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A Messiah in Heaven? A Re-evaluation of Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic
Traditions

This two-part paper begins with an attempt to reconstruct an apocalyptic work from the first century CE. It then compares the nature of the messianic expectations found in this reconstructed text to messianic expectations at Qumran. I hope through this research to identify features of Jewish messianism and thereby make a contribution to the larger question of the nature of Jewish messianic hopes from the first century BCE to the first century CE.

Part One: A proposed reconstruction of an apocalyptic work from the first century CE: *The Oracle of Hystaspes and Revelation*

Scholarly opinion identifies the *Oracle of Hystaspes* as an apocalyptic work.¹ Since the *Oracle* predicts the fall of the Roman Empire (established in the second half of the first century BCE) and is first mentioned by Justin Martyr (writing in the early second century CE), this sets its probable time of composition as the first century CE. The *Oracle* is placed in the mouth of a young boy and addressed to Hystaspes, that is, Vistasp, the king who was Zarathustra's benefactor. The role attributed to Hystaspes in the frame story of the *Oracle* is indicative of an environment in which Iranian traditions were well known and were utilized for anti-Roman propaganda. Indeed, the *Oracle* was forbidden reading throughout the Roman Empire several generations after its composition.²

Although referred to by several scholars in antiquity,³ the contents of the *Oracle* are known to us only from Lactantius, the third-century-C.E. Latin author who cites the *Oracle* in book seven of his *Divine Institutes*,⁴ but without specifying what in book seven derives from the *Oracle* and what reflects other sources. Consequently, scholars differ regarding what in Lactantius's book belongs to the *Oracle*; hence the lack of consensus as to whether the *Oracle* is of Jewish or Iranian origin.⁵ In a comprehensive paper published thirty years ago, Flusser demonstrated the strong likelihood of a Jewish origin for the *Oracle*.⁶ Flusser also emphasized the similarity between the *Oracle* and chapters 11 and 13 of the *Book of Revelation*.

In light of Flusser's reconstruction and his insights we are able to posit the *Oracle*'s structure. It seems that, like other apocalyptic writings, the *Oracle* had two parts: a symbolic vision and its interpretation. I propose that the symbolic vision was used by John of Patmos and found its way into *Revelation*,⁷ and that the interpretation of the vision was preserved in Lactantius.

The *Oracle*, as I reconstruct it, exhibits the characteristic features of political apocalypse. It reflects the belief that a chain of kingdoms will rule the world, a chain of known, predetermined number and character. The *Oracle*'s writer focuses on the end of the chain, the links closest to his own time. He mentions the Seleucid Empire, represented by the numbers 3 and 10 familiar to us from the book of Daniel⁸ (Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 7.16.1). The Seleucid Empire, however, is swiftly conquered by an evil ruler (*Divine Institutes* 7.16.3; *Revelation* 13:1–10), the next link in the chain. This evil ruler, Rome, will plunder and kill, change the law, alter the name of the kingdom, and move its seat of government.

The author, aware of the two phases in Roman history—the Republic and the Empire—does not portray Rome as the final link in the chain. Rome's rule is to be

followed by that of another kingdom (the Empire), whose leader will come from Syria and will kill the first evil ruler (*Divine Institutes* 7.17.2; cf. *Revelation* 13:11–18).⁹

The son of an evil spirit, this second ruler will present himself as the son of God and will force people to worship him. This is the antichrist¹⁰ who arouses the mob and tries, unsuccessfully, to destroy God's temple.

Our author targets the antichrist, the last link in the chain. During this period, a prophet will be sent by God to preach and to bring the people back to God's way. At the conclusion of this prophet's mission the antichrist will put him to death (*Divine Institutes* 7.17.2; *Revelation* 11:3–7).¹¹ The prophet's body will be left in the street for three days. On the third day he will be resurrected and return to heaven (*Divine Institutes* 7.17.3; *Revelation* 11:8–12). Total victory over the antichrist will be achieved only after years of terror, during which those who are faithful to God will be oppressed and will be forced to flee (*Divine Institutes* 7.17.7). Anyone captured will suffer violent death. This horror will end with the descent of a big sword from heaven (*Divine Institutes* 7.19.5), followed by the true messiah, the great king, who will judge the evildoers, fight the antichrist, and kill him at the fifth battle (*Divine Institutes* 7.19.5–8; *Revelation* 19:11–21).

This is the outline of the *Oracle* in brief as I reconstruct it. If this reconstruction is correct, we can now add another argument in favor of the Jewish origin of the *Oracle*. The expectation of the coming of a prophet, who will return to heaven, to be followed by the descent of a warrior Messiah found in the *Oracle*, is also present in contemporary Jewish tradition,¹² for example, in *Seder Olam Rabba*: "In the second year of Ahaziah Elijah was hidden away and is not seen until the Messiah comes. In the days of the Messiah he will be seen and hidden away a second

time and will not be seen until Gog will arrive. At present he records the deeds of all generations."¹³

However, my main purpose here is not to endorse Flusser but rather to build on his important paper. I propose that we can reconstruct a further component of the original, now lost, first-century *Oracle of Hystaspes* which is missing from Lactantius's book but is discernible in *Revelation*, namely, the story of the birth of the Messiah and his escape, immediately after his birth, to God. For a good Christian like Lactantius, the baby Messiah's ascent to God would contradict his belief in Jesus' life story; finding it unacceptable, he would therefore omit this element.

Although Lactantius' omission of a birth story from his book is understandable, in and of itself this does not constitute proof for the existence of a birth story for the messiah in the original *Oracle*. Not every first century BCE to first century CE work that tells of the Messiah's coming or testifies to belief in his activities contains a full account of the Messiah's origin. The best-known example is the Gospel of Mark, which provides no information regarding Jesus' birth and infancy. To this we can add *Second Baruch* and also *Fourth Ezra*,¹⁴ which mention the Messiah (*2 Baruch* ch. 39-40, 70-72; *4 Ezra*, ch. 7, 11-14) but provide no clear statement regarding his background, although it seems that both writings assume his preexistence.¹⁵

Thus, the claim that an account of the Messiah's appearance in heaven had to be an integral part of the *Oracle* cannot be proven on this basis, but it cannot be entirely ruled out either. I would like to point to two arguments—one internal and one external—in favor of the existence of a birth story in the *Oracle*: first, the *Oracle's* portrayal of the Messiah as a human being, born of a human mother, and second, the existence of related, even parallel, writings that mention the Messiah's mother and contain elements recounting the Messiah's birth and ascent to heaven.

My evaluation of the internal argument takes the question of whether the Messiah in the *Oracle* is a human being as a starting point. In order to answer this question, we must first evaluate another figure found in the *Oracle*: the prophet. As I noted earlier, prior to his encounter with the Messiah who descends from heaven, the antichrist struggles with a prophet sent by God. This prophet possesses the ability to cause drought (see 1 Kings 16–17 where Elijah brings drought on the earth) and to turn water into blood (see 2 Kings 3:22 where Elisha assists the kings of Israel and Judah in their war against the Moabites by causing water to appear to be blood). Furthermore, fire comes out of his mouth and burns his enemies (see 2 Kings 1:10–14 where Elijah exterminates the messengers sent to him by Ahaziah with heavenly fire). As Flusser notes, there is a strong affinity between the prophet described here and biblical Elijah.¹⁶

Thus, the *Oracle*'s messenger of God is a prophet like Elijah, or perhaps even Elijah himself, as his end resembles that of Elijah. Note that, in the *Oracle*, after lying dead in the street for three days, the prophet ascends to heaven. Thus, in the author's worldview special human beings ascend to (biblical Elijah), or descend from and ascend to heaven (Elijah in the *Oracle*) for periods determined by God. Similarly, the Messiah who descends from heaven could also be a human being. But this is not the sole basis for considering the Messiah in the *Oracle* human. When the Messiah descends from heaven he is accompanied by a group of angels; yet, the author nowhere explicitly states that the Messiah is an angel. Furthermore, the use of a heavenly sword points to the limited powers of the Messiah himself. We should also be aware of the fact that, in the *Oracle*, the Messiah has no role in any cosmic or heavenly transformation, nor does he change the order of nature.

I therefore propose that, like Elijah, the Messiah of the *Oracle* is a human being who dwells in heaven and is sent to earth at the End of Days. We would then expect to find a story of how this human being came to ascend to heaven. For this purpose I turn to works related to the *Oracle of Hystaspes* that include descriptions of the messiah's ascent. There are works close to our author's time that relate, or hint, to the Messiah's ascent to heaven before his return to save the world. For example, in *Slavonic Enoch* young Melchizedek is taken to heaven to protect him from the Flood (ch. 71). As indicated earlier, I suggest that, in the *Oracle*, the ascent was part of a birth story. Two sources support this supposition: a story from *Yerushalmi Berakhot*, and *Revelation* chapter 12.

The story in *Y. Berakhot* (5a; with a parallel in *Lam. Rab.* 1.51 to *Lam.* 1:16)¹⁷ tells of a Jew, who upon hearing that the Temple has been destroyed and that a Messiah has been born, decides to search for the baby Messiah. Wandering about as a trader of baby cloth, he arrives at a certain village where he meets the Messiah's mother. While chatting with the mother, he gives her cloth for the baby, called Menachem. During their conversation the mother expresses her wish to strangle her baby. Time passes and upon his return to that village, the mother informs the trader that strong winds snatched the baby from her arms.

In the *Yerushalmi* the baby is in danger. Blaming him for the destruction that has befallen her people, his mother seeks his death. From the mother's point of view, the kidnapping of the baby by the winds is an appropriate punishment. However, a second point of view is found in the story, that of the trader, who believes that the winds carried the baby to God to save him from his mother's threat. This is also the narrator's point of view, as seen from the choice of a unique word that appears only

here and one other time in all the Aramaic texts of that period, used to refer to Elijah's ascent to Heaven, the word *al'ulin* 'strong winds'.¹⁸

Scholars have noted the similarity between the story in the *Yerushalmi* and that of Jesus' birth.¹⁹ But the similarity is superficial only.²⁰ Jesus was alive and safe in his mother's bosom, whereas in the *Yerushalmi* the main event is the baby's disappearance. The comparison drawn by the German scholar Eberhard Vischer between *Revelation 12* and the *Yerushalmi* is more instructive.²¹

In *Revelation 12* a struggle takes place in heaven between a heavenly mother crowned by stars and between a dragon who removes the celestial stars with its tail. The dragon seeks to swallow the newborn messiah, but the latter is carried to God. The messiah's mother is saved by the winds and transported to the desert.

The participants in the *Yerushalmi* are terrestrial. In *Revelation* the powers are cosmic: the crowned mother, the dragon, and the archangel Michael and his assistants who fight the dragon and throw him down to earth.²² Aune's discussion of chapter 12,²³ however, diminishes the difference between the *Yerushalmi* and *Revelation*. Pointing to the lack of coherence between the components of chapter 12, Aune, following many others, argues that this chapter combines two different myths: the story of the baby, and the story of Michael and his helpers.

In discussing the origin of the myth of the mother, the dragon, and the baby and the winds, most scholars accept to a greater or lesser degree Yarbrow Collins' evaluation of the myth.²⁴ Demonstrating that the birth myth here exemplifies the use made of cosmological myths for the purposes of anti-Hellenistic and anti-Roman propaganda, Yarbrow Collins identified the closest parallels to the myth of the mother and the dragon as the cosmological myths prevalent in the western part of Asia Minor: the tradition of the pursuit of the goddess Leto by the dragon Python. When Python

threatens the pregnant Leto, because he knows that Zeus' offspring Apollo is destined to kill him, Zeus sends the north wind to save Leto. Leto subsequently gives birth to Apollo and Artemis, and, ultimately, Apollo kills Python.²⁵

According to Yarbro Collins, the myth in *Revelation* concerning the birth of the child originally took place on earth, not in heaven. When the myth of the archangel Michael was combined with that of the dragon and the woman, heavenly attributes were added to the latter. It seems to me that in the reworking of the myth another change took place: the beast found in the original story (a beast we know from *Revelation* 11 and 13) became a dragon, a character more fitting for heavenly combat.²⁶

Thus, the similarity between the *Yerushalmi* and *Revelation* 12 is more striking than seems at first sight. In both sources the baby is in danger on earth and is taken to dwell in God's shadow. The idea of combat—a struggle between destruction and salvation—is also shared by both stories. In *Revelation* the beast-dragon symbolizes Rome, eager to destroy the savior who threatens its existence. In the *Yerushalmi* the mother intends to destroy the savior because she perceives him as the agent of her nation's destruction.

This consideration of *Revelation* brings us back to the *Oracle of Hystaspes*. As I mentioned at the outset, Flusser has shown that *Revelation* 11 and 13 are a reworking of the *Oracle of Hystaspes'* symbolic vision.²⁷ Chapter 13, with its two beasts, one of which forces humanity to worship the other, is a reworking of the depiction of two beasts, one in combat with the other, which represent the two rival phases in Rome history—the Republic and the Empire. Chapter 11 contains the symbolic description of the prophet's persecution.

I propose the following explanation for the alteration in the symbols in *Revelation* as compared to Lactantius, at least regarding Chapter 13, where two rival beasts turn into one worshipping the other. Unlike the boy who talks to Vistasp-Hystaspes, John of Patmos is a real person who speaks directly to his audience. Ex-eventus prophesy — predictions concerning a chain of kingdoms supposedly to come in the future — would not have any effect on his addressees, who share his knowledge.²⁸ Thus John of Patmos converted the chain into a single picture referring to the political situation of his time: one beast (Rome) forces humanity to worship the other beast (its emperors).

It is harder to find an explanation for the reworking of the *Oracle* in *Revelation* 11, the altering of the persecution of one prophet into the persecution of two prophets.²⁹ Perhaps it is an insertion of a biblical motif; note Zechariah's two messianic figures. However other Jewish and Christian motifs are also possible candidates. What I would like to stress is that, although both Flusser and Aune view Chapter 12 as a foreign body, intervening between the two chapters taken from the *Oracle*, I suggest that Chapter 12 as well was taken from the *Oracle*. As I reconstruct it, in the original *Oracle* the antichrist (*Revelation* 13) opposes the helpless baby Messiah (Chapter 12) and the helpless prophet (Chapter 11) and will be killed by the powerful Messiah at the End of Days (Chapter 19). The argument that the story of the beast-dragon, the baby, and the mother was not known in Jewish tradition cannot be sustained in light of the above-cited story from the *Yerushalmi*.

Two other sources related to the *Oracle of Hystaspes* are pertinent to, and support, my argument. The first is a Jewish apocalypse from circa the fifth century CE: *Sefer Zerubabel*.³⁰ The textual evidence for this book is extremely confusing, making it difficult to reach any definite conclusions regarding this work. Nonetheless,

scholars have noted the similarities between *Sefer Zerubabel* and the *Oracle of Hystaspes*. For our investigation, the important point is that all the manuscripts testify to the existence of a female figure, the mother of the Messiah.

Admittedly, there is no birth story in *Sefer Zerubabel*. The author, or the compiler, chose another scheme of salvation in his book, that of a messiah who dwells in the city to be destroyed by him in the future (as in B. *Sanh.* 98a). The Messiah's mother does, however, play a significant role before the coming of her son, the savior, at the story's end. We must note that the mother's role in *Sefer Zerubabel* was shaped by the author to fit his worldview of the role of empires in world history. Although *Sefer Zerubabel*, like the *Oracle of Hystaspes* and other apocalyptic writings, refers to a chain of world kingdoms, in *Sefer Zerubabel* the links are not connected, that is, one kingdom does not defeat the other but each kingdom is overcome by the people of Israel. The Messiah's mother, holding a magic scepter, is the people's leader. The compiler/author of *Sefer Zerubabel* did not wish to portray the people of Israel as under foreign rule in their land; rather, he presented the kingdoms as invaders who are eventually defeated. The Messiah's mother with her magic scepter is a focal part of this imaginary scenario.³¹

Thus, we cannot deduce from *Sefer Zerubabel* the precise nature of the role played by the mother in its source, the *Oracle of Hystaspes*. I propose that, in the *Oracle*, only the role of giving birth was assigned to the woman. Interestingly, in most of the manuscripts of *Sefer Zerubabel* we find that the Messiah was taken by God's wind: "This is the Messiah of God... who was born to the House of David and God's wind carried him and hid him in this place until the End of Time." Indeed, according to a medieval midrash, *Maase of Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi*, the messiah is not in Rome but in heaven.

A second source with affinities to the *Oracle of Hystaspes* is the *Apocalypse of Elijah*.³² In the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, besides the two prophets, Enoch and Elijah, who descend from heaven and preach to an evil ruler, are killed by him, and are subsequently resurrected and preach again, there is a virgin with a parallel role. I submit that a woman is found in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* because there was a woman in its source. In other words, lacking a reason to invent a female figure, the author included her because she appeared in the source that he reworked.

On this basis I outline the ancient *Oracle* as follows. The first-century Jewish apocalyptic work was an account of confrontation between the antichrist and two personages whom he considered as rivals, the just-born Messiah and the prophet Elijah. Killed by the antichrist, the prophet was resurrected and returned to heaven. The Messiah, who was in danger from his birth, was saved by God who took him to heaven, from where he will return to take revenge on the evil ruler.³³

Relying on this proposed reconstruction enables isolation of several features of early Jewish messianism. First, the *Oracle* provides additional evidence for Elijah's role in the messianic age. Furthermore, in this scheme, not only does Elijah appear, he also disappears again. He is to suffer, to be killed, undergo resurrection and re-ascend to heaven. Second, even in a source from a Greek-speaking Diaspora, the Messiah's role is that of a warrior and not of a suffering lamb. Third, since it provides a solution to a major issue in the first century CE—who is the true heir to the House of David?—the story about the messiah's dwelling in heaven points to the prevalence of the notion of a Davidic messiah.³⁴ In the *Oracle* God provides the answer to this question: it is the one taken by Him, who is kept in heaven until the right time.³⁵

Part Two: The Messiah(s) in Qumran

I now proceed to the second part of my paper, moving backward in time, to Qumran, where we find a somewhat different perspective on the messiah and the messianic role. The Qumranic worldview is complex. To counteract the notion that there are mythic forces who rebel against God, found both in the early parts of *First Enoch* and in the second part of the book of Daniel, the Qumranites envisioned creation as combined of both good and evil on three levels: cosmic, heavenly, and earthly.³⁶ In this worldview, God is the main agent in bringing evil to an end, and terrestrial figures play different and less significant roles.³⁷ This provides clues as to why the closest parallel to the *Oracle of Hystaspes* at Qumran, the Pseudo-Danielic text 4Q246,³⁸ makes no mention of a messiah.

The first part of 4Q246 did not survive. From the first few lines preserved we can deduce that a symbolic vision was shown to a ruler and that he received an elaboration on its content from an earthly speaker. I interpret the first part of the elaboration (cols 1:4–2:3) as referring to the last two links of the chain of kingdoms mentioned before. The Hellenistic kingdom, referred to as מלך אתור [ומ] צרין , the "king of Assyria and Egypt," is defeated by Rome. Similar to the description of Antiochus in Daniel, Rome is pictured as rebelling against God: "He will be called son of God, and they will call him son of the Most High" (2:1).

However, as we read in col. 2:4–9, Rome will be defeated by עם אל, the people of God who will rule for eternity. Thus, we find at Qumran a work that is one step earlier (or rather, one link shorter) than the *Oracle of Hystaspes*, since the *Oracle* refers both to Rome and to the Roman Empire. However, as noted, no Messiah appears in 4Q246.³⁹

If there is no need for a Messiah to bring the End of Days at that time, it is possible to attribute a different role to the Messiah. In *Pesher Melchizedek*,⁴⁰ the battle with the evil heavenly forces is assigned to a heavenly being, Melchizedek. The Messiah, called משיח הרוח, the anointed of the spirit, has no role in bringing salvation. Like many apocalyptic seers, his role is to teach—להשכיל—his people about the coming salvation: "'To comfort the [afflicted]', its interpretation: to [in]struct them in all the ages of the world" (18–20).

However, as Collins notes, in the central writings of the Qumran Community (such as *Damascus Document* and the *Rule of the Community*) we find the belief in the coming of two messiahs, the Davidic Messiah and the Priestly Messiah.⁴¹ The portrayal of the Davidic Messiah at Qumran is clear. He is a warrior, who is to lead the forces in the earthly battle of the End of Days, who will judge the nation with the breath of his mouth, and will save Israel. He is called נשיא העדה or צמח דוד.

The second, priestly Messiah is called כוהן הראש in the *War Scroll*; in *Florilegium* as well as in the *Damascus Document* his title is דורש התורה (7:18–21). In the *Damascus Document*, as part of a well-known midrash, we also find him referred to as יורה הצדק (6:2–11). The fact that the titles דורש התורה and מורה צדק also serve the Qumranites for describing their leaders in the past creates a certain lack of clarity.⁴²

I submit that there is no expectation in the Community for the return of their past leader. It is important to note that the *Damascus Document* provides not the name of the leader but his titles (מורה צדק and not מורה הצדק). דורש התורה, מורה צדק, are designations for the significant leader who helped the community to build and shape its way in the final generation of evil, and the Qumran Community looks forward to the appearance of a leader at the End of Days who will fulfill the same role as its leader did in the past, helping to shape the life of the community at the End of Days

by giving its members the proper tools for learning. There is no expectation for the coming of a legislator (hence there is no expectation for a second Moses) but for a second *teacher* who will be of priestly origin. As a priestly figure he will also take the main role in the temple to be built by God and will atone for his generation (4Q541).⁴³

Do the Qumranic Messiahs and the *Oracle's* Messiah share any features? As Flusser noted,⁴⁴ there is some resemblance between the *Oracle's* Messiah and the Qumranic Davidic Messiah. Both are warriors; both are apparently from the house of David; both fight the evil forces on earth; and both are expected to kill the leader of the evil forces (according to 4Q285 7 1–5). Furthermore, a heavenly sword is associated with both. *War Scroll* column 19 relates the defeat of the Kittim's army during the night by הרבאל (similar to what is related in 2 Kings 19:35): "In the morning [] they shall come to the [p]lace of the line [the mi]ghty men of Kittim, the multitude of Asshur, and the army of all the nations assembled [] (the) slain [] have fallen there by the sword of God" (*War*, 19:9–11).

The Qumranic mighty leader, however, has fewer miraculous features than the one from the *Oracle*. He does not, as far as we know, come down from heaven, nor does he wield the heavenly sword, which is a free agent. Also less miraculous is the Qumranic prophet. While there are statements at Qumran regarding a prophet who will come together with the two messiahs (1QS 9:11), neither dying nor resurrection nor second ascent is attributed to him.

I cannot, however, ignore the existence of a heavenly character from Qumran who is an exalted human being. The speaker in 4Q491 (and related texts)⁴⁵ declares that he no longer has human needs and desire; he is among and above angels and holy ones; he is *the* teacher, who has also suffered disdain in the past.⁴⁶ It is not certain whether this figure should be perceived as a messiah. I tend to think not. In describing

his status, the speaker in 4Q491 exemplifies the spiritual condition that is promised to the Maskilim at the End of Days in the book of Daniel. In Daniel the Maskilim are to become, after the final judgment, like angels, and to achieve a rank that contrasts sharply with their suffering and their humiliating death under Antiochus' decrees. In the Qumran worldview the most fitting person to reach the rank of the Maskilim at the End of Days is the leader of the community.⁴⁷ Coping with the same dilemma as the Maskilim of 'Daniel's' day, of how to explain the humiliation of a highly regarded person in his lifetime, the Community gives a similar answer by envisaging a high stature for their leader in the angelic world.⁴⁸

Does this spiritual ex-leader have any role in the future? It is clear that the heavenly, seated human being of 4Q491 is different from the *Oracle's* Messiah. Whereas in the *Oracle* the figure from heaven is a warrior whose role is to fight, the role attributed to the speaker of 4Q491 is to instruct. It is hard to imagine that this highly elevated, spiritual human being would agree to descend to fight the earthly forces as the *Oracle's* Messiah does. Moreover, as we know, judgment can be carried out in heaven too. The figure of the son of man in 1 Enoch *Book of Similitudes* comes to mind: in the *Similitudes* the Danielic son of man plays the role of judge, attributed to God in Daniel 7. Indeed, the word מִשְׁפֵּט does appear in 4Q491. However, in its context the meaning of law seems more apt than the meaning of judgment. Thus, no future role is ascribed to our speaker.

To conclude: Qumran and the *Oracle of Hystaspes* point to the strong hold of the belief in the figure of the son of David as a savior, primarily as taking a role on the battlefield.⁴⁹ At Qumran the Davidic Messiah is less fantastic than the one in the *Oracle* and is accompanied by, and subject to, another figure. The priestly, halakhically oriented intellectuals at Qumran subscribed, in addition, to the promise of

the future coming of a priestly teacher. Nonetheless, it is also possible that there was an inner circle at Qumran which had no messianic expectations, or which perhaps only assigned to the messiah a role of teaching and explaining the coming of the End.

This last role, to my mind, was the one assumed by John the Baptist. Jesus' messianic role had no precedent, neither in the Qumran Community nor in *Hystaspes*.⁵⁰ There is, however, one text, 4Q521 (4QMessianic Apocalypse), that portrays a messiah with attributes similar to those of (biblical) Elijah and of Jesus.⁵¹ Heaven and earth obey him; he heals the wounded; and he takes part in the resurrection of the dead. The consensus is that 4Q521 was not written by the Qumranites who, insofar as we know, did not believe in resurrection.⁵² This passage can, however, serve as a portrait of Jesus in his lifetime.

A final word. Despite the variety of sources and messianic conceptions discussed here we find in them no expectation for the death and resurrection of any Messiah—neither at Qumran, nor in the *Oracle of Hystaspes*, nor in fragments or books from outside the Community. It seems to me that the extant sources lead to the conclusion that Jesus' death was an unexpected event, not what Jesus or his followers either expected or hoped for.⁵³

 Notes

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¹ See for example, E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (a new English version, revised and edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Goodman; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 3: 654.

² Thus Justin Martyr in his first *Apology* (chapter 44).

³ For a survey, see J. R. Hinnells, "The Zoroastrian Doctrine of Salvation," in *Man and His Salvation: Studies in Memory of S. G. F. Brandon* (ed. E. J. Sharpe and J. R. Hinnells; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), 127–29.

⁴ For a translation of Lactantius, see *Lactantius Lucius Caecilius Firminianus Lactantius, The Divine Institutes* (trans. M. F. McDonald; Washington: Catholic University of America, 1964).

⁵ The discussion of what in Lactantius is taken from the *Oracle* and of the *Oracle's* nature is characterized by circular reasoning. Based on their assumptions regarding the *Oracle's* nature, scholars then single out the paragraphs corresponding to their expectations. Thus, for example, Hinnells ("Zoroastrian Doctrine"), who considers only paragraphs taken neither from Jewish sources nor from the Sibyl (p. 133), concludes that the *Oracle* is "a genuine Iranian – specifically, Zoroastrian – work" (p. 146). Scholars who reject the authenticity of Jewish elements found in Lactantius as a genuine part of the *Oracle* are mentioned in Flusser's paper (D. Flusser, "Hystaspes and John of Patmos," in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* [Jerusalem: Magnes,

1988], 392–93 n. 7) To Flusser's list we must add: Schürer (*History*, 655) and Boyce and Grenet (M. Boyce and F. Grenet, *A History of Zoroastrianism* [Leiden: Brill, 1991], 3:377–78 n. 63).

⁶ Flusser, "Hystaspes," 390–453, and n. 7. To cite Flusser: "To save the Persian character of the *Oracle*, scholars had to disregard the Jewish elements in Lactantius and to suppose that they were introduced by Lactantius from his Christian sources. So they were obliged to perform a dangerous operation and cut off the Jewish elements from the story although they are an organic part of it..." (p. 398). Aune accepts Flusser's position regarding the relationship between the *Oracle* and *Revelation*. See D. E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16* (Word Biblical Commentary 52B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 590–92, 727.

⁷ Flusser, "Hystaspes," 396.

⁸ The fourth beast coming out of the sea, according to Daniel chapter 7, has 10 horns on her head, symbolizing the ten rulers from the beginning of the Seleucid empire, from the late fourth to mid second century BCE. The last three horns (Antiochus Epiphanes' brother Seleucus IV, and his two sons, Antiochus and Demetrius) are removed by the little, additional horn symbolizing Antiochus IV. See J. J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress 1993), 299, 321.

⁹ Flusser ("Hystaspes," 396–97) and Aune (*Revelation*, 729) suggest that the second evil ruler is the *Konion* of Asia. However, since the *Oracle* presents itself as eastern, anti-Roman propaganda, a negative portrayal of the east is improbable.

¹⁰ Flusser used this designation for the second ruler and I follow in his wake. I am aware of the fact that the designation 'antichrist' appears neither in the *Oracle*, nor in

the contemporary first-century Jewish or Christian literature. For a survey of the research on this designation and its meaning, see L. J. L. Peerbolte, *The Antecedents of Antichrist: A Traditio-Historical Study of the Earliest Christian Views on Eschatological Opponents* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 49; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 3–15. Using antichrist for the second ruler is justified since this figure presents itself as a godly persona, has superhuman force, and acts as the adversary of God's anointed messengers, the prophet and the Messiah.

¹¹ In his examination of the *Oracle* and other sources discussed here, I. Knohl (*The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* [Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2000]) fails to note that it was the prophet and not the Messiah who was killed by the antichrist, thus invalidating his conclusions.

¹² Indeed we also find this scenario in *Revelation*. However, as Aune notes (*Revelation*, 592, 727–28), Lactantius does not use *Revelation* in book seven of the *Divine Institutes* and it seems that both *Revelation* and Lactantius rely on a common, early source, the *Oracle*. For a different evaluation, see P. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (trans. W. Pradels; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 52–54.

¹³ C. Milikowsky, "Elijah and the Messiah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2:4 (1982–83): 491–96 [Hebrew]. The date of Seder Olam Rabba is discussed by idem, "Josephus between Rabbinic Culture and Hellenistic Historiography," in *Shem in the Tents of Japhet* (ed. J. Kugel; Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 74; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 159–200, esp. 190, 199–200. Milikowsky suggests the first or second century CE as the probable date for SOR. Furthermore, he points to the existence of a 'proto-Seder Olam' which was known by Josephus, i.e., which was written in the mid-first century CE at the latest.

¹⁴ Note that both *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*, in accord with their apocalyptic worldview, do not award centrality to the Messiah's role. Stone points to the inconsistency of the portrayal of the Messiah in *4 Ezra* and concludes: "In terms of the overall thought of the book, it must be observed that the redeemer figure occurs predominantly in those parts of the book which claim to be drawing on prior traditions...." See M. Stone, *Fourth Ezra* (Minneapolis: Fortress 1990), 213.

¹⁵ Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 207–13, esp. 212. See also L. W. Hurtado, "Pre-existence," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (ed. G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity 1993), 743–46.

¹⁶ "Hystaspes," 420–21.

¹⁷ Martha Himmelfarb recently discussed this story in great detail. See M. Himmelfarb, "The Mother of the Messiah in the Talmud Yerushalmi and Sefer Zerubbabel," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture III* (ed. P. Schäfer; TSAJ 93; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 367–89.

¹⁸ Y. Fraenkel, *Iyyunim be'Olam ha-ruchani shel sippur ha-'aggadah* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1981), 163 n. 19.

¹⁹ G. Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* (trans. Batya Stein; Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 152–60.

²⁰ See Himmelfarb, "Mother of the Messiah," 373–76.

²¹ E. Vischer, *Die Offenbarung Johannis: Eine jüdische Apokalypse in christlicher Bearbeitung* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1886). As Himmelfarb notes ("Mother of the Messiah," 371–72 and nn. 10–11), other scholars have followed Vischer's suggestion.

²² Because of this difference Himmelfarb declined to see a close connection between *Revelation* and the *Yerushalmi*.

²³ Aune, *Revelation*, 664–65.

²⁴ Aune, *Revelation*, 670–74; A. Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR 9; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), 116–19, 122–29.

²⁵ Kalms, however, points to the biblical-Jewish background. See J. H. Kalms, *Der Sturz des Gottesfeindes: Traditonsgeschichtliche Studien zu Apokalypse 12* (WMANT 93; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001), 31–65.

²⁶ On the importance of the heavenly opponent and its defeat for the message of *Revelation* itself, see Peerbolte, *Antecedents of Antichrist*, 133–38, 141.

²⁷ Flusser, "Hystaspes," 446–48; Aune, *Revelation*, 588–93.

²⁸ On the question of *Revelation* as apocalyptic work, see R. J. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 2–17; F. D. Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective* (BZNW 54; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989), 259–64.

²⁹ See the discussion in Aune, *Revelation*, 598–603.

³⁰ Personal communication by Dr. Hillel Neuman of Haifa University who has studied *Sefer Zerubabel* for the last fifteen years. For a recent English translation see M. Himmelfarb, "Sefer Zerubbabel," in *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narrative from Classical Hebrew Literature* (ed. D. Satran and M. J. Mirsky; Philadelphia: JPS, 1990), 67–90.

³¹ Himmelfarb ("Mother of the Messiah," 384) suggests that the role of the Messiah's mother in *Sefer Zerubabel* is a response to the figure of Mary as developed in the Byzantine era.

³² Aune, *Revelation*, 588–93. For discussion of *The Apocalypse of Elijah's* date and provenance, see D. Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt, the Apocalypse of Elijah and*

Early Egyptian Christianity (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 17–20. The last quarter of the third century is the *terminus ante quem* according to Frankfurter; the *terminus post quem* is the mid-second century. Most scholars assume this work to be an expansion of early Jewish apocalypse (ibid., 10–17); Frankfurter himself emphasizes the role of Egyptian Christianity in the *Apocalypse's* evolution.

³³ This description can be considered an early interpretation of Psalm 110, where God calls the chosen one to "sit at My right hand" (v. 1), declaring "from the womb, from the dawn ..." (v. 3). On Psalm 110 in pre-Christian literature, see D. M. Hay, *Glory At the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon 1973), 21–27.

³⁴ D. R. Schwartz ("The Messianic Departure from Judah [4Q Patriarchal Blessings]" *TZ* 37 [1986]: 257–66) found hints of this question in 4Q252.

³⁵ Some further comments regarding the use made of myth in the reconstructed text. The Oracle reworked Daniel 7, thus re-used the Canaanite myth found in Daniel as anti-Hellenistic propaganda (on this, see J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel* [HSM 16; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977], 95–118) for anti-Roman propaganda. The myth of Python-Leto-Apollo is interwoven in the reused myth.

³⁶ "In a spring of light emanates the nature of truth and from a well of darkness emerges the nature of deceit [cosmic level]; In the hand of the Prince of Lights (is) the dominion of all the Sons of Righteousness;... But in the hand of the Angel of Darkness (is) the dominion of the Sons of Deceit" [heavenly level] (*Rule of the Community* 3:19–21; translation: J. H. Charlesworth and L. T. Stuckenbruck, "Rule of the Community," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek Texts with*

English Translations, I [ed. J. H. Charlesworth et al.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994], 14); the sons of righteousness and of deceit represent the third, earthly level.

³⁷See H. Lichtenberger, "Messianic Expectations and Messianic Figures," *Qumran-Messianism: Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth, H. Lichtenberger, and G. S. Oegema; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 13. Lichtenberger comments that eschatological expectations do not have to include the coming of a Messiah.

³⁸E. Puech, "246. 4Qapocryphe de Daniel ar," *Qumran Cave 4.XVII: Parabiblical Texts, part 3* (ed. G. Brooke et al.; DJD 22; Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 165–84. For a discussion of the text, see J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star* (New York: Doubleday 1995), 154–69.

³⁹ See also M. Kister, "Notes on Some New Texts from Qumran," *JJS* 44 (1993): 290 n. 48.

⁴⁰ F. Garcia Martinez et al., *Qumran Cave 11. 2* (DJD 23; Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 221–41.

⁴¹Collins, *Scepter*, 49–123; idem, "Jesus, Messianism and the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Qumran-Messianism: Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth, H. Lichtenberger, and G. S. Oegema; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 100–119.

⁴² The *Damascus Document* col. 1 mentions מורה צדק as the leader who was sent by God to guide the Community according to God's heart; דורש התורה is the leader sent by God to create the appropriate tools to interpret the Torah, for exploring and deducing the correct halakhot (see A. Shemesh and C. Werman, "Hidden Things and their Revelation," *RQ* 18 [1998]: 409–27). He is mentioned in the same paragraph

which promises the coming of יורה הצדק at the End of Days: "and the מהקק is the interpreter of the Torah of whom Isaiah said: He takes out a tool for his work" (Isa. 54:16).

⁴³ 4Q541 was published by E. Puech, *Qumran Cave 4.22: Texts Araméens: Première Partie 4Q529-549* (DJD 31; Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 241. J. M. Baumgarten, who discussed the role of the Messiah in CD ("Messianic Forgiveness of Sin in CD 14:19," in *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls* [ed. D. W. Parry and E. Ulrich; STDJ 30; Leiden: Brill, 1999], 537–44), suggests that the coming of the Messiah itself atones for the generation's sins. However, we know from the *War Scroll* and from other writings from Qumran that the time of the priestly leader at the Eschaton is also the time of the rebuilding of the temple. Thus the atonement mentioned both in 4Q541 and in CD 14 could be achieved through the temple cult to be carried out by the priestly leader.

⁴⁴ D. Flusser, "The Death of the Evil King," in *A Light to Jacob: Studies in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls in Memory of Jacob Licht* (ed. Y. Hoffman and F. H. Polak; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1997), 254–62 [Hebrew].

⁴⁵ See the text and a brief discussion in J. J. Collins and D. Dimant, "A Thrice-Told Hymn," *JQR* 85 (1994-95): 151–57, and the longer discussion in Collins, *Scepter*, 136–49.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the many possible interpretations of this text, see Collins, *Scepter*, 136–53.

⁴⁷ The fact that 4Q491 is linked to a text where the End of Days is described (Collins and Dimant, "Thrice-Told Hymn," 159) suggests, to my mind, that the speaker's status is to be achieved only at the End of Days. This reasoning leads me to reject the

suggestion made by J. W. van Henten ("Moses as Heavenly Messenger in Assumptio Mosis 10:2 and Qumran Passages," *JJS* 54 [2003]: 220–27) that the speaker is Moses.

⁴⁸ I thus agree with M. Abegg ("4Q491, 4Q427, and the Teacher of Righteousness," in *Eschatology, Messianism and the Dead Sea Scrolls* [ed. C. A. Evans and P. W. Flint; Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge, England: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997]) who stated: "... it is possible that such claim (to have ascended to heaven) was made on behalf of the Teacher of Righteousness by the author of the text..." (p. 72).

⁴⁹ See further K. Atkinson, "On the Herodian Origin of Militant Davidic Messianism at Qumran: New Light from Psalm of Solomon 17," *JBL* 118 (1999): 435–60.

⁵⁰ Both S. Byrskog (*Jesus the only Teacher* [ConBNT 24; Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1994]) and R. Deines (*Die Gerechtigkeit der Tora im Reich des Messias: Mt 5,13-20 als Schlüsseltext der matthäischen Theologie* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004]) point to the role of Jesus as a teacher in Matthew. The difference between Matthew's Messiah and Qumran's priestly Messiah is that the Qumranic Messiah gives his followers *the tools* for learning new laws from Scripture, whereas Matthew's Jesus supplies a body of knowledge.

⁵¹ Collins, *Scepter*, 117–22.

⁵² J. J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Routledge, 1997), 110–29; G. W. Nickelsburg, "Resurrection," *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (eds. L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2:766; D. Dimant, "Resurrection, Restoration and Time-Curtailing in Qumran, Early Judaism and Christianity," *RQ* 19 (2000): 527–29.

⁵³ It is possible, however, that Jesus, knowing of John's death, did feel vulnerable. See B. Chilton, "Friends and Enemies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (ed. M.

Bockmuehl; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 72–86. I follow J. J. Collins ("Asking for the Meaning of a Fragmentary Qumran Text: The Referential Background of 4QAaron A," in *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in their Textual and Situational Contexts* [ed. T. Fornberg and D. Hellholm; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995], 579–90) and take issue with G. J. Brooke ("4QTestament of Levi d(?) and the Messianic Servant High Priest," in *From Jesus to John: Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology in Honor of Marinus de Jonge* [ed. M. C. De Boer; Sheffield: JSOT 1993], 83–100) who found hints to a suffering Messiah in 4Q541. I completely reject Knohl's conclusions in his *The Messiah before Jesus*. Against Knohl I submit that the presence of two figures in Revelation 11 does not make the chapter of Qumranic origin. As I have shown here, at Qumran the two messiahs are of different types and have different roles. Furthermore, as sketched by Knohl, there was only one Messiah at the revolt after Herod's death and not two. It is illogical to assume *Revelation* 11 refers to a historical event that occurred in the Qumran Community because it mentions two figures and, at the same time, to reconstruct that historical event with only one figure. Second, as noted, *Revelation* 11 refers to the death of a prophet and not to the death of a messiah. Third, the speaker in 4Q491 does not consider himself a fighter; hence any ties between the speaker and an earthly warrior or a revolt are more than dubious. Finally, there is no similarity between *Revelation* 11 and the *Yerushalmi*. Whereas *Revelation* 11 speaks about the ascent to heaven of an adult who completed his mission on earth, the *Yerushalmi* tells of a baby that ascended in order to be prepared for his future mission on earth. Thus, we cannot deduce the name of the hero referred to in *Revelation* 11 from the name of

the hero in the *Yerushalmi*: Menachem. Accordingly, there was no death and resurrection of Menachem the Essene and Jesus had no prior scheme to follow.