘perpetual *Doppelgänger*.’²⁸ Mani gave the biblical figure of Enoch – like he did those of Jesus, Zoroaster, and the Buddha – prophetic status and incorporated many of the older traditions associated with the name of his inspired forebear into his own corpus of written scriptures. Mani’s *Book of Giants*, for example, was an adaptation of an earlier Jewish composition that featured an expanded version of the story of the Watchers’ descent to earth, with particular attention being given to the activities of their monstrous offspring, the disastrous consequences for earth’s inhabitants, and the attempts of Enoch to rectify the situation. Thanks to the twentieth-century discovery and publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars now realize that the *Book of Giants* was not an

²⁸ This inimitable phraseology belongs to Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (2d ed.; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003), 284. The critical literature on Mani and Manichaeism is immense. Convenient entry points are Michel Tardieu, *Manichaeism* (trans. M. B. DeBevoise; Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Iain Gardner and Samuel N. C. Lieu, eds., *Manichaean Texts From the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, *Gnosis on the Silk Road: Gnostic Texts from Central Asia* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993).

original work authored by Mani, but instead was based upon a hitherto unknown Jewish Aramaic work closely related to the ‘tale(s) of the Watchers’ found in Second Temple era works like certain portions of *I Enoch* and *Jubilees*.²⁹ The likelihood that Mani had direct access to the Aramaic texts of the *Book of Giants* and related compositions is signaled by the use in the Middle Persian versions of Mani’s *Book of Giants* of the Aramaic loan-word *ʿṯr* to signify the Watchers or rebellious angels,³⁰ a lexical borrowing that does not figure in the Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, or Arabic re-tellings of this same tale. Since Mani’s native language was Aramaic, he would have had little difficulty using and manipulating religious texts which were authored or recorded in that language.

One surviving Middle Persian fragment of Mani’s *Book of Giants* contains a portion of a dream interpretation which Enoch (*hwnwx*) was asked to provide: ‘and the trees [which] came out, those are the Watchers (*ʿyr*), and the Giants that came out of the women’³¹ Incredibly this very same dream can be located within the Qumran version of the *Book of Giants* and in later Jewish midrash.³² Other extant fragments of Mani’s *Book of Giants* mention the descent of ‘two hundred demons’ from the heavens to earth, their teaching of heavenly secrets to humans, and the social turbulence that ensues as a result of the birth of the Giants.³³ All of these motifs derive from the Jewish ‘tale of the Watchers,’ an episode that was likely a part of ancient Israelite mythology about the origin of evil in the created order.

It is sometimes stated that Manichaeism – like Marcionism – was extremely hostile to Judaism and ascribed no positive valence to the revelatory figures and events that are typically found and celebrated in the Christian Old Testament. This however is an exaggeration, for a close examination of Manichaean teachings and doctrines reveals their fundamental dependence upon the biblical accounts of creation and the narratives about the pre-Flood generations of humanity up to and including that of Noah. Characters like Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, and Seth play prominent roles in the extant Manichaean ‘counter-version’ of

²⁹ J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 298-339; John C. Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony: Studies in the Book of Giants Traditions* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1992); Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *The Book of Giants from Qumran: Texts, Translation, and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

³⁰ Walter Henning, “Ein manichäisches Henochbuch,” *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, phil.-hist. Klasse 5 (1934): 29-30; Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, *Dictionary of Manichaean Texts, Vol. III, Part 1: Dictionary of Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 99 s.v. *ʿyr*.

³¹ Henning, “Henochbuch,” 29; idem, “The Book of the Giants,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 11 (1943-46): 66.

³² Reeves, *Jewish Lore*, 82-107.

³³ See the material collected by Henning, “Book of the Giants,” 52-74.

Genesis 1-6,³⁴ and other biblical figures like Enosh, Enoch, Shem, and possibly even Abraham receive recognition as authoritative bearers of authentic revelatory knowledge to their respective contemporaries. The important point to bear in mind is that Mani's ire about the distortion of ancestral scriptures is directed against those Jews (and Christians) who promoted contemporary (i.e., third century) editions of their Bibles as being the only 'correct' scriptures for study and transmission within their communities. Mani, it would seem, was well aware that there were older versions of these same scriptures, and he was determined to restore these writings and traditions, now beginning to be branded within the oral Torah of rabbinic Judaism as being 'outside (what is sanctioned),'³⁵ to their rightful place of primacy.³⁶

Where would Mani have gained access to exemplars of older Jewish (and Christian) 'scriptures'? Thanks to the relatively recent recovery of a valuable Greek autobiography of Mani, the so-called *Cologne Mani Codex*,³⁷ we now know that Mani spent his youth and early adult years living among a Jewish-Christian baptist sect in southern Mesopotamia who were the followers of an obscure late first-century Palestinian prophet known as Elchasai. According to Christian sources, Elchasaites could be found in the wilderness of Judea and the Transjordan region near the Dead Sea and in the deserts surrounding the Red Sea.³⁸ Later Muslim sources place them in the marshlands bordering the northern edge of the Persian Gulf, a region to which they migrated sometime during the first half of the first Christian millennium.³⁹ Elchasai claimed he was the recipient of a 'heavenly book,' the contents of which formed the basis for his teachings, and it is also clear from both the heresiological reports and the *Cologne Mani Codex* that his sect devoted considerable attention to the study and exegesis of written scriptures. Mani's knowledge about biblical and allied parascriptural works like the writings ascribed to Enoch or the Aramaic *Book of Giants* was probably

³⁴ Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist* (ed. Riḍa Tajaddud; [Tehran: Maktabat al-Assadī, 1971]), 394-95.

³⁵ See the teaching ascribed to R. 'Aqiva in *m. Sanh.* 10.1; *y. Sanh.* 10.1, 28a; *b. Sanh.* 100b.

³⁶ I have argued this point in more detail in my "Manichaeans as *Ahl al-Kitāb*: A Study in Manichaean Scripturalism," in Armin Lange, et al., eds., *Light Against Darkness: Dualism in Ancient Mediterranean Religion and the Contemporary World* (Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplement Series 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 249-65.

³⁷ Ludwig Koenen and Cornelia Römer, eds., *Der Kölner Mani-Kodex* (Papyrologica Coloniensia 14; Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1988). Most scholars think this Greek text is a translation of a Semitic prototype.

³⁸ Most of the important evidence about the teachings of Elchasai and his sect has been collected by A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (NovTSup 36; Leiden: Brill, 1973).

³⁹ One reads of an analogous migration (i.e., from Palestine and its environs to the east) in the traditional literature of the Mandaeans, a biblically affiliated Mesopotamian baptist sect which has survived to the present day. See E. S. Drower, *The Haran Gawaita and The Baptism of Hibil-Ziwa* (Studi e Testi 176; Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1953).

the result of his twenty-year long tutelage among this biblically affiliated sect. On the other hand, it is also possible that Mani could have formed or deepened his acquaintance with many biblical and parascriptural sources during his repeated interactions with the numerous Jewish, Christian, and other biblically allied communities living in third-century Mesopotamia, Persia, and India, many of whom may have likewise preserved texts and traditional readings which had been superseded or suppressed in the West.

Early Muslim Use of the Watcher Myth

Muḥammad also fits the paradigm of a Near Eastern prophet who consciously aligns himself with a biblically articulated discourse in order to criticize its contemporary custodians; namely, the Jewish and Christian communities of the Arabian Ḥijāz. His condemnation of Jews and Christians for their deliberate corruption or ‘tendentious alteration’ (Arabic *tahrīf*) of the biblical scriptures – the Torah (*Tawrāt*) and the Gospel (*Injīl*) – appears with some frequency in the Qur’ān and is echoed by others in subsequent Muslim literature. Western scholars have been repeatedly struck by the unusual form and content of the stories and narratives that the Qur’ān shares with the Bible. There are few modern critical scholars today who would deny that biblical characters and concepts play a fundamentally generative role in the formulation and expression of qur’ānic discourse. Beginning in the nineteenth-century with the influential prize essay of Abraham Geiger⁴⁰ and continuing with varying degrees of emphasis and success up to the present, western scholars have devoted considerable effort and energy to show that it is not simply the various canonical versions of ‘Bible’ familiar from later communities of Jews or Christians that buttress the Qur’ān’s or its interpretive tradition’s frequent appeals to scriptural characters, episodes, and exemplars. Rather, the Bible of Muḥammad was one that presupposed and operated with certain distinctive readings or traditions that are paralleled in Jewish midrashic treatments of these same characters or episodes, or in the case of Christian materials, by traditions or interpretations that are also attested in so-called apocryphal and extra-canonical works. It was a Bible that was invested with a scope, whether material or conceptual, that transcended

⁴⁰ Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (Bonn: F. Baaden, 1833). For the groundbreaking nature of Geiger’s research upon Islamic literature, see especially Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 52-62; Reuven Firestone, “The Qur’ān and the Bible: Some Modern Studies of Their Relationship,” in *Bible and Qur’ān* (ed. Reeves), 7-11.

reputedly orthodox norms as to what that label supposedly encompassed. As in the previous case of Mani, we can also detect here a certain fluidity or permeability in the way that Bible and its contents were conceived by its 'outlying' communities of readers in Near Eastern late antiquity:⁴¹ they performed, experienced, and transmitted their 'Bibles' in a variety of registers and interpretative formats. This implies that Muḥammad may be our most important witness to what constituted authentic 'biblical' lore in the Ḥijāz during the seventh century.

It also suggests that Muḥammad and Islamic tradition should be granted some credence when they claim that the present texts of the Jewish and Christian Bibles have been tampered with by later generations of scribes and exegetes during the course of their transmission. Most western scholars question this claim, preferring instead to explain the discrepancies between the Qur'ān and Bible to tendentious alterations on the part of Muḥammad or his 'teachers,' or to mistakes made by his informants, or to lapses of attention and/or hearing during his reception of the teachings associated with 'the religion of Abraham.' Almost no one has entertained the possibility that the differences are due to Muḥammad's simultaneous access to a more primitive form of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, and his concomitant recognition (like that of Mani), that the forms of Bible which were being marketed as 'scripture' by some of his Jewish and Christian neighbors were quite different from those he was accustomed to study and revere.

A merely cursory study of the qur'ānic passages which overlap in content and theme with what is found in the Masoretic and related versions of Genesis 1-9 demonstrate their general coherence with the older supernaturalist, as opposed to the newer euhemeristic, readings of the narratives which we described above. Angels are represented as prominent interlocutors with God and they take a verbal interest in the activities of the newly created human race. While the names of Cain, Abel, Seth, and Enosh do not occur in the Qur'ān, an amplified version of 'the story about Adam's two sons' which overlaps with the traditions surrounding Gen 4:1-16 figures in Q 5:27-32. Enoch appears briefly twice under the cognomen 'Idrīs,' and we are informed that 'he was a truthful one, a prophet; and We raised him to a lofty place' (Q 19:56-57). The first clause of this statement of course provides important dissonant evidence for the kinds of disparaging comments we find in most rabbinic Jewish sources about the figure of Enoch and his alleged

⁴¹ Both Mani and Muḥammad are outliers inhabiting the geographical and conceptual margins of a religious landscape that was moving toward the imposition of several different forms of Christian (and Jewish) orthodoxy.

righteousness, and the language employed throughout the Qur’ānic pronouncement provocatively echoes the distinctive terminology that is found in authentic Enochic lore.⁴²

Perhaps the most intriguing evidence for an active interplay between the traditional lore surrounding the myths about the Watchers and what we find articulated in the Qur’ān and its interpretative penumbra is provided by the confrontational scene that is sketched in Q 2:101: ‘When God sent them (i.e., the Jewish inhabitants of the Ḥijāz) a messenger confirming the truth of what they already had, a group of those who had been given the scripture cast the scripture of God behind their backs as if they had no knowledge (of it).’ The authoritative *tafsīr* (commentary) of Ṭabarī (d. 923) explains the verse this way:

Whenever Muḥammad (may God bless him and grant him salvation!) would come to them, they would raise objections to him from the Torah and argue against him using it, and whenever he would harmonize the Torah with the Qur’ān they would cast away the Torah and bring out the *Kitāb ‘Āṣaf*⁴³ (‘Book of Asaf’) and the magic (book?) of Hārūt and Mārūt.⁴⁴

One can readily imagine a scenario where two (or more) variant versions of a supposedly authoritative scripture – indeed, a ‘scripture of God’ (*kitāb Allāh*) – are juxtaposed and polemically interrogated by textual communities intent on determining their authenticity. The ‘magic’ which Ṭabarī attributes to ‘Hārūt and Mārūt’ anticipates the following verse (Q 2:102) which identifies them as two angels domiciled in

⁴² See Reeves, “Intertwining,” 43-52.

⁴³ ‘Āṣaf is presumably Āṣāf b. Barakhyā, one of Solomon’s advisors in the rich Muslim legendry which surrounds this ancient Israelite king; cf. A. J. Wensinck, “Āṣāf b. Barakhyā,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new ed.; 11 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1954-2002), 1:686. The *Kitāb ‘Āṣaf* would seem to be a reference to the infamous *Sefer Asaf ha-Rofe*’ known from medieval Hebrew medical lore which, if true, would make this the earliest reference to this source. See Ms. Oxford Bodl. Heb. 2138 (cf. Ad. Neubauer, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886], 737-38; also Malachi Beit-Arié, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library: Supplement of Addenda and Corrigenda* ... [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], 397-98); Ludwig Venetianer, *Asaf Judaeus: Der älteste medizinische Schriftsteller in hebräischer Sprache* (3 vols. in 1; Budapest: Landes-Rabbinerschule in Budapest, 1915-17); Isidor Simon, *Asaph ha-Yehudi: Médecin et astrologue du moyen age* (Paris: Librairie Lipschutz, 1933); Süßmann Muntner, *Mavo le-sefer Asaf ha-Rofe*’ (Jerusalem: Genizah, 1957); idem in *Qorot* 3 (1965): 396-422 and subsequent volumes of this journal through 6 (1972): 28-51; Joseph Shatzmiller, “Doctors and Medical Practices in Germany Around the Year 1200: The Evidence of ‘Sefer Asaph’,” *PAAJR* 50 (1983): 149-64; Elinor Lieber, “Asaf’s ‘Book of Medicines’: A Hebrew Encyclopaedia of Greek and Jewish Medicine, Possibly Compiled in Byzantium on an Indian Model,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984): 233-49; Martha Himmelfarb, “Some Echoes of *Jubilees* in Medieval Hebrew Literature,” in *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha* (SBLEJL 6; ed. John C. Reeves; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 127-36.

⁴⁴ Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān* (30 vols.; Bulaq, 1905-11; reprinted as 15 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1984), 1:443.

Babylon. According to this curious passage, these same two angels bear the ultimate blame for the teaching of magic and other discordant types of knowledge to human beings, a type of misbehavior that was also ascribed to the rebellious Watchers in *I Enoch* 7-8. The names ‘Hārūt’ and ‘Mārūt’ however do not occur in the extant Aramaic, Greek, or Ethiopic narratives of the works which will form *I Enoch*. In fact these two names do not figure anywhere else in the Qur’ān, nor do they appear in any canonical version of either the Jewish or Christian scriptures which would have predated or been contemporary with Muḥammad or the first few generations of Muslim scholastics.⁴⁵ The qur’ānic passage introducing them is characteristically terse: we are not, for example, informed therein as to who these two particular angels are, how they came to be in Babylon, or why they would implicate themselves in the transmittal of disreputable knowledge to humanity. It does however remark that Hārūt and Mārūt ‘never taught anyone without first warning: “We are a temptation; so do not disbelieve!”’ The verse goes on to affirm that while the empirical application of their teachings might produce marital discord, they remain essentially harmless except for those cases when God permits the efficacy of their spells. Unfortunate miscreants who persist in adhering to their teachings and in rejecting God ‘will have no portion in the World to Come.’⁴⁶

Early Muslim commentators and traditionists have embedded and amplified this enigmatic verse (Q 2:102) within a rich layer of interpretive lore. It often takes the form of a so-called ‘Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt’ (*qiṣṣat Hārūt wa-Mārūt*) that is usually recounted in tandem with prophetic legends featuring the prophet Idrīs (i.e., Enoch). The several versions of this ‘Tale’ exhibit a number of motifs which can be traced back to the Second Temple Jewish myths about the arrival of angels on earth which comprise the cycle of stories that were recounted about the Watchers.⁴⁷ These include the notions of a primeval rivalry or even jealousy between the angels and newly created humanity, a pedagogic embassy endorsed by God

⁴⁵ The names ‘Hārūt’ and ‘Mārūt’ are most often explained by modern scholars as garbled reflexes of ‘Haurvatāt’ and ‘Amərətāt,’ Avestan entities who correspond to the later Zoroastrian figures ‘Khurdād’ and ‘Murdād’ and who govern the material realms of waters and plant life respectively. See Georges Vajda, “Hārūt wa-Mārūt,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new ed.), 3:236-37; William M. Brinner, “Hārūt and Mārūt,” *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān* (6 vols.; ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe; Leiden: Brill, 2001-06), 2:404-405. It is abundantly clear however from the interpretative literature that Hārūt and Mārūt are fossilized remnants of the Enochic Watchers or Nefilim.

⁴⁶ Compare the potentially relevant pronouncements of R. ‘Aqiva and Abba Shaul in *m. Sanh.* 10.1, according to whom the same fate awaits any Israelite who ‘reads apocryphal writings,’ ‘muttered an incantation over wounds,’ and ‘expressly articulates the Divine Name.’

⁴⁷ See my essay “Some Parascriptural Dimensions of the Muslim ‘Tale of Hārūt wa-Mārūt,’” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (in press).

whose intent was to instruct humans in the ways of justice and righteousness, the sexual corruption or seduction of the angels via the agency of female beauty, the created order's spiraling descent into depravity, bloodshed, and idolatry, the impartation of illicit teachings by angels, an unsuccessful appeal by angels to a particularly 'righteous' mediator, and the imprisonment of heavenly entities on and beneath the earth. All of these motifs are important narrative features of the 'tale(s) of the Watchers' that are already found in works like *I Enoch* and *Jubilees*, and they arguably would have once been an essential part of the plot-lines envisioned by our reconstructed Sources 1 and 3 underlying the Masoretic and related versions of Genesis 1-9. Perhaps most significantly, the reservoir of traditions exploited by the Muslim 'Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt' forms our most important resource for the reconstruction of the peculiar form of the Watchers story that appears in Source 3 and that is otherwise attested only in *Jubilees*, certain Christian compositions (e.g., the work known as the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*),⁴⁸ and some post-Islamic Jewish sources.⁴⁹

An instructive example of the 'Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt' which illustrates some of the motifs drawn from the myth of the angelic Watchers follows:⁵⁰

Story of Hārūt and Mārūt. Muslims have a number of different opinions about it (i.e., this tale). Some annalists relate that when God Most Exalted wished to create Adam, He said to His angels: 'I am going to put a caliph on the earth.' They responded, 'Would You put on it one who would despoil it and shed blood? We (by contrast) extol Your praise(s) and sanctify You!' (Q 2:30). After He created Adam and his descendants had become corrupted with wickedness, the angels said, 'O Lord! How horrible are those whom You appointed as caliphs on the earth!' So God commanded them to select three of

⁴⁸ Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* 8.12.1-19.4. For a recent analysis of this passage and some of its features, see Eibert Tigchelaar, "Manna-Eaters and Man-Eaters: Food of Giants and Men in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies 8," in Jan M. Bremmer, ed., *The Pseudo-Clementines* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 92-114. It is worth pointing out that the Greek verb used in this passage to describe the angels' mission (ἐλέγγω) has the well attested wider sense of 'pointing out,' 'admonishing,' or even 'punishing,' a semantic range that coheres nicely with their initial forensic roles in both *Jubilees* and in Muslim *tafsīr*.

⁴⁹ The form of the story where God assigns the Watchers a disciplinary teaching and/or adjudicatory mission on earth that soon goes horribly wrong is formally distinct from those forms that are visible in *I Enoch* and their derivatives. It does however resurface in several strands of post-Islamic Jewish literature such as, e.g., the *Midrash 'Aggadah* of R. Moshe ha-Darshan (see Himmelfarb, "Some Echoes," 118-19) and the Zohar.

⁵⁰ Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-bad' wa'l-ta'rīkh* (6 vols.; ed. Cl. Huart; Paris: E. Leroux, 1899-1919), 3:14.1-14.

their most worthy representatives⁵¹ to descend to earth so as to convey to humanity information about proper behavior, and they did so. They say that a woman came to them, and they became so infatuated with her that they began drinking wine, committing murders, and worshipping false gods (with) praise properly due Him. They taught the woman the Name which they used to ascend to heaven, and she ascended until she arrived in heaven (where) she was transformed into a star—they say that she became the planet al-Zuhara (Venus). He gave the angels a choice between punishment in this world or final (punishment), and they chose punishment in this world, which consisted of their being suspended by their hair inside a pit⁵² in Babylon.⁵³ Magicians come to them (there) and learn magical arts from them.⁵⁴

Scholars who are conversant with medieval Jewish literature will recognize that the ‘Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt’ that is recounted in Muslim sources is closely related to a curious aggadic narrative known to modern scholars as the ‘Midrash of Shemḥazai and ‘Azazel.’⁵⁵ This latter work, extant in at least four Hebrew versions and one Aramaic rendition,⁵⁶ can be dated no earlier than the eleventh century in its

⁵¹ The reference to ‘three’ perpetrators is reminiscent of 2 *En.* 18:4 (long version); *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* §25; and 3 *Enoch* (ed. Schäfer) §§5-8 which similarly feature three offending angels. Two of these three are of course the angels Hārūt and Mārūt.

⁵² Compare 1 *En* 10:4-6: ‘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. And throw on him jagged and sharp stones, and cover him with darkness; and let him stay there for ever, and cover his face, that he may not see light, and that on the great day of judgment he may be hurled into the fire.”’ The translation is taken from Michael A. Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 2:87-88.

⁵³ The Qur’ānic verse (2:102) already situates these angels in Babylon. However, note the Dead Sea Scroll 4Q386 (= 4QPseudo-Ezekiel^b) 1 III 3-4: ‘in Babylon, and it was ... a habitation of demons ...’ Could this apocryphal ‘pseudo-prophetic’ stream of tradition, already proven in other contexts to have exercised some influence on postbiblical scribal circles, be instrumental in developing the particular mytheme that certain demonic entities were sequestered in Babylon? For the cited text, see Devorah Dimant, ed., *Qumran Cave 4 XXI, Parabiblical Texts, Part 4: Pseudo-Prophetic Texts* (DJD 30; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 66 and Plate II (= PAM 42.598).

⁵⁴ While Q 2:102 certainly lurks in the background, the wording of this final statement betrays a well developed occult tradition. The Zohar, for example, is very familiar with this particular motif; cf. 1.126a; 3.207b-208a; 3.212a-b; 3.233a-b.

⁵⁵ E.g., Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed*, 107-109; Max Grünbaum, “Beiträge zur vergleichenden Mythologie aus der Hagada,” in idem, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sprach- und Sagenkunde* (ed. Felix Perles; Berlin: S. Calvary, 1901), esp. 58-75; Bernard Heller, “La chute des anges Shemchazai, Ouzza et Azazel,” *Revue des études juives* 60 (1910): 202-12; Milik, *Books of Enoch*, 330-31; Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 258-68.

⁵⁶ Variant Hebrew versions occur in the medieval midrashic compilations *Bereshit Rabbati*, *Yerahme’el*, *Pugio Fidei*, and *Yalquṭ Shimoni*. Milik presents a synoptic edition and discussion of the ‘Midrash’ which

present textual forms, whereas the cognate Muslim ‘Tale of Hārūt and Mārūt’ predates the Jewish versions by several centuries and almost certainly serves as their source.⁵⁷ Yet the re-manifestation of the distinctive names of the two Watcher ringleaders of *I Enoch* 6-11 – Shem(i)ḥazai and ‘Azazel – in the Hebrew versions of the story⁵⁸ suggests that whoever was responsible for the expropriation and re-judaization of the Muslim tale may have been cognizant of its mythological lineage and so restored the original actors to the Jewish story. On the other hand, talmudic literature does preserve a few references to these names and their pre-Flood narrative provenance;⁵⁹ a raconteur familiar with these passages could have easily effected such changes as part of a program of literary reclamation. However it is explained, it is abundantly clear that the Enochic ‘tale(s) of the Watchers’ enjoys a vigorous afterlife among several Near Eastern biblically affiliated religious communities well into the Christian Middle Ages.

It should finally be observed that the forms of the ‘tale of the Watchers’ that are presupposed by the present shape of Genesis 1-9 and that are attested in Second Temple Jewish works like *I Enoch* and *Jubilees* operate only with a voluntary descent of the Watchers to earth, be it a self-imposed invasion as in *I Enoch* 6 or a divinely commissioned mandate as is presented in *Jubilees*. There is actually no hint in pre-Christian sources of a version of the ‘tale of the Watchers’ wherein a group of angels are involuntarily expelled from Heaven as a result of their refusal to perform some divinely commanded task. The famous myth about the fall of Satan and his faction – a myth that will eventually achieve a scriptural status when it is incorporated into the Qur’ān⁶⁰ – did not figure in the early complex of traditions surrounding the Watchers and therefore does not merit extended discussion in the present context. This relatively new myth will emerge however as a dominant element in the Christian and Muslim discursive elaborations of how evil made its entrance into the created order, combining with, transforming, and re-shaping the narrative templates supplied by the earlier ‘tale(s) of the Watchers’ into more complicated patterns and structures,

must be used with caution (*Books of Enoch*, 321-31). A hitherto unrecognized Aramaic form of the same ‘Midrash’ also appears in Zohar 3.207b-208a.

⁵⁷ In the words of Bernhard Heller, “la legende [i.e., the Jewish one] a été calquée sur celle de Harout et Marout.” Quoted from his “La chute des anges Shemchazai, Ouzza et Azazel,” *Revue des études juives* 60 (1910): 210. His judgment on the relationship of these sources is seconded by Haim Schwarzbbaum, “Prolegomenon,” in Moses Gaster, *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel; or, The Hebrew Bible Historiale* (London, 1899; repr., New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971), 38.

⁵⁸ The Aramaic version uses the name ‘Uzza instead of Shem(i)ḥazai, a phonetic variant of the name that is well attested in Jewish angelology. See Reeves, *Jewish Lore*, 112-13.

⁵⁹ See *b. Yoma* 67b and Rashi *ad loc.*; *Nid.* 61a and Rashi *ad loc.*; *Tg. Ps.-J.* to Gen 6:4.

⁶⁰ Q 2:30-34; 15:28-38; 38:71-81 (cf. also 7:11-25; 17:61-65; 18:50; 20:116-121).

and its growing popularity will eventually prompt its introduction into the post-Islamic midrash known as *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer*,⁶¹ the first time that the ‘fall of Satan’ theme actually makes its appearance in indubitably Jewish literature.

⁶¹ R. David Luria, ed., *Pirque de-Rabbi Eliezer ha-Gadol* (Warsaw: T. Y. Bamberg, 1852), §14, 33b.