

**The Voices of the “Triumphant Hymn”:
The Orthodox *Sanctus* as a Christian *Merkabah* Text**

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A clarification is due at the very beginning of this article.¹ By “the *Sanctus*” I do not refer to the thrice-holy hymn alone, “Holy, holy, holy, etc.” I rather take the word to refer both to the hymn itself and to the introduction to it,² because they exist as one unit in current Orthodox practice. In other words, this is an article on what could be called “the Orthodox *Sanctus*,” the introduction to the hymn and the hymn itself. The hymn itself is the same but the introduction varies slightly between the two common Orthodox anaphoras attributed to St. John Chrysostom and to St. Basil the Great, respectively. The preface of the hymn describes the heavenly liturgy (which the earthly liturgy joins) and ends in both variants by prefacing the hymn itself—“the hymn of victory” (ὁ ἐπινίκιος ὕμνος)—with four participles: ἄδοντα, βοῶντα, κεκραγῶτα, καὶ λέγοντα (“roaring, lowing aloud, crying out, and saying”). My overall argument is that the *Sanctus* is a Christian *merkabah* text. In other words, the *Sanctus* inherits the ancient Jewish mystical tradition about the divine throne-chariot (*merkabah*) and its occupant, the Glory,

¹ This article is an expanded form of a talk given in Timișoara, Romania, in October 2018. I wish to thank the organizers of that conference, particularly Met. Ioan of Timișoara and Frs. Nichifor Tănase and Rafael Povîrnaru.

The one who several years ago suggested to me this line of inquiry is my mentor, former professor, and bishop Alexander (Golitzin). He is also the first person I consulted for the arguments of this paper. This note is a modest expression of my gratitude. The research became more a matter of urgency as five years ago I started translating the well-known Simonopetra *Ieratikon* into English (*Ἱερατικὸν* [4 vols; The Holy Mountain, 2008-2017]). The collaborative work (with Rev. Matthew-Peter Butrie and Archb. Alexander) recently saw publication as *Ieratikon according to the Simonopetra Tradition* (4 vols.; Dayton, OH: The Cherubim Press, 2019). The three-volume translation (which replicates the original Greek edition) is accompanied by a large fourth volume with extensive notes on the translation, its vision and practices.

² By this introduction I mean the phrase which in the Liturgy of St. John begins with εὐχαριστοῦμεν σοὶ καὶ (“we thank you also”), and in that of St. Basil, with σὲ γὰρ αἰνοῦσιν ἄγγελοι (“for angels praise you”).

tradition which is developed on the basis of Ezekiel 1.³ A secondary point is built on this initial argument, namely that the four participles that introduce the triumphant hymn refer specifically to the sounds of the four faces of the Cherubim: the roaring of the lion, the lowing of the ox, the crying out of the eagle, and the speaking of the human. This ancient (and I would daresay, original) sense of the four participles is attested in early iconography and mystagogical texts and is witnessed in Constantinople as recently as the nineteenth century.

I must also say here that this article is not joining the arguments on the introduction of the *Sanctus* into the Eucharistic prayer or the research on the historical development of the *Sanctus*. Simply put, I am not interested here in liturgical history, in the *when*, *why*, and *how*—questions that only a specialist could address properly.⁴ I am interested, rather, in the theology of the *Sanctus* as it is, the final product, in what this depiction of the heavenly liturgy wants to say. Starting with the late 1970s a related argument has been made that the ancient Jewish *merkabah* tradition stands more or less at the root of the *Sanctus*.⁵ Yet, this argument was advanced summarily at a time when the scholarship of the *merkabah* tradition itself was still in its incipient stages. The *merkabah* connection was picked up again in 1991. In an extensive monograph Bryan Spinks revisited, to an unfavorable decision, Robert Taft's argument that the *Sanctus* has an Egyptian origin.⁶ Essential to Taft's argument was Origen's *On First Principles* 4.3 (14):

³ The numbering of biblical books used in the paper, including that of the psalms, is the one of the Septuagint. The translations of ancient texts are mine unless noted otherwise.

⁴ On these issues see, among other titles, Robert Taft, "The Interpolation of the Sanctus into the Anaphora: When and Where? A Review of the Dossier," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 57 (1991), 281-308; and 58 (1992), 531-52; Bryan D. Spinks, *The Sanctus in the Eucharistic Prayer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); idem, "The Integrity of the Anaphora of Sarapion of Thmuis and Liturgical Methodology," *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998), 136-44; Gabriele Winkler, *Das Sanctus. Über den Ursprung und die Anfänge des Sanctus und sein Fortwirken* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 267; Rome, 2002).

⁵ Leon Cornet, "Sanctus et Merkaba," *Questions liturgiques* 59 (1978), 23-37; Bryan D. Spinks, "Jewish Sources for the Sanctus," *The Heythrop Journal* 21 (1980), 168-79.

⁶ Spinks, *The Sanctus*; Taft, "The Interpolation."

My Hebrew teacher also used to teach as follows, that since the beginning or the end of all things could not be comprehended by any except our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, this was the reason why Isaiah spoke of there being in the vision that appeared to him two Seraphim only, who with two wings cover the face of God, with two cover his feet and with two fly, crying one to another and saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of your glory.” For because the two Seraphim alone have their wings over the face of God and over his feet, we may venture to declare that neither the armies of the holy angels (*exercitus sanctorum angelorum*), nor the holy thrones, nor the dominions, nor principalities nor powers can wholly know the beginnings of all things and the ends of the universe.⁷

It should be added that the Alexandrian makes the point about the two beings on each side of the throne not only here, but also in 1.3.4, which also connects to the Hebrew teacher, but which now juxtaposes Is 6.3 with Hab 3.2:

My Hebrew master used to say that the two seraphim, which are described in Isaiah as having six wings each and as crying one to another and saying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts” (Is 6.3), were to be understood to mean the only-begotten Son of God and the Holy Spirit. And we ourselves think that the expression in the song of Habakkuk, “In the midst of the two animals” or the two living creatures “thou shalt be known” (Hab 3.2), should be understood to refer to Christ and the Holy Spirit. For all knowledge of the Father, when the Son reveals him, is made known to us through the Holy Spirit. So that both of these, who in

⁷ B. W. Butterworth, *Origen. On First Principles* (London: Peter Smith, 1936), 311; *Origenes Werke. Band 5* (ed. P. Koetschau; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1913), 5.346-7.

the words of the prophet are called “animals” or “living beings,” are the cause of our knowledge of God the Father.⁸

Contra Taft, Spinks opined that the eucharistic Sanctus most probably comes either from Jewish synagogal liturgy, from Jewish *merkabah* mysticism, or from biblical imageries themselves, directly or indirectly. Therefore, he maintained that Origen’s theology is of little import.⁹

Ironically, what both Spinks and Taft failed to notice is exactly the point in which their arguments converge, namely that in *On First Principles* 4.3 (14) and 1.3.4 the Alexandrian gives voice to nothing else but the *merkabah* tradition. As I will show below, both Is 6.3 and Hab 3.2 (in the version known to Origen) are *merkabah* texts and Origen uses them as such. In his *Commentary on Romans* 3.8 he himself states that the two living creatures of the biblical texts are the Cherubim of the Holy of holies, the *merkabah* of Ezekiel 1.¹⁰

Jewish *Merkabah* Mysticism

The ancient Jewish *merkabah* tradition has received extensive scholarly attention in the last five decades, ever since the seminal work of Gershom Scholem.¹¹ A brief introduction to *merkabah* mysticism, with cautionary remarks, is needed. First and foremost, *merkabah* mysticism is not confined to a clearly definable and homogeneous body of literature, either ancient or medieval. In other words, there is no *merkabah* “literature.”¹² Yet it is incongruous to require such a corpus

⁸ Butterworth, *Origen. On First Principles*, 32.

⁹ Spinks, *The Sanctus*, 87-89. See also his more nuanced position in “The Integrity of the Anaphora of Sarapion of Thmuis and Liturgical Methodology,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998), 136-44.

¹⁰ For a closer reading of Origen’s interpretation of these passages, see Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), 134-40.

¹¹ Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (2nd ed. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965); *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1941).

¹² Most of what scholars would deem as *merkabah* speculations survive in the Hekhalot corpus. This corpus is published in Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhaloth-Literatur* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 2;

in order to discern *merkabah* influences on something or the *merkabah* identity of a tradition. The discernable difference between later and earlier *merkabah* texts is that the former adhere to their *merkabah* interests more consistently and explicitly, and use the *merkabah* Urtexts more thoroughly. These Urtexts are Ezekiel 1, the primary foundational text of the whole mysticism (*merkabah* being the throne-chariot in it), Daniel 7, Psalm 97, and Isaiah 6.

Second, *merkabah* mysticism, at least as it transpires in extant texts, does not seem to be confined to a particular literary style so as to qualify as a genre, nor can it be defined as a static literary motif. Rather, the discernable *merkabah* tradition is a fluid cluster of motifs that express religious belief and praxis in different genres, such as apocalypticism. Arguably the central marker of the tradition is the description of the divine chariot-throne, the central element of its foundational text, Ezekiel 1.

Third, despite this seemingly narrow interpretive character, *merkabah* mysticism should not be identified based on the presence of any specific individual marker, but rather based on the presence of an underlying *merkabah* ideology or spirituality expressed in a cluster of markers of which one or more may be missing in any specific text. One should accept that there is no essential *sine qua non* identifier for *merkabah* mysticism and that this literary interest does not depend on any single individual marker, even the overt use of Ezekiel 1 or explicit descriptions of the divine throne. With these cautionary remarks in place, what follows is a summary, diachronic view of the *merkabah* tradition as it predates the *Sanctus*.

It is probable, based on the research to date, that this major tradition of Jewish mysticism—so sacred that its unsupervised study and un-experienced exposition are punished by

Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981). It is translated in James Davila, *Hekhalot Literature in Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

death¹³—grows out of the vision of the divine throne and its occupant, the Glory, vision which the prophet Ezekiel had by the river Chebar. This vision is complex and puzzling. The divine throne is carried by four creatures (חַיִּיִּם / *hayyot*; ζῳῶα) each having four faces: human, lion, ox, and eagle.¹⁴ The vision is granted further details in chapter ten: the *hayyot* are called Cherubim and, in the Greek version of 10.12, they are covered in eyes on their backs, hands, wings, and wheels.¹⁵

The vision of chapters 1 and 10 is extended into chapter 3, where the *hayyot* are said to make “a sound of great shaking” (φωνὴ σεισμοῦ μεγάλου), which exclaims “Blessed is the Glory of the Lord from his place” (Ezek 3.12).¹⁶ The following verse (3.13) suggests that the blessing is the sound of the wings “of the living creatures as they flutter to one another” (אִשָּׁה אֶל אַחֶתָּהּ; ἑτέρα πρὸς τὴν ἑτέραν). The Septuagint repeats the imagery in 1.23: “fluttering to one another” (πτερυσσόμεναι ἑτέρα τῆ ἑτέρα).

¹³ See the materials analyzed in David Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (American Oriental Society 62; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980), 19-64.

¹⁴ The detail seems to be a later insertion into chapter 1, imported from chapter 10. The Hebrew text refers to the faces for the first time in 10.14, a verse which is not in the Septuagint.

¹⁵ The Masoretic text of Ezekiel never describes the *hayyot* as being covered in eyes. It is only the *ophanim*, the wheels, which are covered in eyes (1.17-18 and 10.12). Most likely the wheels were originally meant, at least in chapter 10, as a second class of heavenly beings alongside the creatures-cherubim. On this see David Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), 45-7.

¹⁶ This and all subsequent translations from the Septuagint are mine, unless noted otherwise. I have consulted the Greek text in *Septuaginta. Editio altera* (Alfred Rahlfs, ed.; rev. Robert Hanhart; Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006). The psalms are referenced according to this LXX numbering. S. D. Luzzatto in the nineteenth century and Walter Zimmerli in the twentieth advanced the argument that the exclamation of 3.12 is a misreading of an original “as the Glory rose from his place.” See S. D. Luzzatto, *Erläuterungen* (Lemberg: Menkes, 1876; repr. Jerusalem: Makor, 1969), 127; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* (2 vols.; trans. R. E. Clemens; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979, 1982), *ad loc.* See also Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel* (2 vols.; Anchor Bible 22, 23; New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1997), 1:71; Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (3rd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 332. These two scholars have convinced the entire Ezekielian scholarship (I myself remain unconvinced). A note should be made here that, even if the exclamation is not the original reading of the text, it belongs here naturally. Whether the blessing is an editorial accretion or not, all of the developments of the vision suggest that the *merkabah* tradition has both its root and earliest developments in the book itself and that its liturgical features can also be traced back to the extant Ezekiel.

Ezekiel does not—in Hebrew or Greek—qualify this hymning any further, but in 43.2, where the Masoretic text has “its sound [of the glory] was like the sound of many waters (מים רבים),”¹⁷ the Septuagint uses a word that, I would suggest, is very significant: “and the sound of the camp was like the sound of many doublers/repeaters” (καὶ φωνὴ τῆς παρεμβολῆς ὡς φωνὴ διπλασιαζόντων πολλῶν).¹⁸ Διπλασιάζω means—to double, to duplicate, to repeat. The meaning of this strange verb, I would suggest, is revealed only by what Ezekiel tries to do in his book overall. As previous scholarship has shown, the primary function of Ezekiel is to save the presence of God from the Babylonian destruction.¹⁹ A primary point of the whole book, if not its central point, is precisely the fact that the throne presented to the prophet’s sight is none other than the throne of the Holy of holies, mounted by the Glory. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, the throne complex—the *hayyot*, wheels, faces, wings, cloud, burning coal, and fire—does not merely replicate or echo the temple worship, but it *is* the temple worship summed up in its focal point, the divine presence. The Glory himself, mounted upon his throne, acts as the Holy of holies and the totality of the temple.²⁰ The prophetic book thus confirms not only the continued presence of God among his people, but also the continuation of the temple and its cult.²¹ I would suggest that, read against this temple focus which undergirds the whole book—

¹⁷ This and all subsequent translations of the Masoretic text are my own, unless noted otherwise. I have used the text in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997).

¹⁸ The question has been asked whether the Septuagint version is a later interpretation of the original, which is assumed to be better represented by the Masoretic text. Halperin suggests that the interpretation takes the verb διπλασιάζω from the שָׁאן of Ps 67.18 (*The Faces of the Chariot*, 58). It need not be so. In the ancient Hebrew script *shin* and *nun* look similar to *mem*; מים רבים, many waters, can easily be שנים רבים, many repeaters.

¹⁹ See especially John F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth. Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000); Silviu Bunta, “In Heaven or on Earth: A Misplaced Temple Question about Ezekiel’s Visions,” in *With Letters of Light: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Early Jewish Apocalypticism, Magic and Mysticism in Honor of Rachel Elijor* (eds. D. Arbel and A. Orlov; Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 2010), 28-44.

²⁰ See Bunta, “In Heaven or on Earth,” 28-44. The same language survives in Orthodox liturgy, which calls Christ “Holy of holies” in the anaphora of St. Basil and in the prayer of the bowing of heads at Matins.

²¹ The point that the purpose of the vision of the Glory is to assure Ezekiel of the continuity of the cult is also made in Jacob of Serug: see Alexander Golitzin, *Jacob of Sarug’s Homily on the Chariot that Prophet Ezekiel Saw* (Piscataway, NJ : Gorgias Press, 2016), 76-7 (lines 640-652).

focus which did not escape the attentive eye of the Septuagint translators—the verb διπλασιάζω seems to describe antiphonal singing. The liturgy of the Cherubim is the very liturgy of the temple. It is not surprising then that this verb parallels the imagery of Is 6.3, a text that describes the Seraphim—who also in the temple—as “crying out toward one another” (וַיִּקְרָא זֶה אֶל זֶה; ἐκέκραγον ἕτερος πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον).

Ezekiel seems to share a second temple feature with Isaiah: the “sound of great shaking” in Ezek 3.12 echoes Is 6.4, which states that each voice of the antiphonal seraphim “shakes” (MT) or “stirs” (LXX) the foundation (MT) or the door lintel (LXX) of the temple. The fact that Ezekiel’s *merkabah* and Isaiah’s vision completely merged in later Jewish and Christian mysticism, as they do in the *Sanctus*, should not be surprising. There is evidence, some of which will be reviewed below, that the vision of Ezekiel was read very early on with an eye toward the vision of Isaiah and vice-versa, because both were perceived to be located in the temple and to be describing the very same reality.²² As David Halperin remarked,

Ezekiel 10:9 -17, by reinforcing the equation of the hayyot and the cherubim, confirms that the merkabah belongs in the context of the Jerusalem Temple, and that its importance is to mark the changes in God’s attitude toward this Temple. But the Temple setting suggests something else: that Ezekiel’s vision should be coupled with Isaiah’s, which also takes place both around God’s throne and in his Temple. Once this happens, Ezekiel’s merkabah begins to vibrate to rhythms set by Isaiah. The hayyot and the ofannim, for all their idiosyncrasies, absorb some of the energy of the seraphim and begin to act like them.²³

²² The Babylonian Talmud makes this point explicitly by ascribing to a fourth-century Sage (Abba ben Joseph bar Ḥama, or Rava) the conclusion that “everything that Ezekiel saw Isaiah saw also” (*b. Hag.* 13b).

²³ Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 46.

To return to the development of the *merkabah* tradition, Sir 49.8 and possibly 1 Chr 28.18 attest to its ongoing importance in the early second century BC, but they provide no details of import to this inquiry. Yet, the *merkabah* tradition receives one of its earliest²⁴ major developments in Ps 17.8-16 (18.7-15 MT), the Lord “bows the heavens” and “comes down,” “mounts cherubim” and flies enveloped in dark brightness, hail, and coals of fire, and at his approach the earth shakes and its foundations tremble and are uncovered down to the springs of the waters. The *merkabah* elements of the text are obvious and have been pointed out before; they need no repetition.²⁵ What is of particular note is that in this text the *merkabah* tradition merges with the very ancient tradition of God’s victorious descent.²⁶ The mergence was solidified in the early (pre-Christian) practice of reading *merkabah* texts at the festival of Shabuot, the commemoration of the descent on Sinai, a practice already evident in the earliest descriptions of the Pentecost.²⁷

²⁴ Arguments have been made for a date of the psalm as early as the tenth century BC: F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, “A Royal Psalm of Thanksgiving [2 Sam 22=Ps 18],” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72 (1953), 15-34; J.-L. Vesco, “Le Psaume 18, lecture davidique,” *Revue Biblique* 94 (1987), 5-62. At the other end of the spectrum some have proposed a date as late as the second century BC. Hans-Joachim Kraus has rightly drawn attention to the possibility that all these proposals rather reflect stages of the editorial development of the psalm (*Psalms. A Commentary* [2 vols.; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988, 1989], 1:256). For a review of the scholarship see Rebecca S. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of Chaos in the Hebrew Bible* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 75-78. For a recent balanced analysis see Alison Ruth Gray, *Psalm 18 in Words and Pictures: A Reading Through Metaphor* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 38-40, 202-4.

²⁵ Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 222.

²⁶ The primary ancient statements of the descent tradition are Ps 67.18, Hab 3.3-15, and Deut 33.2-3. On the descent tradition see the now classic F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 70-71, 101-2, 123, and Theodore Hiebert, *God of My Victory: The Ancient Hymn of Habakkuk 3* (HSM 38; Atlanta: Scholars, 1986). For a review of the rabbinic interpretations of this motif see Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah As Refracted Through the Generations* (London: Continuum, 2006), 359-67.

²⁷ On this see Halperin’s *The Faces of the Chariot*, 14-19; *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*, 132-133. The connection between the descent on Sinai and the *merkabah* of Ezekiel is not lost on the early Christian writers. For Origen see David Halperin, “Origen, Ezekiel’s Merkabah and the Ascension of Moses,” *Church History* 50 (1981), 261-75. Jerome links Ps 67.18, another descent verse, with Ezek 43.2 and Is 6.3 (*In Ezechielem* 13; PL 25, 416B-D). Novatian says that in these verses David describes “the chariot of God” of Ezekiel 1 (*De Trinitate* VIII; *Novatiani Romanae Urbis Presbyteri De Trinitate Liber* [ed. W. Fausset; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909], 26-7). The Liturgy of the Apostolic Constitutions also juxtaposes Ps 67.18 with the blessings of Ezek 3.12 and Is 6.3.

The *merkabah* tradition is attested with more detail in what Scholem called “the oldest description of the throne in the whole of this [*merkabah*] literature,” namely *I Enoch* 14.²⁸ In regard to the Holy of holies of the heavenly-earthly temple the text has this to say:

And I was looking and I saw a lofty throne; and its appearance was like ice, and its wheels were like the shining sun, and [its sides of] cherubim, and from beneath the throne issued rivers of flaming fire. And I was unable to see. The Great Glory sat upon it; his apparel was like the appearance of the sun and whiter than much snow.²⁹

The dependence on Ezekiel has been explored in numerous studies and needs not be revisited here.

Another very early expression of the *merkabah* tradition comes from the Septuagint version of Hab 3.2. The Masoretic text reads oddly:

O Lord, I have heard your report, and I feared, Lord, your work. In the midst of the years revive it, in the midst of the years make [it] known.

The Septuagint text instead has:

Lord, I have been listening to your sound (εισακήκοα τὴν ἀκοήν σου) and have been afraid, I observed your works³⁰ and was driven out of myself (ἐξέστην): you will

²⁸ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 44.

²⁹ *I Enoch* 14.18-20. Translation from George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *I Enoch. A New Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), with the one correction between brackets. The Ethiopian text has there “voices of the cherubim” (*waqala kiruben*), which could reflect Ezek 10:5. The Greek fragment of the Akhmim papyrus has “boundary” or “side of the cherubim” (ὄρος χερουβίν) and the proposal has been made to pluralize this to ὄροι, sides (J. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976], 200). I follow here this suggestion.

³⁰ Given the cultic setting of the text, I would contend that “the works” (τὰ ἔργα) does not refer here to creation, but it is shorthand for the artistic representations of the Cherubim (Exod 25.18-22) and maybe even of the Glory. For the argument that the presence of the Glory in the First Temple was represented in a statue see Silviu Bunta, “YHWH's Cultic Statue after 597/586 BCE: A Linguistic and Theological Reinterpretation of Ezek 28:12,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (2007): 222-241. When the artistic representations in the temple are called for the first time τὰ ἔργα, in Exod 31.4-5, this is done emphatically to the point of incoherent repetition (διανοεῖσθαι καὶ ἀρχιτεκτονῆσαι, ἐργάζεσθαι... τὰ λιθουργικὰ καὶ εἰς τὰ ἔργα τὰ τεκτονικὰ τῶν ξύλων ἐργάζεσθαι κατὰ πάντα τὰ

be perceived in the midst of the two creatures (ἐν μέσῳ δύο ζώων), you will be looked upon when the years come near.

In a 2019 study Bogdan Bucur reviews the scholarship on this difference and gives a fresh look to the ancient Christian and Jewish connections between Hab 3.2 (in the Septuagint version), Isaiah 6, and Ezekiel's *merkabah*.³¹ Bucur's conclusion—that the LXX version was no philological accident, but a deliberate choice guided by a theological preconception—is convincing.³²

The second time, at least to my knowledge, that a text refers specifically to the four faces of the cherubim is in a fragment from Qumran, 4Q385 4.³³ The fragment does not add to the *merkabah* tradition anything of note to our inquiry; the tetramorphs are not described as engaged in worship. Yet, they are described so in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, especially 4Q405 20 ii-21-22 (and also in 11Q17 vii). This longer composition seems to be the earliest Jewish text that describes the merging of the earthly and heavenly temples, or rather the celestialization of

ἔργα, [I filled him with a divine spirit] to conceive and to design, to work... the liturgical objects, and to work the works crafted out of wood, according to all the works). In LXX the artistic representations are often called τὰ ἔργα (e.g., Exod 35.21, 32-35). Num 4.43 even uses the peculiar expression λειτουργεῖν πρὸς τὰ ἔργα, “to liturgize toward the works.” In Numbers (LXX) the verb λειτουργέω is used exclusively for liturgical service (G. Dorival et al., eds., *La Bible d'Alexandrie. IV. Les Nombres* [Paris: Cerf, 1994], 115-117), which makes “the works” the object of cultic service. The scriptural references to the cherubim are reviewed in Alice Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 385; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), but she is missing all these points.

³¹ Bogdan Bucur, *Scripture Re-envisioned: Christophanic Exegesis and the Making of a Christian Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 191-207. See also Bogdan Bucur and Elijah Mueller, “Gregory Nazianzen's Exegesis of Hab 3:2 (LXX) and Its Reception: A Lesson from Byzantine Scripture Exegesis,” *Pro Ecclesia* 20 (2011), 86-103, esp. pp. 96-9.

³² Furthermore, it can be said that this theology did not work itself *into* the text, but rather it found itself *in* the text. Based on the evidence which we have for the earliest form of the Old Testament, a fixed and rigid text can no longer be assumed at any stage of transmission, but rather it is much more accurate to think of living literary traditions (in the plural!)—both written and oral, both competing and intersecting. This means that, as a matter of premise, we can no longer suspect particular ancient readings—such as the LXX version of Hab 3.2—of being external interferences into a rigid text from which they are distinct, but rather of being crystallizations of these living textual traditions.

Halperin has convincingly argued that the phrase “in the midst of the two creatures” (ἐν μέσῳ δύο ζώων) has roots in the Septuagint version of Ezek 1.13 (ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ζώων): Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 90, n.26. See also Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkabah Mysticism* (2nd rev. Ed.; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 106.

³³ See text and translation in Florentino García Martínez and Eibert C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (2 vols.; Leiden, Boston, New York: Brill; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997-1998), 768-71.

the earthly temple during or in worship, as it has been argued before.³⁴ A good part of the fragment in question must be quoted here:

7. The [cheru]bim fall before Him and they b[le]ss when they raise themselves. A voice of quiet (קול דממת) of God 8. is heard] and tumult of chanting (המוון רנה); at the rising of their wings, a voice of [quie]t (קול דממת) of God. They are blessing a structure of a throne chariot above the firmament of the cherubim 9. [and] they chant [the effulge]nce of the firmament of light «from» from beneath His glorious seat, and when the ophannim go, the angels of holiness return. They go out from between 10. His [w]heels of glory. Like the appearance of fire are most holy spirits all around, an appearance of streams of fire in a likeness of hashmal, and workmanship of 11. [br]ightness with colorful glory, wondrously dyed, purely salted. Spirits of living [di]vinites go about constantly with the glory of [the] chariots of 12. wonder, and a quiet voice (קול דממת) of blessing is with the tumult of their going, and they psalm (with) holiness in the returning of their ways; when they raise themselves they exalt wondrously. And when (they) settle 13. they [sta]nd. A voice of joyous chanting (קול גילות רנה) grows silent and the qui[et of] a blessing (ודממת ברך) of God³⁵ in all the camps of the divinites [and] a voice of

³⁴ Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam. Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 252-79; C. R. A. Morray-Jones, "The Temple Within. The Embodied Divine Image and Its Worship in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish and Christian Sources," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 37 (1998), 400-31; Carol Newsom, "Merkabah Exegesis in the Qumran Sabbath Shirot," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38 (1987), 11-30.

³⁵ At this point I eliminated "is" from the translation. It is not in the original and presupposing it here changes the sense of the sentence in a radical way. Other translations have: "The sound of glad rejoicing falls silent and there is stillness of divine blessing in all the camps" (Newsom); "The sound of glad rejoicing becomes silent and there is a calm blessing of gods" (Garcia-Martinez); "The joyful sound of hymning becomes quiet and the silent blessing of God" (Halperin). The most literal is Halperin's and it retains the sense of the original the most.

prais[es] 14. [...] .. []. from between all their divisions on [their] side[s ... and] all their mustered (troops) chant, ea[c]h in [his] stati[on.]³⁶

Unlike 4Q385 4, this fragment of the Songs goes to a good length to describe the praises of the cherubim. What is of special note to us is the phrase “voice of quiet” קוֹל דְּמָמָה, which possibly draws on 1 Kings 19:12, where God is revealed to Elijah in “a sound of delicate silence.” The “voice of quiet” could be taken to refer to a pause in the heavenly praise, due to line 13. Yet, this is a gross misreading of the text. A careful reading will evince that the “voice of quiet” is not the consequence of the quieting of the “voice of joyous chanting.” Rather the “voice of quiet” is synonymous with “voice of joyous chanting,” “tumult of chanting,” and “voices of praises.” The point of line 13 is that the praise, expressed by these three different phrases, ceases when the cherubim settle. The question is then, how is a “voice of quiet” also a “voice of praises” and a “voice of joyous chanting,” and even more so, how is it “tumult of chanting,” as lines 7-8 would have it? My suggestion is that the voice is not quiet in the sense of being soundless, but rather in the sense of being word-less, unhuman. If the text belongs to the early first century BC, as it has been argued,³⁷ this is probably the earliest reference to the faces of the cherubim praising in their non-human sounds.

Daniel 7, probably slightly earlier than these Qumran texts, presents its own rewritten *merkabah* vision. The echoes of Ezekiel 1, as others have shown, extend beyond the obvious elements of the description of the enthroned Ancient of days into the mention of the four great beasts that emerge from the sea.

³⁶ Translation from James Davila, *Liturgical Works* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 147-8. The critical edition of the text is Carol Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (Harvard Semitic Studies 27; Atlanta, GA.: Scholars Press, 1985), here p. 303.

³⁷ The manuscript is dated to ca. 50 BC (Newsom, *Songs*, 258-9).

Ezekiel sees four hayyot. Daniel sees four hewan, an Aramaic word that is etymologically related to hayyot but, unlike its ambiguous Hebrew cognate, clearly means “beasts.” Daniel’s beasts do not physically resemble Ezekiel’s hayyot except in scattered details. Like the hayyot, however, their appearance is a prelude to that of the divine throne; and, at the climax of Daniel 7, they are in subjection to it.³⁸

I would suggest that Daniel is not completely innovating in his bestialization of the creatures of Ezekiel, but he is rather exploiting or drawing to a logical conclusion the zoological features of the creatures in Ezekiel itself. The bestiality of the creatures is worth emphasizing not only as a corrective to the later Christian tendencies to forget the otherness of the heavenly creatures but also because it is central to the interpretation of the anaphora proclamation.

The evidence for the next major step in the development of the *merkabah* tradition seems to converge on the first century AD. At least three texts that can be safely placed within this timeframe: *2 Enoch*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and the *Book of Revelation*.³⁹ A fourth text, the *Book of Parables* is more difficult to date, but an increasing number of scholars suggests dates around this time.⁴⁰ All these texts fully merge the *merkabah* of Ezekiel with Isaiah 6.

³⁸ Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 77. In Halperin’s view Daniel uses Ezekiel’s vision because, “as he understood it, the sequence of Ezekiel’s description hinted at a historical sequence in which a human-like entity emerges supreme over four bestial ones”.

³⁹ For the dating of *2 Enoch* to the first century AD see F. I. Andersen, “2 Enoch,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols., ed. James H. Charlesworth; Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1983, 1985), 1:91-221, here 94-95; idem, “The Second Book of Enoch,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (David N. Freedman et al., eds.; New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 2:516-22; C. Böttrich, *Das slavische Henochbuch* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 1995); J. VanderKam, *Enoch: A Man for All Generations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1995). Andrei Orlov (“Noah’s Younger Brother Revisited: Anti-Noachic Polemics and the Date of 2 (Slavonic) Enoch,” *Henoch* 26 [2004], 172-87) argues for a pre-70 AD date of the pseudepigraphon. For the dating of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, see R. Rubinkiewicz, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham en slave* (Société des Lettres et des Sciences de l’Université Catholique de Lublin; Zródła i monografie, 129; Lublin, 1987); idem, “Apocalypse of Abraham,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:681-705, here p. 683.

⁴⁰ See the considerations in see J. J. Collins, “The Son of Man in First Century Judaism,” *New Testament Studies* 38 (1992), 448-66, here pp. 451-9; M. Black, “The Messianism of the Parables of Enoch: Their Date and Contributions to Christological Origins,” in James Charlesworth et al., eds., *The Messiah. Developments in Earliest Judaism and*

2 *Enoch* has a long *merkabah* section in chapters 20-22. Of particular note is 22.2, which in the longer recension describes the heavenly liturgy in terms of both Ezekiel and Isaiah 6:

And who am I to give an account of the incomprehensible being of the LORD, and of his face, so extremely strange and indescribable? And how many are his commands, and his multiple voice, and the LORD's throne, supremely great and not made by hands, and the choir stalls all around him, the cherubim and the seraphim armies, and their never-silent singing.⁴¹

The *Apocalypse of Abraham* has a more detailed description of the *merkabah* in chapter 18. Of special import to this research are the description of the “the many-eyed ones round about [the throne], reciting the song” and the mention of four singing “fiery living creatures,” who seem to be distinct from the “many-eyed ones.” The appearance of each of the four is the same: each has four faces, “of a lion, of a man, of an ox, and of an eagle.” But the text adds the unexpected detail that each creature has four heads, so that each of the four living creatures has sixteen faces.⁴² Moreover, another detail is imported from Isaiah: the four *hayyot* have six wings each, like Isaiah's seraphim. Although the text further develops the reciprocal singing of the wings of the *hayyot* of Ezekiel into a beastly hostility, it still mentions that “the voice of their blessing [was] like the voice of a single man.”

The mergence of Ezekiel's *merkabah* with Isaiah 6 is also witnessed in Revelation 4. The following is my more literal translation of Rev 4.2, 6-8:

Christianity (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1992), 145-68; M. A. Knibb, “The Date of the Parables of Enoch: A Critical Review,” *New Testament Studies* 25 (1979), 345-59.

⁴¹ Andersen, “2 Enoch,” 136.

⁴² The detail is shared with the Targum Jonathan to Ezekiel 1:6: *The Targum of Ezekiel* (The Aramaic Bible 13; trans. Samson Levey; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 20.

Immediately I was in the Spirit and behold, a throne was set in the heaven and upon the throne [there was] a sitting one (καθήμενος). . . And in the midst of the throne (ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου) and round the throne four living creatures (ζῳα), full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, and the second living creature like an ox, and the third living creature having the face like of a human, and the fourth living creature like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each of them having six wings, full of eyes all round and within, and do not have rest (ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν), day and night saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God ruler-of-all, One that was, One that is, One that is to come!”

Modern scholarship has long noted the abundance of *merkabah* elements of this text, down to the peculiar use of “in the midst of the throne,” found earlier in Hab 3.2.⁴³ Unusually, the four faces of the creatures of Ezekiel are distributed among the four creatures.⁴⁴ Moreover, the text is a great testimony to the early christological identification of the Glory in the Holy of holies with the divine name, represented here as three titles: “One that was, One that is, One that is to come.”

The *Book of Parables*, which is now part of *I Enoch*, mentions four figures standing on the four sides of the thrones, each offering his own praise and prayer to the Glory (40.2-10), but

⁴³ As Halperin noted, “the text of Ezekiel 1:13 that lay before the Septuagint translator seems to have had, at the beginning of the verse, *ubenot hahayyot mar'eh* (‘in the midst of the *hayyot* was an appearance’) in place of MT’s *udemut hahayyot mar'ehem* (‘this was the likeness of the *hayyot*: their appearance. . .’). This reading may perhaps have influenced Revelation 5:6, where the Lamb-and hence its seven eyes-stands ‘in the middle of the throne and the four living creatures.’” (Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 90, n.26). See also Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkabah Mysticism* (2nd rev. ed.; Leiden: Brill, 2014), 106.

⁴⁴ Of particular significance is also the presence of the theophanic “sudden,” reflected here in εὐθέως “immediately,” peculiarly unaccompanied by καί or δέ. On the significance of the language of sudden in theophanies see Alexander Golitzin, “Revisiting the ‘Sudden’: Epistle III in the Corpus Dionysiacum,” *Studia Patristica* 37 (2001), 482-91; “‘Suddenly, Christ’: The Place of Negative Theology in the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagites,” in Michael Kessler and Christian Shepherd, eds., *Mystics: Presence and Aporia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 8-37; *Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 41-50, 298-9.

it does not describe them. Aside from their number there is little to connect them to Ezekiel's *hayyot* or *ophanim*. Nevertheless the apocryphon does describe the hymns of the celestial liturgy:

Those who do not sleep bless you, and they stand before Your Glory, and bless and praise and exalt, saying: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Spirits; he fills the earth with spirits." And there, my eyes saw all those who do not sleep; standing in front of Him, and blessing, and saying: "Blessed are you, and blessed is the name of Lord, for ever and ever!" (*I Enoch* 39.12-13)⁴⁵

The strongest *merkabah* elements of this passage are obvious: the enthroned one is called the Glory and he is hymned with a blessing, just as in Ezek 3.12. But this blessing is now juxtaposed to the hymn of Isaiah 6. What is of special note in this text is the fact that the blessing, which comes from Ps 112.2, includes the name "Lord."

All the developments of the Jewish *merkabah* tradition reviewed above date from before the birth of Christianity. I do not wish to suggest here that the *merkabah* tradition has incorporated these accretions in a linear fashion. The evidence presented so far is only of the earliest known attestations of these elements. Yet the fact that these elements are very early also means that they were the shared inheritance of the Christian Church and of the emerging rabbinic Judaism. But even with the parting of the ways between Christianity and Judaism, their theologies did not cease to cross the increasingly less porous borders between them. Evidence suggests that such crossings continued to happen with the *merkabah* tradition itself. In my opinion the most obvious smuggled good, so to speak, is a small detail. A classical rabbinic text,

⁴⁵ Translation from Michael A. Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 2:127, with my elimination of the definite article before "Lord" and capitalization of "Glory." The presence of the definite article there is a mistake, as I argue below. See also the *Ieratikon according to the Simonopetra Tradition*, 4:139-140.

Hekhalot Rabbati, in its earliest manuscript, an eleventh century fragment from the Cairo Geniza, wraps this detail in language strikingly similar to the Orthodox *Sanctus*:

Majestic among beings is the human. And with the likeness of a human You inscribed Your throne. They [i.e., the creatures] have the face of a human and hands of a human under their wings (Ezek 10.8; cf. 1.8). They bend down and prostrate themselves and they say a song [like a man]. And awe of You, O King, is over them.

Majestic among animals is the lion. You have inscribed the likeness of a lion on Your throne. They have the face of a lion. They roar like a lion, and their arm and their power are like (that of) a lion. And awe of You, a Lion, is over them.

Majestic among cattle is the ox. You inscribed the likeness of the ox on Your throne. They have the face of the ox. They low like an ox and the vision of them is like an ox. They stand upon their standing-place like an ox. And awe of You, O King, is over them.

Majestic among birds is the eagle. You inscribed the likeness of an eagle on Your throne. They have the face of an eagle. They fly⁴⁶ like an eagle, and they flit about and they run like an eagle, and they are swift as an eagle to do Your will. And awe of You, O Pure One, is over them.

⁴⁶ The manuscripts in the synoptic arrangement of Peter Schäfer have “fly” טסו here (*Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981], 120-1). Yet, arguably this is a misreading of the original “cry,” which is demanded by the parallelism with the previous paragraphs.

[For all] to proclaim three times to You a threefold qedushah, according to the word that is said, “Holy, holy, holy” (Is 6.3).⁴⁷

A fifteenth century Italian manuscript has a longer hymn of the tetramorphic creatures: “Holy, holy, holy, **** [the tetragrammaton] of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.”⁴⁸ It is worth pointing out that, if this passage were to exist in *koine* Greek, select words from it would sound as follows: λέγοντα, ἄδοντα, βοῶντα, κεκραγότα, Ἅγιος, ἄγιος, ἄγιος, [and with the addition] Κύριος Σαβαώθ· πλήρης ἡ γῆ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ.

An important detail of the text is the conjunction of Ezekiel 1, which mentions the tetramorph creatures, and Isaiah 6, which mentions the trisagion hymn. But this widespread convergence is not the smuggled good. Rather another detail is the smuggled good: the explanation for why the Cherubim have the four particular faces, namely that each is the face of the creature reigning over its own genus family. Evidence provided by Halperin, which I am summarizing here, has shown that this detail of the *merkabah* tradition is attested in Jewish sources much earlier than the eleventh century, probably as early as the third century (I say “probably” because Jewish sources of late antiquity are notoriously difficult to date).⁴⁹ It is already attested in *b. Hag.* 13b: “The lion is the king of beasts, the ox is the king of animals, the eagle is the king of birds; humankind is exalted over them. God exalts himself over all of them.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Hekhalot Rabbati* §273 based on its earliest version, from the Geniza collection. The translation is from James Davila, *Hekhalot Literature in Translation: Major Texts of Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 149-51, with some Geniza variants taken from footnotes.

⁴⁸ MS Budapest, Rabbinic Seminary, Kaufman 238.

⁴⁹ See Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 135.

⁵⁰ My translation from Isidore Epstein, ed., *Babylonian Talmud. Hebrew-English Edition* (London: Soncino Press, 1983). Simeon b. Laqish, to whom the saying is attributed, is a third century Palestinian Amora. The placement of the tradition in Palestine is supported by the many other attestations of the *merkabah* detail, all attributed to the fourth century Palestinian Amora Abin (Tanh. Buber 'Emor #23).

This very same detail occurs in many Christian sources, starting also with the late third century. Among these Halperin lists Novatian, the Macarian Homilies, and Ephrem. The fragment of the first Macarian homily containing the tradition deserves a full quote:

The four animals that bore the chariot were a type of the leading characteristics of the soul. For as the eagle rules over all the other birds and the lion is king of the wild beasts and the bull over the tamed animals and man rules over all creatures, so the soul has certain dominant powers that are superior to others. I am speaking of the faculties of the will: conscience, the mind and the power of loving. For it is through such that the chariot of the soul is directed and it is in these that God resides.⁵¹

This text connects not only with the Jewish *merkabah* tradition, but it also incorporates an older element of the Christian *merkabah*. To my knowledge Clement of Alexandria, for the first time, and after him Origen, Didymus, Dionysius the Areopagite, see the *merkabah*, precisely as the Macarian homily, as the human soul mounted by its Lord.⁵²

To the three names known to Halperin—Novatian, the Macarian Homilies, and Ephrem—should be added Dionysius the Areopagite’s *Celestial Hierarchy* 15.8.⁵³ Yet, one should not assume that the crossing happened only from the Jewish side to the Christian side. Doubtlessly, boundary crossings happened in both directions. Indeed, we may never know the direction of this particular detail with any reasonable amount of confidence.

⁵¹ *Macarian homilies* 1.3; Pseudo-Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies* (trans. George A. Maloney; New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 31.

⁵² On this see also Alexander Golitzin, “Earthly Angels and Heavenly Men: The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Nicetas Stethatos, and the Tradition of Interiorized Apocalyptic in Eastern Christian Ascetical and Mystical Literature,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001), 125-53; Bogdan Bucur, “The Other Clement: Cosmic Hierarchy and Interiorized Apocalypticism,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 60 (2006), 251-68; idem, *Scripture Re-envisioned*, 166-168.

⁵³ *Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, The Complete Works* (trans. C. Luibheid and P. Rorem; New York, 1987), 188-9.

The anaphora

Analyzed against these early *merkabah* developments, the Orthodox *Sanctus* shows its distinct *merkabah* features. The most obvious *merkabah* elements will not receive any further analysis.

Among them, to list only a few, are:

1. the mention of the Cherubim;
2. the mention of the Seraphim, attesting to the mergence of Ezekiel's *merkabah* with Isaiah 6;
3. the reference to "many-eyes," an obvious reference to Ezekiel 1;
4. the mention of wings;
5. the hymn of Is 6.3, now merged with Ezekiel 1: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Savaoth! Heaven and earth⁵⁴ are full of your glory!"

Other *merkabah* features will only be revealed with closer examinations.

For one, the version of the *Sanctus* in the anaphora of St. Basil introduces the four participles with "they cry to one another ἀκαταπαύστοις στόμασιν." Although the phrase ἀκαταπαύστοις στόμασιν is commonly translated in English Liturgy books as "unceasing voices", it rather means "unresting mouths". The expression is as non-idiomatic in *koine* Greek as it is in English. Therefore, the original author's choice for ἀκατάπαυστος is particularly meaningful. The common mistranslation with "unceasing" or its synonyms only highlights the

⁵⁴ The addition "and earth" is not late Christian, as it is often assumed. It is attested in 2 *Enoch* 21.1 (J), *Testament of Isaac* 6.24, and 1QH^aviii 8.10-11, as well as Targums to Is 6.3. The expression seems to attest to the early Jewish idea that the earthly liturgy unites with the heavenly. For more pertinent remarks see R. M. M Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy: A Study in Their Development in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran Texts to Ephrem the Syrian* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 186-8.

fact that the author could have easily used ἀδιάλειπτος, which truly means “unceasing,” but he did not. By contrast, κατάπαυσις and the cognate ἀνάπαυσις mean “rest” and “place of rest.” Both terms have a temple and *merkabah* history. “Unresting voices” describe the *merkabah* of Rev 4.8 (ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν). The imagery also appears in the slightly contemporary *Book of Parables*, which describes the sun and the moon as offering “unresting” praise in markedly *merkabah* terms: they “stand opposite the other, in front of the Lord of Spirits, and they give thanks, and sing praise, and do not rest, because their thanksgiving is like rest to them” (*1 Enoch* 41.7).⁵⁵ The same imagery is repeated in *2 Enoch* 11.2. It is reasonable to assume then that the phrase “un-resting mouths” echoes this *merkabah* element.

The phrase introduces another peculiar detail of the Sanctus that carries *merkabah* connotations: strangely enough the heavenly creatures “cry to one another” (κέκραγεν ἕτερον πρὸς τὸ ἕτερον) and not to God! The evidence presented in the first part of this paper suggests that this detail of the anaphora, although taken more directly from Is 6.3, traveled and reached the liturgical tradition of the East as another *merkabah* element, as a fusion of Is 6.3, Ezek 1.23 (LXX), and Ezek 3.13. The strange use of the adjective πτερωτά, after the angelic beings are already described as ἐξαπτέρυγα in the anaphora of St. John, is also best understood against Ezek 1.23 (LXX) and 3.13.

An additional *merkabah* detail of the Sanctus is evidenced by the questions: In what sense is this liturgical hymn “triumphant”? In what sense does the hymn mark a victory? What victory? Later liturgical commentators either ignore the adjective or struggle with it. The generalistic explanation that the hymn glorifies God’s victorious character is going in the right direction, but it fails to hinge onto the specificity of the whole paragraph; after all, the anaphora

⁵⁵ Translation from Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch*, 2:129.

is not a text of metaphysical insight, but a theophany. I would rather suggest that the roots of this victory lie again in the *merkabah* tradition. The phrase “triumphant hymn” is not found anywhere in Scripture. A cursory look at Greek patristic literature will reveal that it uses the expression in reference to the psalms of descent and to the entrance into Jerusalem. What is also significant is that early Christianity inherits the tradition of God’s victorious descent as already fully merged with the *merkabah* of Ezekiel, as I have noted above. Ps 67.18-19, already mentioned earlier, is particularly significant here:

The chariotry of God is ten-thousandfold, thousands of thriving ones (εὐθηνούντων).⁵⁶ The Lord is among them at Sinai, in the holy place. You mounted (ἀνέβης) into the highest, you took captivity captive, you seized payments in humanity, so that the disobedient also tabernacle (καὶ γὰρ ἀπειθοῦντας⁵⁷ τοῦ κατασκηνῶσαι). The Lord God is blessed!⁵⁸

It is telling that in Christian sources, starting with Eph 4.8-9, the psalm becomes a text of the resurrection and ascension of Christ *par excellence* (as it still is in Orthodox hymnography).⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Another ancient spelling is εὐθουούτων, “of the steering ones.”

⁵⁷ *Septuaginta. Editio altera* opts here for ἀπειθοῦντες, but in Orthodox reception this participle is overwhelmingly in the accusative ἀπειθοῦντας.

⁵⁸ There is another peculiar feature of the descent tradition in Ps 67.16-17 which is extant in the Orthodox liturgy. The Masoretic, Septuagint, and Vulgate versions of this differ:

הַרְאֵלֵהִים הַרְבָּבָּוֹת הַרְבָּבָּוֹת הַרְבָּבָּוֹת
לְמַהּ תְּרַצְדוּן הַרִים בְּבָבָּוֹת הַרְבָּבָּוֹת הַרְבָּבָּוֹת לְשִׁבְתוֹ אֶל־הַיְהוָה יִשְׁכֶּן

ὄρος τοῦ θεοῦ ὄρος πῖον, ὄρος τετυρωμένον, ὄρος πῖον. ἵνα τί ὑπολαμβάνετε, ὄρη τετυρωμένα, τὸ ὄρος, ὃ εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς κατοκεῖν ἐν αὐτῷ; καὶ γὰρ ὁ κύριος κατασκηνώσει εἰς τέλος.

Mons Dei mons pinguis, mons coagulatus, mons pinguis. ut quid suspicamini montes coagulatos mons in quo beneplacitum est Deo habitare? in eo etenim Dominus habitabit in finem.

According to the Septuagint, the mountain upon which God descends is not only fertile (ὄρος πῖον), but also “curdled” (ὄρος τετυρωμένον). This is certainly a straightforward translation of גְּבוּן and not a variant vocalization or consonantization. The Septuagint takes the word to be a cognate of גְּבִינָה, cheese or curd. The “curdled mountain” and “curdling” are mentioned in several Orthodox hymns as imageries of the incarnation, hymns explored by Fr. Ephrem Lash in “Translating Liturgy,” *Logos. A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 39.2-4 (1998), 191-224, here pp. 201-5. As he points out, many modern translations soften the Greek term and thus lose the connection to the psalm verse and the descent-incarnation tradition within them.

⁵⁹ On this point see Daniélou, *Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 233-63.

I would suggest that it is this mixed descent-*merkabah* tradition that provides the divine victory to which the anaphora exclamation alludes. The connection between the *merkabah* and God's victory did not go undetected by the patristic readers. To mention only one witness, the Macarian homilies has the following to say in connection to Ezekiel's *merkabah*:

where God himself truly mounts and guides the soul, he always obtains the victory, skillfully directing and leading with expertise the chariot of the soul to a heavenly mind forever. God does not wage war against wickedness, but since he possesses all power and authority of himself, he brings about the victory by himself. Therefore, the Cherubim go, not where they wish, but where the Rider in control directs them. Wherever he inclines them, there they go and he supports them. For Scripture says, "The hand of a man was under them" (Ez 10:21).⁶⁰

The connection between the *merkabah* and God's victory is even more explicit in another place in the Liturgy itself, namely in the prayer of the Cherubikon (οὐδεὶς ἄξιος τῶν συνδεδεμένων...). The translation and italicized emphases are mine:

For you alone, Lord our God, *rule* over those in heaven and on earth, *who ride on* (ἐποχούμενος) *the cherubic throne*, who are Lord of the Seraphim and King of Israel, who alone are holy and rest in the holy place.

It is particularly significant that Christ—for this is not a prayer addressed to the Father—is described here as ἐποχούμενος. The verb ἐποχέομαι does not simply mean "to sit," as many English translations of the Liturgy would have it, something one does on a chair or seat, but it rather means "to mount," "to ride," "to be carried upon," something one does on an animal or chariot.

⁶⁰ *Macarian homilies* 1.9; Pseudo-Macarius, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies*, 34.

Two related points deserve succinct mentions. First, it is especially this connection of the divine victory to the *merkabah* that reveals how much the entrance into Jerusalem is a radical rewriting of the mixed *merkabah*-descent tradition. The rewriting goes down to the mounting of a creature.⁶¹ Doubtlessly the *Sanctus* itself has an eye toward the entrance into Jerusalem, since it repeats Ps 117.26 (εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου) as in Mt 21.9, flanked by the Osannas. But I would venture to suggest that by using Ps 117.26 through the tradition of the entrance into Jerusalem, the *Sanctus* illumines how much the entrance is a rewritten *merkabah*. This rewriting of the *merkabah* in the entrance narrative does not escape the attention of early eastern hymnographers.⁶²

Second and relatedly, the way most English translations, both liturgical and scriptural, render Ps 117.26, “blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” is quite problematic. Indeed the Greek phrase ἐν ὀνόματι Κυρίου is an awkward word-for-word rendering of the Hebrew genitival construction, in this case בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה. The Hebrew phrase is definite, as in “the name of the Lord.” The Greek translation is awkward for not rendering the definiteness of the Hebrew phrase properly, by translating it ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ Κυρίου. Modern English translations of the Septuagint and of liturgical texts “correct” this mishap and recover the definiteness of the Hebrew construction.⁶³ This is a mistake. In Hebrew, genitival constructions (as in “the name that belongs to the Lord”) and appositional constructions (as in “the name that is

⁶¹ Parenthetically, I suspect that this rewriting is meant to introduce the absurdity of the cross.

⁶² The aposticha of the feast has the following hymn: “O Thou who ridest on the cherubim and art praised by the seraphim, Thou hast sat, O gracious Lord, like David on a foal, and the children honored Thee with praise fitting for God. . .” (*The Lenten Triodion* [trans. Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware; South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2002], 492).

⁶³ Thus *The New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton, *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1844); *Orthodox Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 2008). The latter is not truly a new translation of the Septuagint, but rather a reworking of the New King James Version without good knowledge of the Orthodox interpretive history. It is bad enough to have drawn the justified ire of Fr. Ephrem Lash: “Review Article: Orthodox Reflections on the ‘Orthodox Study Bible,’” *Sobornost* 31 (2009), 87-96.

‘Lord’”) are distinct. Without going into too much detail, the latter will repeat prepositions and the definite article, which the former never would. Yet, unlike the Hebrew phrase of Ps 117.26, which is clearly a definite genitival construction, the Greek ἐν ὀνόματι Κυρίου can be taken as appositional in the most natural way. It is arguably in this appositional sense that the phrase is used in early Christianity, including the New Testament. Once taken to be about Christ the phrase no longer praises Christ as coming in the name of the entity “Lord,” as if of someone distinct from himself, but rather praises Christ who comes as “Lord.” Therefore, in its new Christological setting the phrase is best translated as “in the name of Lord.”

To go back to the argument of this paper, read with the entire *Sanctus* against the *merkabah* tradition, the four participles that introduce the hymn (ᾄδοντα, βοῶντα, κεκραγότα, καὶ λέγοντα) relate the sounds of the four faces of the Cherubim, the roaring of the lion face, the lowing of the ox face, the crying out of the eagle face, and the saying of the human face. There is a certain naturalness to this conclusion: two of the four verbs, βοάω and κράζω, are onomatopoeias, imitating the bellowing of oxen and the crying of eagles. Furthermore, it is particularly significant that another verb used is λέγω. This verb expresses the generic sound that humans make, the sound specific to the human genus, more like “speak.” This is particularly significant since other verbs, such as “sing,” could have been used; the hymnographic nature of the *Sanctus* would have elicited such hymnic verbs in the most natural manner. The strikingly non-hymnographic and generic λέγω seems, then, to be an intentional choice. If only in light of λέγω, one would not be amiss to wonder whether the other participles also express generic sounds of other creatures. Both the earliest mystagogical interpretations and the iconographic

depictions of the participles take the four participles to be about the natural sounds of the four faces of the Cherubim.⁶⁴ I am now turning to these interpretations.

The Sounds of the Creatures in Mystagogical Literature

The four participles are associated with the four faces/creatures in the first extensive commentary on the Liturgy, by Germanos of Constantinople.⁶⁵ The commentary has a complex transmission history. The initial text has undergone at least three major revisions over centuries. Yet, the following text appears in the most reliable manuscripts, apparently preserving the Urtext:

The fans and the deacons manifest the six-winged Seraphim and the representation of the many-eyed Cherubim, for in this way too the earthly things imitate truly the heavenly and supra-earthly and spiritual order. For the tetramorphic creatures (τετράμορφα ζῶα) antiphonally receive to one another (ἀλλήλοις ἀντιδεχόμενα), the first, the one as a likeness of a lion (τὸ ὡς ὁμοίωμα λέοντος), cries out “Holy”; the second, the one as a likeness of a calf, cries out “Holy”; the third, the one as a likeness of a human, cries out “Holy”; and the fourth, the one as a likeness of an eagle, cries out “Lord of Savaoth” (Is 6.1-4).⁶⁶

This is my translation, meant to reflect all the bad turns of phrase and peculiar word choices with which the text is replete. For one, what does it mean to “receive to one another”? The phrase makes no sense, but it echoes rather closely the beastly imagery found in the *Apocalypse of*

⁶⁴ See also the pertinent observations in I. Foundoulis, *Απαντήσεις εις λειτουργικάς απορίας* (5 vols.; Θεσσαλονίκη: Αποστολική Διακονία της Εκκλησίας της Ελλάδος, several reprints), §346.

⁶⁵ On the presence of the motif in this commentary and in other Byzantine literature, see also G. de Jerphanion, “Les noms des quatre animaux et le commentaire liturgique de Pseudo-Germain,” in idem, *Les voix des monuments. Notes et études d’archéologie chrétienne* (Paris, 1930), 250-9.

⁶⁶ My translation of the Greek text in St. Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy* (trans. Paul Meyendorff; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1984), 94.

Abraham. The phrase ὡς ὁμοίωμα, which I rendered here literally with “as a likeness,” makes for very awkward Greek, especially as it is here prefaced by the definite article. Yet, I would suggest St. Germanos writes this terrible Greek intentionally,⁶⁷ because the phrase carries clear echoes of Ezekiel 1, the only description of the divine Glory and its chariot throne we have in the Scriptures, and which, in the Septuagint version, uses ὡς no less than fourteen times and ὁμοίωμα, eight times.

Clearly Germanos merges Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1-10: the tetramorphic Cherubim of Ezekiel—which Germanos imagines to be four in number—offer the hymn of Isaiah 6 in genus-specific voices.⁶⁸ A later version of Germanos’ classical commentary (attested for the first time in a sixteenth century manuscript) wants to be even more explicit about the fact that the four participles express these generic sounds. The following is my very literal translation:

“The triumphant hymn roaring,” roaring is the eagle, “bellowing” is the ox, “crying” is the lion, and “saying” is the human (ἄδοντά ἐστιν ὁ ἀετός· βοῶντά ἐστιν ὁ βοῦς· κεκραγότα ὁ λέων· καὶ λέγοντα, ὁ ἄνθρωπος).⁶⁹

Regrettably the text does confuse the sounds of the lion and the eagle. It is a confusion that, as we will see, becomes ubiquitous by the late Byzantine period. Ironically, this evidence for the original meaning of the participles also already attests to the beginning of its demise, the time when it no longer made sense.

⁶⁷ For this reason, I consider that smoothing out in translation this bad Greek is a mistake.

⁶⁸ Although the passage seems to leave open the possibility that the “tetramorphic creatures” are the Seraphim, this is unlikely. Only a few lines earlier in the text Germanos refers to “the thrice-holy doxology of the seraphic powers and of the tetramorphic creatures” (ἡ τῶν σεραφικῶν δυνάμεων καὶ τετραμόρφων ζώων τρισάγιος δοξολογία), phrase which suggests that the tetramorphic creatures are distinct from the Seraphim (St. Germanos of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*, 92). Therefore, it does not seem that Germanos fuses the two heavenly ranks. Rather, he seems to fuse the liturgies of the two prophetic visions, so that the Cherubim of Ezekiel worship with the same hymn as the Seraphim of Isaiah 6, arguably under the conviction that the visions of all prophets are of the same reality (as in *b. Hag.* 13b, quoted earlier).

⁶⁹ My translation after PG 98, 429D.

To my knowledge the earliest witness to the tradition that each face of the tetramorphic creature makes its corresponding natural sound is found in the Areopagite corpus, in the *Celestial Hierarchy 2*, which also asks the important question of how one is to understand this bestial chorus:

I think it is necessary to expound... toward what sort of simplicity it is necessary to be led up through those fashioned [in the Scriptures], so that we too do not impiously think—just like the many—that the heavenly and deiform minds are some many-legged and many-faced things, formed according to the animal-form of the oxen or the beastly-form of the lions, and are shaped according to the curved-beaked form of the eagles or the hair-like featherness of birds, and imagine them to be some fiery wheels above the heavens, and material thrones suitable to the source of divinity for reclining, and some multi-colored horses, and spear-bearing commanders, and as many others as are given us by the Sayings [i.e., the Scriptures] in a variety of revelatory symbols, in a divinely-fashioning manner... [One would also suppose] the realms above the heavens to be full of lions, and swarming horses, and bellowing hymnology (μικητικῆ ὑμνολογία), and bird flocking, and other creatures, and humble material things, as many as the likenesses entirely without likeness of the truly revelatory Sayings draw, as they incline toward that which is out-of-place and corrupt and impassioned.⁷⁰

What is of particular note is that the passage alludes specifically to Ezekiel 1 and its *merkabah* tradition; it mentions the many faces, the wheels, the creatures, etc. In this *merkabah* context the

⁷⁰ *Celestial Hierarchy* 2.1, 2.2. This and all ensuing translations of *Celestial Hierarchy* are my own from the text in *Corpus Dionysiacum II. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. de Coelesti Hierarchia, de Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, de Mystica Theologia, Epistulae* (Patristische Texte Und Studien 36; G. Heil and A. M. Ritter, eds.; Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2012), 7-59, here p. 9-10.

author uses the intriguing phrase *μυκητικῆ ὑμνολογία* which means “bellowing hymnology.” Therefore, the phrase attests to the bestial sounds of the heavenly liturgy. Furthermore, and this is an essential point, the passage presents this imagery as traditional. Some, Dionysius continues, shy away from such coarse images. Yet, the argument goes, they should not; not only is this crude imaging of heavenly realities scriptural, Dionysius says, but it is also mystical, mystagogical and purifying in its very coarseness:

Therefore the sacred descriptions of the Sayings [i.e., the Scriptures] honor and do not undermine with ugliness the heavenly orders, revealing them through representations without likeness, and through these showing them forth as transcending in an over-worldly manner all material things... Wherefore, so that those who do not have in mind anything higher than the seen beauties might not be impassioned, the uplifting wisdom of the venerable theologians also draws down sacerdotally toward unsuitable dissimilarities, not allowing our part which inclines to matter to rest upon shameful images, but making the ascending part of the soul rise up, and prodding it with the misshapeness of the signs, as it is would seem neither right nor true even to the ones who are very much inclined to matter, to think that the beyond-the-heavens and divine sights are truly resembling things so base.⁷¹

In the 1850 introduction to his famous *A History of the Holy Eastern Church*, Rev. John Mason Neale notes that “the Constantinopolitan ritualists explain that of S. Chrysostom, of the four Evangelists: ἄδοντα, singing (like the eagle) βοῶντα, bellowing (as the ox) κεκραγότα,

⁷¹ *Celestial Hierarchy* 2.3, my translation from *Corpus Dionysiaca* II, 13. For more on the theological justification of images of heavenly realities see Glenn Peers, *Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium* (Berkeley, 2001), 89-125; K. Parry, “Angelology,” in id., *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden, 1996), 81-8.

crying (as the lion) λέγοντα, speaking (as the man.) And this seems a more natural explanation than another, which represents the four quarters of the globe as referred to in these words.”⁷² We must forgive Neale his confusion of ἄδοντα with κεκραγότα. Chances are the confusion is not his, but it replicates the mistaking of the sound of the lion with the sound of the eagle throughout Byzantium and probably replicated by his interlocutors.

Mention should be made here, if only briefly, of the fact that in the history of Christian thought the four faces of the Cherubim were not perceived exclusively in this liturgical manner, but, as it is well-known, they also came to be associated with the four evangelists.⁷³ However, this development, which goes back to Irenaeus and is prevalent in the Greek-speaking Church, has received no traction among Coptic Christians, who still represent the four faces of the Cherubim in their own right.⁷⁴

The sounds of the creatures in iconography

This understanding of the participles is supported by the iconography of the tetramorph Cherubim. The general iconographic motif within which the voices of the Cherubim are represented, and which has received among specialists the name of *Majestas Domini* (I suspect

⁷² Rev. John Mason Neale, *A History of the Holy Eastern Church. Part I: General Introduction* (London: Joseph Masters, 1850), 470.

⁷³ On this well researched motif, see Peers, *Subtle Bodies*, 33-5; M. Werner, “On the Origin of Zoanthropomorphic Evangelist Symbols: The Early Christian Background,” *Studies in Iconography* 10 (1984-86), 1-35; K. Wessel, “Evangelistensymbole,” *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst II* (K. Wessel, M. Restle, eds.; Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1971), 508-516; T. Velmans, “Quelques programmes iconographiques de coupoles chypriotes du Xlle au XVe siècle,” *Cahiers Archéologiques* 32 (1984), 152-3.

⁷⁴ M. Grooth and P. van Moorsel, “The Lion, the Calf, the Man and the Eagle in Early Christian and Coptic Art,” *Bulletin Antieke Beschaving* 52/3 (1977/78), 233-45.

after the eponymous 1938 book by Fr. Frederik van der Meer),⁷⁵ blends elements from Ezekiel 1, Isaiah 6, Habakkuk 3.2, Daniel 7, and different parts of Revelation. This representation is nothing else, one could say, but a visualization of the entire *merkabah* tradition reviewed above. Significantly, this visualization of the *merkabah*, extant in iconography from as early as the fifth century, is commonly part of the art of the sanctuary.⁷⁶ Within this representation, even after the four faces of the Cherubim come to be solely associated with the four evangelists, they are still portrayed with the corresponding participles of the anaphora. This happens especially in the churches of Cappadocia⁷⁷ and Corfu,⁷⁸ and in illuminated manuscripts.⁷⁹ One example of a church icon and an illuminated manuscript icon should suffice.

Catherine Jolivet-Lévy describes an icon in the early tenth century church of Güllü Dere as follows:

In the vault [of the apse] ... we recognize the usual program of the ‘archaic’ apses: a triumphant vision of Christ, with ... the participation of the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel. Christ is enthroned in the center *on a seat with the back like a lyre*, between the symbols of the nimbed evangelists and holding the book. These

⁷⁵ F. van der Meer, *Maiestas Domini. Théophanies de l’apocalypse dans l’art chrétien* (Vatican City, 1938).

⁷⁶ See Peers, *Subtle Bodies*, 46-7.

⁷⁷ For such icons, with the four participles preserved completely or partially, see Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Le programme iconographique de l’abside et de ses abords* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1991), 27-8, 31-4, 38, 50-1, 63-4, 99, 109, 113-114, 119, 138, 165-6, 180-1, 183, 220-1, 259-60, 290; Ναυσικά Πανσελήνου, “Τα σύμβολα των ευαγγελιστών στη βυζαντινή μνημειακή τέχνη. Μορφή και περιεχόμενο,” *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 17 (1993-1994), 79-86, esp. 84-5.

⁷⁸ P. Vocotopoulos, “Fresques du XI^e siècle à Corfou,” *Cahiers Archéologiques* 21 (1971), 154-6. For this iconography in other churches, see Ναυσικά Πανσελήνου, “Τοιχογραφίες του 13ου αι. στην Αργολίδα. Ο ναός των Ταξιαρχών και ο Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Θεολόγος,” *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 16 (1991-1992), 155-166 (see icon 8 on page 159); Μ. Γεωργοπούλου-Βέρρα, “Τοιχογραφίες του τέλους του 13ου αι. στην Εύβοια. Ο Σωτήρας στο Πυργί και η Αγία Θέκλα,” *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον* 32 (1977), 9-38, here p. 17; Ν. Γκιολες, *Ο βυζαντινός τρούλλος και το εικονογραφικό του πρόγραμμα* (Athens, 1990), esp. 139-40. For a general overview of the Byzantine representations of the Cherubim, Oskar Wulff’s work is still very useful: *Cherubim, Throne und Seraphim. Ikonographie der ersten Engelshierarchie in der christlichen Kunst* (Altenburg, 1894).

⁷⁹ George Galavaris, *The Illustrations of the Prefaces in Byzantine Gospels* (Vienna: Verlag d. Österr. Akad. d. Wiss., 1979), 86-7 (icons 62, 64); Χριστόφορος Κουρουζίδης, *Τα Σύμβολα των ευαγγελιστών στα χειρόγραφα του Αγίου Όρους* (Thessaloniki, 2012), 54-9.

were accompanied, according to custom, by the introductory liturgical participles of the Trisagion, but the inscription formerly noted by Father Gransault near the human, [κα]ὶ λ[έγ]οντα, “and saying,” has disappeared.⁸⁰

A wonderful example of this motif in an illuminated manuscript is the icon on folio 17 recto of the fourteenth century Vatopedi 937. Hristophoros Kourouzidis describes it as follows:

In the center there is the face of the human, with the word λέγοντα barely discernable in his halo. On his right is the lion and the word (κε)κραγότα, to his left the calf and quite worn out the word βοόττα (sic!), while above is the eagle and the word ἄδωττα (sic!).⁸¹

The confusion of the sounds of the lion and of the eagle coincides with the one in the later versions of Germanos’ commentary, as noted above.⁸²

Final thoughts

The evidence presented here is only summary, and more research is doubtlessly needed on the topic. Yet, it still affords some tentative conclusions. First, many elements of the current Orthodox *Sanctus* suggest that it is a Christian *merkabah* text.⁸³ The *Sanctus* inherits these elements from the ancient Jewish mystical tradition about the divine throne-chariot (*merkabah*)

⁸⁰ Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines*, 27 (my translation from French).

⁸¹ Κουρουζίδης, *Τα Σύμβολα*, 54 (my translation from modern Greek).

⁸² The confusion is repeated in the other two similar icons of the same manuscript, on folio 129 verso (Κουρουζίδης, *Τα Σύμβολα*, 57) and on 317 verso (Κουρουζίδης, *Τα Σύμβολα*, 59).

⁸³ I wish to thank Vitaly Permiakov who has drawn my attention to the fact that the *Sanctus* is not only used in the anaphora. It also constituted the conclusion of a number of hymns which accompanied the transfer of the holy gifts at the eucharistic Liturgy. One of such hymns became a fixed accompaniment of the transfer of the gifts in the Armenian and East Syriac traditions. For this see Robert Taft, *The Great Entrance. A History of the Transfer of Gifts and other Pre-anaphoral Rites of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 200; Roma: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1975), 90-97.

and its occupant, the Glory—a tradition which is mostly built on Ezekiel 1. Second, read against this mystical background, the four participles that introduce the triumphant hymn itself refer specifically to the sounds of the four faces of the Cherubim, the roaring of the lion, the lowing of the ox, the crying out of the eagle, and the saying of the human. This ancient and in all likelihood original sense of the four participles is attested in early iconography and mystagogical texts and is witnessed in Constantinople as recently as the nineteenth century.

Hoping that this article will preface further research on this argument, I would like to offer two final thoughts and some concrete but tentative suggestions on translating the *Sanctus*. The first thought I would like to submit here is built on the fact that the Liturgy does not use *merkabah* language only in the *Sanctus*. This mysticism rather is present more clearly in the prayer of the Trisagion and in the prayer of the Cherubikon. And herein lies a significant question: why this difference of tone between the *Sanctus* and the other *merkabah* texts? Or, to put it more directly, even if my argument is correct, one is still left wondering, naturally, why the *merkabah* is expressed in the *Sanctus* in such elliptic manner? After all, the *Sanctus* does not mention the throne itself, while the prayer of the Cherubikon does. It is useful to be reminded here of my preliminary remark that the *merkabah* character of a text is not defined by one marker alone. With this in mind, to venture a tentative response, the elliptic *merkabah* of the *Sanctus* speaks to the very nature of the whole anaphora. It seems to me that the liturgical text reaches unprecedented levels of dense straightforwardness as we draw close to the anaphora. To put it bluntly, the closer we get to God the dumber we become. Then paradoxically, this elliptic character that places the *Sanctus* in sharp formal contrast to the other *merkabah* texts of the Liturgy, to Ezekiel 1 itself, and to the many other *merkabah* texts explored here, is also precisely the aspect in which the *Sanctus* replicates Ezekiel 1 in substance. The prophet is overwhelmed to

the point of resorting to an approximate language verging on stuttering; the person at Liturgy is overwhelmed into the simplest phraseology. The divergence in form seems to be due to the different natures of these texts.

This brings me to my second and last point. Everything in this paper seems to advance a historical-critical approach to texts. Yet I hope the argument advanced here is one to work itself out all the way to its logical conclusion, namely that the *Sanctus* is a text of visionary experience: a theophanic text. This understanding never died out in the east. It was, however, pushed out of the more learned environments as these were taken over by a new way of doing theology—one that serves epistemological imperatives and has succumbed to the mindset which found history, liturgy, and Scripture to be perfectly distinct fields of study (governed by systematics, which is perceived as true or highest theology). Although the neopatristic Synthesis revised previous textual canons, which were at the time quite void of the Fathers of the Church, and provided a better (although still incomplete) textual canon of Orthodoxy, it failed to divest itself completely of the internal canon-mindedness and methodology of the scholastic approaches it meant to dethrone. In my opinion, this task remains to be accomplished.

And now for my tentative suggestions for translating the *Sanctus*. In my opinion, grounded in the above arguments, two mistakes can be made in translating the four participles of the *Sanctus* into English. The first is to have “the triumphant hymn” too early in between the participles, opening up the possibility of understanding “the hymn” as being distinct from the words that follow, “Holy, holy, holy ...” In Greek all four participles have “the triumphant hymn” as their common direct object and this should also be clear in the English translation. The triumphant hymn is nothing else but what follows, “Holy, holy, holy ...” The second mistake is not to know the history of the four participles and miss their reference to the four faces of the

cherubim from Ezekiel 1, of lion, ox, eagle, and man. The translation I personally propose with all of the above in mind is: “roaring, lowing aloud, crying out, and saying the triumphant hymn, ‘Holy, holy, holy ...’”