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Matthew Goff

A Blessed Rage for Order

Apocalypticism, Esoteric Revelation, and the Cultural Politics
of Knowledge in the Hellenistic Age¹

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.
– Wallace Stevens, “The Idea of Order at Key West”

The production of knowledge is a core element of the apocalyptic literature of Second Temple Judaism. Critical for understanding this trope is the legitimization of esoteric knowledge as heavenly revelation. Apocalypses in this way put forward totalizing systems of knowledge by which the world can be understood. The presentation of such knowledge as revelation transforms it into an intellectual commodity that various social groups can utilize. This essay argues that the theme of supernatural revelation in apocalyptic literature should be understood not simply in the context of political crises, such as the Maccabean revolt, but also in terms of the cultural politics of knowledge in the Hellenistic Age.

Introduction

A Mayan hieroglyph that can denote conjuring a vision from the heavenly world is an image of a hand grasping a fish (*tz'ak*).² This very worldly image, which signifies a traditional way to catch fish, is an apt metaphor for the acquisition of heavenly knowledge – one enters a different realm of experience, grabs something there, and takes it back. The acquisition of knowledge

1 I thank the students of my Spring 2015 graduate seminar, “Knowledge, Revelation, and the Torah in Ancient Judaism,” whose contributions helped me think through several texts and ideas engaged in this essay. I also thank Blake Jurgens and Kyle Roark for reading an earlier version of this paper.

2 D. Winters, “A Study of the Fish-in-Hand Glyph, T714: Part I,” in *Sixth Palenque Round Table, 1986* (ed. M. Green Robertson and V.M. Fields; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 233–245.

from heavenly sources is a foundational theme in various religious traditions. It is particularly germane to the Judaism of the late Second Temple period. To use the Mayan metaphor, in the Judaism of this time there are a lot of fish in the sea. God was hailed as a “God of Knowledge” (e. g., 1QS III, 15) and divine knowledge on various topics – God, the Torah, history, the natural world – is prominent in the literature from the period. The theme of supernatural knowledge in ancient Judaism is particularly important with regard to the apocalyptic tradition. The term “apocalypse” means “unveiling” and denotes a genre of literature that consists of narrative accounts of visions and dreams disclosed to important figures from the past (e. g., Enoch, Daniel, Ezra), in which heavenly beings (typically angels) reveal knowledge.³ The genre apocalypse constitutes an etic category with which to classify ancient texts, developed to highlight the formal and thematic similarities they share. Undergirding the entire corpus is the conviction that the world needs higher knowledge, which derives from a heavenly source rather than the human mind, in order to be understood properly. The types of knowledge that the apocalyptic tradition valorizes as originating from heaven, such as the structure of the cosmos and the nature of history, were pressing concerns not only within Judaism but throughout the Hellenistic world. The development of Jewish apocalypticism should be understood against the wider backdrop of the Hellenistic age.

Comprehensive Systems of Knowledge

Apocalypses disclose several specific types of knowledge. Many reveal the nature of the eschatological judgment (e. g., Dan 12:1–3; *1 En.* 45:3–6; *4 Ezra* 7:26–44). The *Book of the Watchers* discloses knowledge about the antediluvian past through an imaginative retelling of the flood story, using this tale to explain the origin of evil spirits (*1 Enoch* 15). *Watchers* also divulges knowledge about the terrestrial sphere and the cosmos (chapters 17–36), as does the *Astronomical Book* (chapters 72–82). Claims of revelation are also, in a sense, made about revelation itself. The revelation at Sinai (the Mosaic Torah) is understood as a document that needs additional revelation to be understood. This perspective is critical for the book of *Jubilees*, and the Dead Sea sect hails the Teacher of Righteousness for being given the “mysteries” of how scriptural texts should be interpreted (1QpHab VII, 4–5).

3 J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 3–11

These specific types of information are components of more extensive revelations that disclose comprehensive, totalizing knowledge which makes reality intelligible. Supernatural revelation helps construct what Peter Berger has called “symbolic universes,” which he describes as “bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality” that orient “all collective events in a cohesive unity that includes past, present and future.”⁴ There is much in the apocalypses that coheres with Berger’s perspective. Daniel 7 and the Enochic texts the *Apocalypse of Weeks* and the *Animal Apocalypse* make the Maccabean crisis comprehensible as one event in a larger scheme of history determined by God. The revelation of astronomical knowledge and the heavenly world in *1 Enoch* provides a cosmic orientation in which to situate human existence. Dualism, which is widespread in apocalyptic literature and early Judaism in general, likewise signifies ways of thought that makes reality intelligible through opposed binary pairs: light/darkness, good/evil, life/death. The social and cosmic world is presented in stark black and white terms, providing clarity while removing nuance and ambiguity. Dualism provides a clear moral order that structures human experience. The Treatise on the Two Spirits, for example, appeals to a dualism of light and darkness, as part of a divine scenario that determines all human conduct (1QS III,13–IV, 26).

While Second Temple texts in different ways provide a framework to make the world intelligible, they appeal to different scales of knowledge to do so. Although Ben Sira emphasizes the extent of his own wisdom, with which one can better understand God and the world, he nevertheless insists that there are vistas of knowledge that remain beyond human comprehension: “The first man did not know wisdom fully nor will the last one fathom her. For her thoughts are more abundant than the sea” (24:28; cf. 43:32; NRSV). This general outlook is consistent with Ecclesiastes and Job 28, and Deuteronomy teaches that there is knowledge in the heavenly realm that cannot be found on earth (29:29). The boundary of human knowledge asserted by Ben Sira is shattered by Enoch. He is hailed for knowing *everything*. This is evident from the first claim he makes about himself in *1 Enoch*: “From the words of the watchers and holy ones I heard *everything*” (1:2; emphasis mine).⁵ *Jubilees* 4 praises Enoch in similar terms: “He saw *everything* and

4 P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991 [orig. 1966]), 113, 120.

5 Unless otherwise stated, translations of *1 Enoch* are from G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001). Translations of *Jubilees* are from James

understood” (v. 19). As the Enochic tradition develops, Enoch transforms from a recipient of revealed knowledge, as in *Watchers*, into a source of revelation, as in the later texts the “Birth of Noah” story (*1 Enoch* 106–107) and the *Book of Giants* (4Q530 7 ii). The radical nature of the extent of Enoch’s knowledge becomes even more extreme in later Enochic literature, according to which he obtains knowledge that even angels do not know (*2 Enoch* 21–22; *3 Enoch* 14). Ben Sira’s emphasis on the limits of human knowledge is likely a consequence of his conservative social setting as a scribe in a retainer class (see below). While little can be conclusively known about them, the producers of the literature of *1 Enoch* do not seem to have been under such restrictions. This suggests they are not a product of the same scribal milieu as Ben Sira.

Claiming access to comprehensive knowledge that orients reality is not limited to apocalypses. The book of *Jubilees* presents itself as the transcript of a revelation given to Moses on Sinai. In it God tells Moses to write “what is first and what is last and what is to come during all the divisions of time which are in the law and which are in the testimony and in the weeks of their jubilees until eternity” (1:26). The book claims that Moses not only received the Pentateuch but also was shown heavenly tablets on which the nature of history (periodized into jubilees) and the structure of the cosmos (with the priority of the sun) are inscribed. *Jubilees’* reworking of stories from Genesis and Exodus is intended to show that the Torah is in harmony with the cosmos as a whole.

Second Temple texts often present such broad vistas of knowledge as “mysteries” that derive from heaven. 4QInstruction, the longest wisdom text of the Dead Sea Scrolls, repeatedly urges its student-addressee (*mēbin*) to study the *raz nihyeh* (“the mystery that is to be”). The Persian-derived term *raz* denotes revealed knowledge in the Aramaic apocalypses (e. g., Dan 2:27–29; 4QEn^c 5 ii 26–27 [*1 En.* 106:19]). The Wisdom of Solomon states that the wicked do not know the “mysteries of God” (2:22). It is thus implied that the righteous do, and Solomon claims to have received from personified wisdom profound knowledge about the nature of reality, including the structure of the cosmos and the beginning, middle, and end of times (7:17–21). The term “mystery” in 4QInstruction has similar connotations. The phrase *raz nihyeh* denotes revealed knowledge that was revealed to the *mēbin* about the nature of reality (4Q416 2 iii 17–18). God created the world by means of this mystery (4Q417 1 i 8–9), making it both the content of the revelation and

C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, vol. 2 (CSCO 511; ScAth 88; Leuven: Peeters, 1989).

the means by which it is known (the medium and the message).⁶ In unfortunately fragmentary contexts, 4QInstruction associates the mystery that is to be, not unlike *Jub.* 1:26 or *Wis* 7:18, with a tripartite division of time – that which has been, that which is, and that which will be (4Q417 i 3–5; 4Q418 123 ii 3–4). The mystery that is to be signifies a deterministic scheme, from creation to judgment that orchestrates the unfolding of the natural order that is presented to the *mebin* as a revealed truth.

Heavenly Knowledge, From Angels to Bookish Men

Apocalyptic literature presents such totalizing systems of knowledge as divinely revealed. They are exercises in “epiphanic rhetoric.”⁷ The appeal to revelation endows this knowledge with the supreme authority of heaven. The revelation constitutes a “theophany” of knowledge that manifests the transcendent power of the divine realm. Visionaries in the apocalypses are overwhelmed by the disturbing imagery of their dreams, such as crypto-zoomorphic animals (e.g., *Dan* 7:28; 4 *Ezra* 12:3). Such vivid and unusual creatures convey the otherworldly and transcendent nature of the knowledge that is received. The knowledge is not legitimated through an appeal to logic but, in a sense, the brute force of heaven. There is a good example of this point from late antiquity. Plotinus, a Neoplatonist who taught in Rome in the third century C.E., expressed frustration that some of his students who attended his philosophy seminars were “heretics” who “produced revelations” (lit. “apocalypses,” ἀποκαλύψεις) which they attributed to legendary figures from the past such as Zoroaster (Porphyry, *Vita Plotinus* 16).⁸ Plotinus complains that, in the students’ claims about the nature of God and reality, they do not use logical proofs but rather make “arrogant assertions” based on revelation (*Enneads* 2.10).⁹ They did not argue like philosophers but rather supported their views with apocalyptic writings, which infuriated a philosopher. Plotinus’ complaint illustrates another strategy of legitimization that is widespread in the earlier Jewish apocalypses – pseudepigraphy.

6 M. J. Goff, “The Mystery of Creation in 4QInstruction,” *DSD* 10 (2003): 163–186; S. I. Thomas, *The “Mysteries” of Qumran: Mystery, Secrecy, and Esotericism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (SBLJL 25; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 150–60.

7 C. A. Newsom, “The Rhetoric of Jewish Apocalyptic Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* (ed. J. J. Collins; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 201–217, here 206.

8 D. M. Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 2–3.

9 *Ibid.*, 44.

Pseudepigraphical writings purport to contain direct transmissions of revelation that were written down by patriarchs such as Enoch, Daniel, and Ezra. This rhetorical technique has the double advantage of appropriating the influential status of such patriarchs and rooting a claim of revelation in the distant past.

The knowledge revealed in apocalypses is also legitimized by construing the visionaries as intellectuals. They are often depicted as learned, bookish men.¹⁰ Reading and writing are prominent in this material. Enoch reads tablets in heaven (*1 En.* 106:19). Daniel writes down his visions and is educated in the language and letters of Babylonia (*Dan* 1:4; 2:13; 7:1). *4 Ezra* centers on a revered scribe of the Hebrew Bible. The apocalypses' construal of their visionaries as intelligent and educated is particularly clear in the case of Enoch. He is not associated with writing or books in the Hebrew Bible, in striking contrast with Enochic literature. *1 Enoch* describes him as a "righteous scribe" (e. g., 12:4) and emphasizes his intelligence and curiosity. Enoch claims not only that he saw "everything" but also that "I also understood what I saw" (1:2). When the angels show him the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden, he becomes particularly inquisitive. He says: "Concerning all things I wish to know, but especially concerning this tree" (25:2). When the angels take him to the eastern-most edge of the earth, he is not only given revelation about the astronomical order. Employing good scientific method, he also observes the motion of heavenly bodies and writes down what he sees (33:2).¹¹ It is implied that he was chosen to receive revelation in part because of his intelligence. Enochic literature emphasizes that he has the ability to understand and transmit what is disclosed to him through writing.

The Concealment and Disclosure of Secret Knowledge

The heavenly knowledge revealed in apocalypses is presented as secret, esoteric knowledge. Moshe Halbertal stresses that understanding something as having an esoteric level of meaning expands its "receptive capacity to meaning' to almost infinite dimensions."¹² The discovery of esoteric knowledge allows for the creation of a blank slate (or, as Enoch would say, a heavenly

10 J. J. Collins, "The Sage in the Apocalyptic and Pseudepigraphic Literature," in *Seers, Sibyls and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 339–350.

11 The issue of Enoch vis-à-vis "science" is examined below.

12 M. Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and its Philosophical Implications* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 151.

tablet) upon which anything can be written that, in a sense, props itself up in mid-air. What is written on this slate gives coherence to the world, but it needs only tenuous connections to the “real” world to have this function. This is particularly clear with regard to the Dead Sea sect. The *Habakkuk Peshet*, for example, teaches that particular words and phrases in this prophetic text signify important figures and moments in the history of the sect. The literal words are themselves not the key issue. Rather they are access points to a higher level of meaning available only to an elect few.

Attitudes towards secrecy with regard to revealed knowledge vary among the apocalypses. The two oldest layers of *1 Enoch*, the *Book of the Watchers* and the *Astronomical Book* attest different epistemological perspectives. While the *Astronomical Book* purports to contain celestial knowledge disclosed to Enoch by an angel (*1 En.* 72:1), the material generally acknowledged as the earliest core of *Watchers*, chapters 6–11, encodes a wide range of knowledge, including metallurgy, female ornamentation, and astronomy (the very sort of knowledge Enoch receives from Uriel in the *Astronomical Book*), as illicit revelation from angels. This early material may reflect a social circle whose adherents show a deep skepticism regarding the utility and legitimacy of knowledge from heaven. Reed observes that the epistemological outlook of *1 Enoch* 6–11 coheres with the pessimism of Ecclesiastes and suggests that both texts may have been shaped by a common scribal culture.¹³ *1 Enoch* 6–11, in which Enoch never appears, then becomes co-opted and surrounded by material (chapters 1–5, 12–16) that hails Enoch as a legitimate conduit for heavenly knowledge. The Dead Sea sect, according to the *Community Rule*, was taught that it should keep its knowledge hidden from the rest of Israel (1QS IX, 16–17). 4QMMT stresses a more inclusive position with regard to sharing at least some of their knowledge with outsiders (e.g., 4Q397 6–13 1–2), perhaps suggesting that the text stems from an earlier stage of the history of the sect. The book of Daniel does not restrict revealed knowledge within a particular sect but rather recounts how learned men (the *maškilim*) provide understanding to Israel during the Maccabean crisis (11:33). This presumably involved teaching versions of the visions recounted in chapters 7–12.

13 A. Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 43. It has also been suggested that *Watchers* exhibits a polemical attitude towards various Babylonian forms of scribal knowledge and the types of experts associated with them. See Henryk Drawnel, *The Aramaic Astronomical Book (4Q208–4Q211) from Qumran: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2011), 57–60. The issue of scribes is discussed further below.

The construal of knowledge as secret and esoteric makes it an intellectual commodity, or, to use the language of Bourdieu, cultural capital, that can be controlled by various social actors who benefit from being perceived as the custodians of such exceptional knowledge.¹⁴ Foucault has similarly stressed the social embeddedness of knowledge, arguing that the conceptualizations and articulations of what can be known occur within a set of discursive practices that are determined by historical and social forces.¹⁵ With regard to esoteric knowledge, this raises a paradox observed by Halbertal – that secret knowledge, in order to possess value for a particular group of persons, must to some extent be known.¹⁶ It would not have any cache if it were wholly unknown. Esoteric knowledge can be transmitted within a community that is defined by possession of this knowledge, as stressed by the Qumran rulebooks (1QS IX, 18–19; CD XIII, 7–8). Or those who possess this knowledge may disseminate it out of a conviction that it would benefit others, as in Daniel. In particular there is an inherent tension between esoteric knowledge and writing, which facilitates the preservation and spread of knowledge. Writing opens up the potential for the knowledge to spread beyond the control of the group transmitting it. This problem is evident in the *Epistle of Enoch*. Enoch not only asserts that the righteous will be given “my” books, but also that “sinners” will write books that distort his words (1 En. 104:11–12). The presentation of supernatural revelation in the form of written texts helps explain how these archaic disclosures were preserved from the distant past to the present. This illustrates the centrality of writing in apocalyptic literature, which is emphasized despite this medium’s tension with the imperative to keep knowledge concealed.

Scribes, Sects and Teachers

Georg Simmel emphasized the role of secret knowledge in the formation of identity, which he described as the “soziologische Positivität des Geheimnisses.”¹⁷ One way that groups and individuals derive a sense of

14 H. B. Urban, “The Torment of Secrecy: Ethical and Epistemological Problems in the Study of Esoteric Traditions,” *HR* 37 (1998): 209–248; Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 128.

15 M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith; New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 181–192.

16 Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation*, 148.

17 See chapter 5 (“Das Geheimnis und die geheime Gesellschaft”) of Simmel’s 1908 book, *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*. Consult also B. Nedelmann, “Geheimhaltung, Verheimlichung, Geheimnis – Einige Soziologische Vorüber-

their own identity is by possessing knowledge that others do not have. Two classifications for early Jewish social groups for whom esoteric knowledge is important are scribes and sects. The term “scribe” typically denotes bureaucrats who work in elite settings such as the court or temple, who have professions that require advanced literacy.¹⁸ In the Second Temple period such individuals are often portrayed as experts in the Torah. Ben Sira epitomizes such a conception of the scribe (e. g., Sir 38:24–39:11). Daniel is a learned man situated in a royal court, but other pseudepigraphic visionaries of the apocalypses, including Enoch, Ezra and Baruch, are not officials ensconced in a temple or court setting. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, learned men comprise a very important category in apocalyptic literature. *4 Ezra* defines the “wise” as having special books others do not possess (14:46), and Daniel presents the *maškilim* as teachers and custodians of revelation. In both books these social categories are populated with individuals who have expertise and education, as well as access to esoteric, revealed knowledge. Their possession of revelation makes them superior to other learned men. Daniel, for example, through divine revelation is able to do what the other wise men of Babylon cannot (discern the dream of Nebuchadnezzar and its interpretation). Nevertheless, these two group-defining elements, scribal expertise (often expressed as knowledge of Torah) and possession of esoteric knowledge, overlap with each other. Both are used to define individuals as exceptional teachers. This is the case with the *maškilim* of Daniel. One can also point to the Teacher of Righteousness, an expert with training in Torah who possesses additional divine revelation.

Ben Sira, even though he dismisses the study of “hidden” knowledge and the significance of dreams (3:21–24; 34:1–8), shares with the narrative portrayals of sages in the apocalypses the perspective that authoritative, learned individuals have both education/expertise (i. e., training in writing) and knowledge which derives from heaven that is esoteric, in the sense that it is available only to a select few – namely, those who study the Torah under the tutelage of a teacher like Ben Sira, who has divine wisdom. Chapter 24 associates personified wisdom with a tree and also water, utilizing the river

legungen,” in *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions* (ed. H. G. Kippenberg and G. G. Stroumsa; SHR 45; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 1–16.

18 The scholarship on this topic is voluminous. See L. Grabbe, “Scribes, Writing, and Epigraphy in the Second Temple Period,” in “See, I Will Bring a Scroll Recounting What Befell Me” (*Ps 40:8*): *Epigraphy and Daily Life from the Bible to the Talmud. Dedicated to the Memory of Professor Hanan Eshel* (ed. E. Eshel and Y. Levin; JAJSup 12; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 105–122; C. A. Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran* (STDJ 52; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 37–47.

imagery from the account of the garden of Eden in Genesis 1–3, describing this water as nurturing his own garden, a metaphor for his own pedagogical interaction with students (vv. 12–17, 25–31).¹⁹ The composition uses language of revelation and divine inspiration to articulate what he can convey to them (vv. 32–33). Wisdom will “reveal her secrets,” he claims, to one who obediently follows the path of life that he lays out for him (4:18; cf. 42:18). This knowledge, the book stresses, will allow such a student to understand the Torah and how God has structured the natural world. The composition presents Ben Sira as a sage who possesses knowledge from heaven and thus that he is a source of something rare and exceptional that students should crave. Its acquisition does not form an identity marker for a sect with elect status, but it nevertheless plays a major role in community formation for the students of Ben Sira. His admonition in Sir 3:21–24 that one not study “wondrous” (פלאות) and “hidden” (נסתרות) knowledge employs terms utilized by the Dead Sea sect to describe the revealed knowledge they purportedly possessed (e.g., 1QS V, 11–12; IX, 18; CD XIII, 8). Ben Sira’s dismissal of “hidden” knowledge is probably not because it is “apocalyptic,” while the knowledge he conveys is “sapiential.” It is more likely that he delegitimizes revealed knowledge that he does not possess or control access to.

The *Sitz im Leben* of apocalyptic literature is often understood as scribal. There is something to this, but it depends on what is meant by “scribal.” The prominence of writing and books in this material suggests it was circulated among learned and educated people. Reading and writing were rare skills possessed by individuals who often operated in aristocratic settings, such as the court or temple. Richard Horsely asserts, even though he is dubious of the apocalypses as a literary category, that these texts originate from a specific social setting – scribes who, while normally socially conservative in outlook, revolted against the dominion of Hellenistic rulers, utilizing their scribal training to craft books that disseminated visions that foretold the demise of the imperial state.²⁰ This construal of apocalypticism fits well with Daniel. Daniel is a courtly scribe whose visions are decidedly anti-imperial. But this model cannot do justice to pre-Maccabean apocalypses. The content of the *Astronomical Book* is highly mathematical and does not envision the demise of a wicked king or an evil, oppressive state. *Watchers*,

19 M. J. Goff, “Gardens of Knowledge: Teachers in 4QInstruction, Ben Sira and the Hodayot,” in *Pedagogy in Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. K. Martin Hogan, M. Goff, and E. Wasserman; SBLEJL; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, forthcoming).

20 R. A. Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

with its emphasis on the corruption of the world and the spread of demons, could have been used to understand political enemies, but this goal is much more explicit in Daniel than *Watchers*.²¹ Moreover, 4QInstruction, which is clearly written to an audience that endured material poverty, indicates that advanced training in literacy and Torah study, and claims of supernatural revelation, did not only circulate in elite, scribal settings. While it is possible that some court or temple scribes used their erudition to compose apocalypses, one should not construe such learned, elite individuals as the only milieu in which these texts could have originated.

Another problem with attributing apocalypses to administrative scribes is aptly demonstrated by another major social function of esoteric knowledge – its role in the formation of sects, which were abundant in this period.²² Claims of revelation are easy to assert and can produce a great deal of social power for people who are recognized as custodians of such knowledge. The most secret realm of knowledge is, in this sense, the least restricted.²³ Apocalypticism is a decentralized phenomenon. The Dead Sea sect forms around the view that it possesses authentic revelations that were originally disclosed to the Teacher of Righteousness. While this figure and other leaders of the sect may have been priestly, they are never depicted as “scribes” in the sense of bureaucrats who operate out of the temple or the court. No text of the Dead Sea Scrolls describes any leader of the *yahad* as a סופר, the term used by Ben Sira for such elite intellectuals (Sir 38:24). The Qumran group is a sect that coalesces around the conviction that the revealed knowledge associated with the Teacher of Righteousness regarding how to understand the Torah, the covenant between God and Israel, and the eschatological judgement, should be preserved and carried out. Other groups proliferated on the basis of similar claims to revealed knowledge. Though the evidence prevents sure conclusions, some of the booklets of *1 Enoch* (e. g., the *Epistle of Enoch*) were likely the basis for the formation of a community for which the possession of the knowledge originally given to Enoch was important for their sense of their own identity.²⁴ People who followed the “Man of the Lie,” a teacher and leader of a sect against which the *yahad* polemicizes, were likely told that they were the ones who had authen-

21 It has been argued, for example, that the book’s portrayal of the violent sons of the watchers as giants constitutes a negative assessment of invading Hellenistic armies. See, for example, A. E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 19.

22 A. I. Baumgarten, *The Flourishing of Jewish Sects in the Maccabean Period: An Interpretation* (JSJSup 55; Leiden: Brill, 1997).

23 Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation*, 152.

24 Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 74.

tic heavenly knowledge and that it was the *yahad* who spreads lies (CD 1:14–17; 1QpHab 5:8–12). The Qumran *Book of Mysteries* asserts that its addressees have access to revealed knowledge (4Q299 8 6), while disparaging “magicians” who are “skilled in sin” and speak in parables and riddles, asserting that they do not know “the eternal mysteries” (4Q300 1 ii). *Mysteries* acknowledges the learned nature of the group it criticizes, and these “magicians” can be understood as teachers of some sort. They likely bolstered their own authority by claiming to have revealed knowledge while dismissing the similar claims of the group behind *Mysteries*. Various sects claimed access to special revelation, and at times these assertions clashed with one another. Such proliferating claims of revelation problematize the pursuit for a single social setting in which one can locate the origins of apocalypticism.

The decentralized nature of apocalypticism also affects the construal of its traditio-historical background. Gerhard von Rad famously argued that apocalypticism arises out of the wisdom tradition instead of prophecy.²⁵ This sparked a vibrant debate about the relationship between wisdom and apocalypticism.²⁶ For von Rad, wisdom literature is the product of court intellectuals who are not simply administrators but also deep thinkers who desired to understand the nature of reality, and over time they applied their thirst for knowledge to the end of history, producing apocalypticism. Knowledge is indeed an important theme in both traditions. Both the sapiential and apocalyptic traditions revolve around texts that purport to transmit wisdom, the means by which to understand the world (cf. *1 En.* 82:2–3; 92:1). It should not be disputed that the wisdom tradition was a formative element in the development of the apocalypticism. The *Similitudes of Enoch* directly adapts the figure of personified wisdom (*1 Enoch* 42), which stands at the center of Proverbs, Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon. Since it is reasonable to understand producers of apocalypses as educated, it follows that they would have had some exposure to wisdom literature, a key element of pedagogy in ancient Israel. But just as the origins of apocalypticism should not be associated with a single community or movement, the formation of this literature should not be reduced to the issue of one single tradition influencing another. Apocalyptic literature is the product of people drawing upon various cultural and literary traditions, including post-exilic prophecy,

25 G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 2:301–315.

26 For an overview, see M. J. Goff, “Wisdom and Apocalypticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* (ed. J. J. Collins; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 52–68, here 58–60.

the sapiential tradition, Persian religion, and ancient Near Eastern myth. Apocalypticism comprises, to use a term made popular by Lévi-Strauss' *The Savage Mind*, a *bricolage* of traditions forged into a new whole during the Hellenistic age.²⁷

The Expansion of Knowledge, Revelation, and Resistance in the Hellenistic Age

There is an expansion of the horizons of knowledge in the Hellenistic age. While 1 Kings praises Solomon's legendary wisdom, the only specific type of knowledge it says he acquired pertains to flora and fauna (1 Kgs 4:32–33). The knowledge he obtained according to the Wisdom of Solomon is on a much more profound scale, involving the nature of the universe, as mentioned above (Wis 7:17–21). In Job 38:18 God taunts Job by asking “have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?” This is exactly what Enoch does in *1 Enoch* 17–36. Why does this burgeoning of knowledge, presented as esoteric revelation from heaven, occur in the Second Temple period?

Halbertal stresses that the need to develop a concealed realm of knowledge flourishes in a time of crisis.²⁸ Generally the question of crisis in the Hellenistic period focuses on the Maccabean revolt. There is clearly something to this view. Political crises and oppression can function as catalysts for transforming tradition and developing new ones. This is important for understanding apocalypticism. Daniel, for example, refashions ancient Near Eastern mythic conceptions of chaos monsters and proclamations of divine judgment from the prophetic tradition in its effort to provide higher revelation to understand the Maccabean crisis.

Adaptations of older traditions, presented as revealed knowledge, also occurred elsewhere in the Near East in response to Seleucid oppression. The Persian apocalyptic text *Bahman Yasht* presents a striking parallel to Daniel. This text describes a vision disclosed to Zoroaster of a tree of four branches (in some versions seven), made respectively of gold, silver, bronze and mixed iron, each of which symbolizes kings (1.1–5).²⁹ The fourth kingdom signi-

27 C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 16–22.

28 Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation*, 137–139.

29 C. G. Cereti, *The Zand ī Wahman Yasn: A Zoroastrian Apocalypse* (Serie Orientale Roma 75; Rome: Istituto Italiano per Il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1995). See also A. Hultgård, “Persian Apocalypticism,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism. Volume 1: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. J. J. Collins; New York: Continuum, 2002), 39–83.

fies “the evil rule <of> the parted hair *dēws* [demons] of the seed of wrath [*Xēšm*]” (1.11; cf. 3.29). The demons invade Iran, causing turmoil and chaos. People are confused and stray away from their religious traditions (4.16–30). There is a general weakening of the created order (4.41–48). It stops raining. The milk of the cows has less cream. Even the horses run slower. The demons are then defeated by the god Mithra, who restores the traditional religion of Iran (7.32–37). The demons with “parted hair” are reasonably identified as a reference to Alexander and his invading Macedonian army.³⁰ The account of the destruction of these demons even mentions Alexander by name (7.32; cf. 3.26). Native religious traditions were also marshaled against Hellenistic rule in Egypt. This is the case, for example, in the *Potter’s Oracle*, which was probably written in the late third century B.C.E.³¹ This prophetic text, not unlike the *Bahman Yasht*, foretells a time of dismay during which the sun grows dim and morals decline that is to last until the “greatest goddess” (Isis, presumably) sends a “king from the sun” who will rule, thus overthrowing the Ptolemaic dynasty (2.8). The oracle also predicts that “the city of foreigners which was founded will be deserted” (1.6), a clear allusion to Alexandria, the seat of Ptolemaic rule. The *Bahman Yasht* and the *Potter’s Oracle* illustrate that Daniel is not unique but rather an instance of the broader phenomenon of cultures of the Hellenistic Near East reimagining their older religious traditions to make sense of their political subjugation, expressing resentment against foreign rulers and imagining their overthrow.

Antediluvian Wisdom, Astronomy and the Cultural Politics of Knowledge

The crisis that the ancient cultures of the Near East faced in the Hellenistic age should not, however, simply be reduced to political oppression by foreign kings. The Hellenistic age triggered a broader crisis of identity and knowledge. As Collins stressed in the 1970s, the loss of native power to Hel-

30 S. K. Eddy, *The King is Dead: Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism*, 334–31 B. C. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 19–21. Note also that assessing the original context of this *yasht* is problematized by additions to it during the Sassanid period.

31 For the text of the *Potter’s Oracle*, see M. Austin, *The Hellenistic World from Alexander to The Roman Conquest: A Selection of Ancient Sources in Translation* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 569–571. Consult also Eddy, *The King is Dead*, 292–294.

lenistic rulers produced a climate of alienation,³² fomenting a nostalgia for the past. Native intellectuals wanted to show the value and importance of their cultures by highlighting their venerable antiquity. This is an overarching goal of Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*. Not unlike Josephus, Berossus and Manetho, a Babylonian and an Egyptian priest, respectively, wrote in Greek and described their cultures and religious traditions as being incredibly old.

During the Hellenistic period a widespread interest existed in the primordial past as the source of knowledge that is important to human civilization. In a fragment from Alexander Polyhistor preserved in the chronicles of Eusebius and Syncellus, Berossus provides a Mesopotamian tradition regarding the origins of civilization. He recounts that a large fish-monster, with both a fish head and a human head, by the name of Oannes (Sumerian Uan) swam to shore and spoke to humans, giving them knowledge of agriculture, mathematics, writing, and how to build cities.³³ Diodorus Siculus (first century B.C.E.) stresses instead the antiquity of Egypt and attributes the origin of primordial knowledge, in particular the invention of astronomy and writing, to Hermes, an *interpretatio graeca* of Thoth, the Egyptian god of writing (1.16.1; cf. 1.9.6).³⁴ He stresses not only Egypt's age but also the country's continuity with its distant past, claiming that the rainless region of southern Egypt survived the flood from the time of Deucalion (1.10.4). Artapanus, a Jewish Egyptian author, also appropriates the figure of Hermes, stating that Hermes is another name for Moses, who invented many foundational elements of Egyptian culture, including writing (hieroglyphics) and the knowledge of stone construction, thus attributing a Jewish origin to the pyramids and other monuments in the country (*apud* Eusebius, *Praep. ev.*, 9.27.4). The Phoenicians claimed Thoth (Tautos) as one of their own who, according to Philo of Byblos' *Phoenician History* (late first century C.E.), invented writing and was the first "to introduce scientific discipline" to humankind (*apud* Eus., *Praep. ev.* 1.9.24).³⁵ An Egyptian text, dated to the second century B.C.E. and

32 J. J. Collins, "Jewish Apocalypticism against Its Hellenistic Near Eastern Environment," in *Seers, Sibyls and Sages*, 59–74, here 69. For a recent overview of the Hellenistic age, see Matthew Goff, "The Hellenistic Period," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Ancient Israel* (ed. S. Niditch; West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 241–56.

33 G. P. Verbrugge and J. M. Wickersham, *Berossos and Manetho, Introduced and Translated* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 44. Oannes corresponds to the *apkallu* Adapa, whom according to Mesopotamian tradition the god Ea sent to the world to bring civilization to humankind.

34 P. van der Horst, "Antediluvian Knowledge," in *Japheth in the Tents of Shem: Studies on Jewish Hellenism in Antiquity* (CBET 32; Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 139–158, here 140–141.

35 H. W. Attridge, and R. A. Oden, Jr., *Philo of Byblos: The Phoenician History* (CBQMS 9; Washington, D. C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981), 29.

attributed to Nechepso and Petosiris, a pharaoh and sage from earlier times, contains a range of astronomical knowledge, including information about eclipses, presented as revealed knowledge disclosed by Hermes, reflecting syncretism of Hermes and Thoth.³⁶ Hermes is also a revelatory source of astronomical knowledge according to Eratosthenes (third century B.C.E.).³⁷ He wrote a poem entitled *Hermes* which conveys extensive technical information about the world and the cosmos reported by Hermes, who, having ascended to the heavenly realm, observes what he sees.

The early Jewish effort to attribute the origins of writing and astronomical knowledge to Enoch (*1 En.* 72:1; *Jub.* 4:17) coheres remarkably well with accounts of the invention of writing and astronomy made elsewhere in the Hellenistic world. Hermes in particular, the intermediary between the heavenly and divine realms in Greek mythology, is functionally quite similar to Enoch. Both were considered important sources of esoteric knowledge.³⁸ Moreover, the (non-Jewish) Hellenistic texts examined above legitimize the knowledge they contain with the same tropes found in Jewish apocalyptic literature – claims of supernatural revelation, pseudepigraphic attribution to an authoritative figure of the distant past, and writtleness as an authorizing motif.

Philip Alexander understands the theme of astronomy in Enochic literature by arguing that Enoch is the “patron of Second Temple Jewish science.”³⁹ Alexander attributes this interest to a kind of intellectual revolution that began in the Persian period, in which “a remarkably free interchange of ideas” took place among scholars throughout the region, as evident in the emergence of Greek natural philosophy in western Anatolia (Miletus) in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. and Enochic “science” in Palestine in the third century.

36 P. Pablo Fuentes González, “Néchépso-Pétosiris,” in *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques, IV: de Labeo à Ovidius* (ed. R. Goulet; Paris: C. N. R. S. Éditions, 2005), 601–615, here 603; M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (2 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 1:215.

37 K. Geus, *Eratosthenes von Kyrene. Studien zur hellenistischen Kultur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (MBPF 92; Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002).

38 K. von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2005), 18–20.

39 P. S. Alexander, “Enoch and Beginnings of Jewish Interest in Natural Science,” in *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought* (ed. C. Hempel, A. Lange and H. Lichtenberger; BETL 159; Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 223–243, here 230. See also A. Yoshiko Reed, “Was there science in ancient Judaism? Historical and cross-cultural reflections on ‘religion’ and ‘science,’” *SR* 36 (2007): 461–495. Consult further the essays in J. Ben-Dov and S. L. Sanders, *Ancient Jewish Sciences and the History of Knowledge in Second Temple Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

The Hellenistic age was a time of intellectual dynamism not only because of political crises. The era created a new cultural context in which a range of ideas, originating from Greece and elsewhere, could be exchanged across different cultures. An exchange of knowledge among intellectuals of different ethnicities certainly existed in the Hellenistic age, as in other periods. For example, technical and specialized knowledge regarding the cosmos spread in the Hellenistic period from Babylon to Greece and Egypt.⁴⁰ But concern for “scientific” knowledge, as we have seen, was not simply an issue of intellectuals’ disinterested desire to observe and understand the natural order, as is implied by our modern conception of science. Alexander’s emphasis on science and the free exchange of ideas overlooks the fact that astronomical knowledge was an intellectual commodity that was claimed and exploited by various social actors.

The conception of the natural order in the Enochic apocalypses should be understood in terms of the cultural politics of knowledge of the Hellenistic age. Intellectuals belonging to various ethnic groups observed that there was knowledge common to people throughout the Near East, such as agriculture or writing. Moreover, they often postulated a single point of origin for this knowledge, an exceptional individual such as Hermes, Thoth or Enoch, from whom such knowledge disseminated.⁴¹ Such construals of the origins of astronomy and other forms of civilizing knowledge constituted efforts by peoples who had fallen out of power to give pride of place to their own cultures, by showing that others (including those who rule over them) benefit from their wisdom.⁴² Specifically, debates about the origins of astronomy functioned as a cipher for the question of which culture was the oldest, a point of pride for peoples subjugated by the Greeks, whose culture was generally regarded as much younger than those of the Near East.⁴³ A people regarded as the inventors of such knowledge was also generally understood as preserving this knowledge for centuries, stressing not only their antiquity but also their stability. Such ancient knowledge implied a heritage of centuries of good governance, enabling accurate celestial observation and the preservation of data.

40 R. Beck, *A Brief History of Ancient Astrology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 16.

41 K. Jax and K. Thraede, “Erfinder I,” *RAC* 5 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1962), 1179–1191; K. Thraede, “Erfinder II,” *ibid.*, 1191–1278. See also S. Blundell, *The Origins of Civilization in Greek & Roman Thought* (London: Groom Helm, 1986).

42 This mindset is also evident in Josephus who, for example, argues that Jewish law was an important source for Pythagoras (*Ag. Ap.* 1.162–165).

43 A. Yoshiko Reed, “Abraham as Chaldean Scientist and Father of the Jews: Josephus, *Ant.* 1.154–168, and the Greco-Roman Discourse about Astronomy/Astrology,” *JSJ* 35 (2004): 119–158 here 136–142.

As an example, the Jewish author Pseudo-Eupolemus (ca. 200 B.C.E.; *apud Praep. ev.* 9.17.2–9) exalts Enoch as the first to acquire astronomical knowledge. He attributes the transmission of this knowledge to Abraham, whose journey from Babylon to Canaan to Egypt, recounted in Genesis 12, is reconfigured so that he spreads astronomical knowledge during his travels. This tradition is also in Josephus (*Ant.* 1.151–68). So understood, the progress of civilization has a westward arc. Such a perspective leaves little room for the priority of the Greeks in the history of culture, or even that of Egypt, from which, Greeks asserted, they derived key elements of their own culture (e.g., Plato, *Tim.* 22; Herod. 2.50–54).

Astronomical knowledge was also important because of the widespread view that the universe has a divinely ordained structure. Festugière argued that a major element of a prevailing “Hellenistic mood” was that the cosmos was organized according to regular principles.⁴⁴ He argued that this belief was in part a response to the political upheaval of the period. Conceptions of fate and astral determinism, shaped in part by the popularity of the Zodiac, helped explain the sense that one’s life is determined by events out of her control.⁴⁵ A prevailing sense of chaos and instability created a need to envision the cosmos as ordered and coherent. Such a mood was favorable to the spread of ideas throughout the Hellenistic world that articulated this sense of cosmic order. Stoicism, which reimagined Platonic thought by understanding the logos as the divine rational principle that animates the cosmos, stressed fatalism and the determined nature of reality, teaching that the goal of the individual is to attempt to live in harmony within this larger cosmic structure. Philo and other Alexandrine Jews, such as the author of the Wisdom of Solomon, re-envisioned Judaism with such ideas at its core to an extent not found in Jewish writings from Palestine in this period. Stoic ideas also influenced writings by (non-Jewish) Egyptians, as is evident from the writings of Chaeremon and the wisdom text *Papyrus Insinger*.⁴⁶

44 A.-J. Festugière, O. P., *Personal Religion among the Greeks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), 37–52. See also J. J. Collins, “Cosmos and Salvation: Jewish Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Hellenistic Age,” in *Seers, Sibyls and Sages*, 317–338, here 328; von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism*, 16–17.

45 M. Popović, *Reading the Human Body: Physiognomics and Astrology in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Hellenistic-Early Roman Period Judaism* (STDJ 67; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 119–128. The rigid difference between astrology and astronomy in modern usage does not work well with regard to speculation about the nature of the cosmos in antiquity. See Reed, “Abraham as Chaldean Scientist,” 122.

46 P. W. van der Horst, *Chaeremon: Egyptian Priest and Stoic Philosopher* (EPRO 101; Leiden: Brill, 1987); M. J. Goff, “Hellenistic Instruction in Palestine and Egypt: Ben Sira and Papyrus Insinger,” *JSJ* 36 (2005): 147–172.

Conclusion

The Judaism of the late Second Temple period produced a robust economy of knowledge. Various social groups produced, preserved and circulated knowledge of various sorts. Numerous texts, such as Daniel or the booklets of *1 Enoch*, put forward totalizing, comprehensive systems of knowledge that helped make reality intelligible. Such texts are exercises in symbolic world-building. The apocalypses constitute a critical component of these efforts. The knowledge they convey was endowed with additional value by being understood as divinely revealed, allowing individuals and sects to derive legitimacy and authority from the possession of such restricted knowledge. While the contexts of such claims can vary wildly, this social function of esoteric knowledge transgresses a neat divide between wisdom and apocalypticism, with teachers associated with both genres presented as custodians of divine knowledge (e. g., Ben Sira and the *maskilim* of Daniel).

The political situation of the Hellenistic age produced a need to explain oppression from foreign kings that also fomented a more insidious sense of cultural alienation, triggered by the subjugation of the ancient cultures of the Near East by the upstart Greeks. Native intellectuals sought to present their cultures as the originators of beneficial knowledge that was disseminated throughout the entire Hellenistic world. The attribution of the origins of astronomy to supernatural revelation disclosed to Enoch indicates that Jews were participants in this cultural discourse. Jews in the Hellenistic age appealed to revelation to legitimate knowledge, which often involved the teleological structure of history culminating in eschatological judgment and the organization of the cosmos according to divinely established principles, in order to endow a world that often seemed chaotic with coherence and meaning.

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