CHAPTER FOUR

HEKHALOT ZUTARTI:
THE LESSER (BOOK OF THE HEAVENLY) PALACES

INTRODUCTION

The Hekhalot Zutarti (§§ 335–375, 407–426) is written in a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic and presents the reader with a welter of mysterious divine and angelic names to be used in adjurations, along with ascent rituals for theurgic purposes. Its text and original form (insofar as we can speak of the latter) are more difficult to reconstruct than for some of the other Hekhalot texts, but are recoverable to a significant degree.

Contents

The contents of the Hekhalot Zutarti are varied and are difficult to summarize. The first part (§§ 335–375) has a special interest in divine names and their use in adjurations. The work opens with introductory material issuing obscure warnings about the dangers of the practices taught therein (§ 335), followed by brief references to ascents by Moses and R. Akiva (§§ 336–337). A textually complex account of the Story of the Four Who Entered Paradise follows (§§ 338–345). Various aspects of the ascent to the chariot and the vision of God are then discussed: an ascent of R. Akiva (§§ 346, 348); an account of the formidable powers of the practitioner (§§ 349–350, paralleled in § 361); and an arcane discussion of whether a mortal can see God and live (§ 350–352). Next comes a detailed description of the four living creatures in the heavenly throne room (§§ 353–356), followed by a series of revelations of divine names and incantations (§§ 357–367). Then we find another detailed account of the environs of the divine throne, called “The Throne Midrash” by Morray-Jones (§§ 368–375). The second part of the work (§§ 407–426) turns to a consideration of the visionary descent to the chariot. It describes the entrance test and the water test at the sixth palace (§§ 407–412) and then gives instructions for the descent (§§ 413–419). Revelations about various important angels follow (§§ 420–421), leading to another set of instructions for the visionary journey to the chariot (§§ 422–424). The work concludes with a curse and a blessing from the Prince of the Presence regarding the
proper disclosure and use of the revelations found therein (§ 425–426). (In the translation I have for the most part followed Morray-Jones in delineating the major sections of the Hekhalot Zutarti.)

Manuscripts

The complete text of the Hekhalot Zutarti is found in N, O, M40, M22, and D, all of which have been published in the Synopse. The text of N has been heavily interpolated with other material. A fragment recovered from the Cairo Geniza dated to the eleventh century (G7) preserves a substantial portion of §§ 335–356 and is our earliest textual source for the work.

The text of the magical Handbook Havdala di-R. Akiva § 3 overlaps with the Hekhalot Zutarti at §§ 362–365. Two Geniza fragments (G16 and G18) preserve material from this passage, but it uncertain to which of the larger texts they originally belonged. The incantation amulet G75 contains material that overlaps with Hekhalot Zutarti § 421 (cf. G8 2b 44b–49) and may be excerpted from it. The Shı‘ur Qomah material in §§ 367b–369, 375 overlaps with the Shı‘ur Qomah passage in M40 §§ 953–956 and with G9.

All of this material has been used to reconstruct the eclectic critical text of the Hekhalot Zutarti which is translated in this chapter. This work is preserved in fewer manuscripts than the Hekhalot Rabbati and the Sar Torah and in a form less thoroughly edited. Nevertheless, the text of the core document can usually be reconstructed with a reasonable degree of confidence, although the original text of the divine names and nomina barbara is at times irrecoverable.

Title

The earliest surviving reference to the title Hekhalot Zutarti is found in the eleventh-century responsum written by Hai ben Sherira HaGaon which has been discussed in the introduction to the Hekhalot Rabbati. He mentions both titles, but his allusions to their content confirm only his knowledge of the Hekhalot Zutarti, specifically § 424. He describes a praxis “to have a vision of the chariot and to peer into the palaces of the angels on high” as follows:

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