

The Evolution of the Patriarch Enoch in Jewish Tradition

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Abstract: At a single paragraph in the Bible, Enoch presents a somewhat etiolated figure among the other patriarchs; and yet, outside the Bible, his presence is enormous and ever changing. In this article I examine how the reception of Enoch has evolved over the centuries and millennia since his appearance in Genesis. Initially in the form of several small booklets from the 4th–1st centuries BCE, Enoch is understood as inventor of writing and heavenly traveller, visiting God on his throne and comprehending the astronomical mechanics; but by the time of the medieval Kabbalists he has been transformed into the great angel Metatron, the prototype of all mystics who seek heavenly wisdom, and present at the creation of the universe. In these cases, the theme of the learned seer has developed to meet the expectations of the Jewish communities who were drawn to him, and yet there is a surprising continuity of character even over thousands of years and miles.

Introduction

The patriarch Enoch, seventh in line from Adam, gets some short shrift in the Hebrew Bible: through a mere 6 verses (Gen 5:18–24), we learn that he was born, lived 365 years, “walked with God” and was no more. As simple as that, and he is mentioned nowhere else in the text.¹ However, since roughly the 4th century BCE, Enoch has grown in stature, taking on new roles and qualities as different Jewish communities contemplated his nature and importance.

Some of the emerging themes in Enoch’s evolution are developments from the biblical text, but others are new concepts with no obvious Jewish precedent.² Having “walked with God”, Enoch is understood as, on the one hand, exceedingly righteous, while on the other, as a celestial traveller who visited the heavens and talked with angels, God having “taken” him. Throughout these travels, though, he records his experiences as testimony for human beings; his function as scribe rapidly becomes a defining characteristic, and the books bearing his name are all allegedly written by his own hand. The earliest extant Enoch literature presents the seer as being granted a vision of God in

¹ Enoch has a likely pre-Biblical presence as the Mesopotamian King Enmeduranki (Orlov 2005), who shares some important features with the pseudepigraphic Enoch, therefore suggesting that the character as we know him had absorbed traditions from outside the Bible even at this early stage, but this is outside the remit of this study, the intention of which is to focus on Enoch in Judaism.

² We find the precursors of Enoch’s roles as Diviner, Expert in Secrets, Mediator, Scribe, and Priest in the Enmeduranki traditions (Orlov 2005, 23–39).

heaven, but by the turn of the era this has become the focal point of his experience, a transformative point from which he cannot return; and we see here the beginning of a metamorphosis which will, by Islamic times, leave him as the archangelic potency Metatron, so powerful as to be confused with God. By this time, Enoch's mystical adventure has become the prototype which the Jewish Merkava mystics attempt to replicate, and in their literature it is Metatron who recounts his own experience as a part of his function as their guide in heaven and who introduces for them the vision of God. By the time of the medieval mystics, nearly 2,000 years after the first booklets, Enoch has become a divine manifestation of God himself.

This article will examine the development of Enoch over the centuries, as he transforms from the simple righteous man of the Bible to meet the needs and expectations of different communities which were drawn to him. While some scholars argue that there is something of a linear development to Enoch,³ others hold that there have been several streams of tradition which have coalesced and then drifted apart in the patriarch's history.⁴ My own argument will be that Enoch as we can know him now demonstrates both continuity *and* change, having developed certain characteristics in response to the outlook and experiences of those communities which saw fit to write about him, while still progressing in something of a linear manner – each stage dependent upon the changes wrought by the

previous. Accordingly, different communities will have emphasised specific aspects from the various trajectories which were available to them, creating the patriarch anew at each juncture. However, that there were also different trajectories developing at the same time, even in perhaps the same communities, is undeniable.⁵

Enoch during Second Temple Times

Perhaps because of the Bible's taciturn regard, extra-biblical speculation on the person of Enoch has been rife.⁶ We find some of the earliest non-canonical texts of Second Temple Judaism recorded in his name, beginning with two 4th–3rd century BCE booklets which describe his life in far more detail than Genesis. In the *Astronomical Book* (*1 En* 72–82,⁷ also known as the *Book of the Luminaries*) we learn what it may have meant that Enoch walked with

³ Most recently Orlov 2005, but see the review of literature and further points presented in Coblenz Bantch – Assefa 2012. The latter conclude with the vision of “the Enochic traditions as many branches of a tree with roots likewise that extend in numerous directions” (189).

⁴ Perhaps most famously, Scholem 1987.

⁵ At Qumran the *Astronomical Book* and the collections of other booklets may represent diverging trajectories (Reed 2015). It is also plausible to speculate that Enochic texts which underwent interpolation and development within Christian communities then were reabsorbed *along with the new developments* back into Jewish traditions. This “incubation” of previously Jewish concepts within Christianity before re-entry into Judaism is not at all unknown (see, e.g., Schäfer 2012) and it is via this process that the *Zohar* seems to know of *Similitudes* (Olson 2004, 271).

⁶ Although it seems more likely that these traditions were unknown at the time the Genesis account was written, the other possibility is that the Enochic booklets represent a direct passage from the original traditions which had, for one reason or another, been edited out of Genesis.

⁷ The text we now know as *1 Enoch* is a compilation of five separate compositions joined with some seg-way passages. It is preserved in singular form only in Ethiopic, but most (all but the *Similitudes*) of the booklets have been found as Aramaic fragments at Qumran, AB evidently having been much longer originally than the extant version; there is also a unique text there, the *Book of Giants* (Milik 1976). The titles of the booklets are all from modern scholars and thus have some variation.

God: here we follow him on an angelically-guided tour of the heavenly sphere. The angels meticulously describe the celestial mechanics, the laws of the sun and moon, their phases and timekeeping, along with a prediction that in “the days of the sinners” the heavenly bodies will begin to fall out of phase, and an evolving chaos will envelop the earth as both nature and humanity grow out of sync with their prescribed order (80:1–8).⁸ As such, it is something of an expansion on the two elements of Enoch’s Genesis biography: his walking with God and his association with the suggestively calendrical figure of 365.⁹ This first stratum of the Enoch literature, the subject matter of which is repeated as an integral part of his experiences even a millennium later, is a significant document of Jewish interest in natural science at this time.¹⁰ The human attempt to independently reason about and understand the natural world had not been a part of Jewish thought previously, and was perhaps imported from Babylonia. Despite being apparently “alien wisdom” to Second Temple Judaism, this scientific theme (whereby Enoch circumnavigates heaven and witnesses the machinery of nature) appears to be an original part of the tradition, only joined one or two centuries later by a separate eschatological element.¹¹ The themes of astronomical travel and a rationally ordered universe became integrated into Enoch’s narrative at this earliest post-biblical stage and will remain throughout.

⁸ Translations are from the Hermeneia texts (Nickelsburg 2001, Nickelsburg – VanderKam 2012).

⁹ The reckoning of the days of the year figures heavily in the booklet, which promotes the same kind of solar calendar as we find in other documents at Qumran; in opposition to the more traditionally Israelite lunar calendar.

¹⁰ Alexander 2014, VanderKam 2014.

¹¹ Alexander 1998, 95.

The Book of the Watchers (*1 En* 1–36) presents a much stronger narrative on the life of Enoch, emphasising his personal righteousness. While in AB Enoch is only guided by angels, in BW he is personally selected for an audience with God. Still we find the motif of the cosmos’ regularity, where everything is in its appointed place – everything, that is, except for humankind, which has forsaken the ordained path. The cause of humanity’s laxity is easy to ascertain: an angelic group known as the Watchers had, in times past, descended upon earth enamoured with the comely daughters of men, and taken brides for themselves. While siring children (the giant *nephilim*), they spread to humans their knowledge of dark arts like sorcery, metalwork, divination, and fashion. Enoch himself first appears as a servant of God who is sent to inform the Watchers of their condemnation and whom the Watchers request to petition God for forgiveness on their behalf. As God lifts Enoch into heaven to present the petition, we witness the stunning visions of, this time not the planets but, the palaces of God. Enoch travels through the atmosphere until he reaches “a great house built of hailstones” (14:10), a house “hot as fire and cold as snow” (14:13), within which is another house “all built of tongues of fire... excelled in glory and splendour and majesty” such that Enoch cannot even describe it accurately (14:16). Within this turbulent vision is yet another, still greater: God enthroned with the host of angels around him. And here, Enoch’s capacity ends because he himself cannot even see let alone describe God. What Enoch can know however is the voice of God: God, rejecting the Watchers’ petition, addresses Enoch as, “righteous man and scribe of truth” (15:1): two titles which will become crucial in the development of our ancient hero.

Once Enoch is led away from God's presence he witnesses again the basic mechanics of the universe – the places where the winds are stored, the foundation of earth and the cornerstone of heaven, and the “paths of the angels” (18:1–5); the place of punishment for the rebellious stars which deviated from God's timetable (18:14–16; 21:1–6), the captivity of the wicked angels and the enclosures for human souls where “their spirits are separated [into good and evil] until the great day of judgment” (22:10); the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge.¹² Through all of this he is guided by the angels who write down information for him, and answer his questions; Enoch is relentlessly curious, repeatedly probing the angels for information about the things he sees.¹³

Throughout the rest of the texts which make up the early strata of Enoch literature, we find repeated emphasis on a stable, planned cosmos: the heavenly bodies are catalogued and systematised, history is narrated from creation to apocalypse.¹⁴ Enoch is shown around by angelic guides and is called upon

to record this structure for the benefit of human beings, often having read the Heavenly Tablets which prescribe every individual action and the fate of each soul.¹⁵ The scribal function, while supposedly a duty of the angels, quickly becomes so much a part of Enoch's myth that sometimes he is identified as the inventor of writing.¹⁶ While the earliest booklets are focussed on cosmology, the ethical quickly becomes a part of Enoch's message, and by the 2nd century BCE the simple description of the sins of the astronomical bodies, the Watchers and human beings has transposed into an appeal to righteousness, to living in the ways of God, and the separation of the righteous from the unrighteous.¹⁷ The “unrighteous deeds are written down day by day” and will be the source of eschatological judgment (*I En* 98:8). Enoch has been shown “everything which is on heaven and earth” in order to record it (*Jub* 4:23), and so when one text asks,

For who is there of all the sons of men who is able to hear the words of the Holy One...to look at all the works of heaven [...] to see a soul or a spirit and is able to tell? Or to ascend and see all their ends [...] who is able to know the length of the heavens, and what is their height and upon what they are

¹² The former “no flesh has the right to touch until the great judgment [...].Then it will be given to the righteous and pious [...]. Its fragrances will be in their bones, and they will live a long life on the earth” (25:3–6). The latter is “the tree of wisdom from which your father of old and your mother of old [...] ate and learned wisdom” (32:6).

¹³ While AB offers an unconventional calendar, BW provides a new take on the origin of evil: no longer are Adam and Eve to blame, but the fallen angels who led humanity astray. These elements, which present a challenge to the received biblical tradition, indicate an outsider nature typical of apocalyptic literature, which finds fault in the world and contemporaneous society, and it is not surprising that we find the literature among those of the separatist Qumran community.

¹⁴ The most impressive being the 2nd century BCE Dream Visions (*I En* 83–90, also known as Animal Apocalypse).

¹⁵ The recording of history in a set of tablets or books is a common aspect of Jewish theology at this time (Baynes 2012). Usually these books are written by angelic scribes, and opened only on the day of judgement.

¹⁶ *Jub* 4:17, Targ Ps-J Gen 5:24. Jubilees is a 2nd century BCE text not included in *I Enoch* but sharing in many concepts and motifs. It was also found at Qumran, and depends in part on BW, DV and possibly AB, while providing material for the Epistle (Segal 2007). Curiously, the Similitudes identifies writing as a gift of the Watchers, because of which “many went astray” (*I En* 69:9).

¹⁷ Most especially in the 2nd century BCE Epistle of Enoch (*I En* 91–105).

founded? And what is the number of the stars, and where all the luminaries rest? (*I En* 93:11–14) The answer is clear: Enoch, as we know, has done all these things.¹⁸

Enoch at the Turn of the Era

It is in the latest of the *I Enoch* booklets that we find the most dramatic changes, however. The Similitudes of Enoch, or The Book of Parables, (*I En* 37–71) dates from the 1st century BCE, though it was long thought to be later due to the presence of certain motifs which bear a striking similarity to those found in the New Testament's depiction of Jesus.¹⁹ In this text, unusual because its focus is far more on the person of Enoch than previously, we follow the patriarch as he is lifted into heaven and sees again the dwelling place of the righteous (39:4) and the meteorological secrets (41:3–8; 59), receives “books of jealous wrath and rage, and books of trepidation and consternation,” (39:2) and is commissioned to relate the vision-parables he receives to the people of earth (37:5), but this time he encounters a new figure: the “Chosen One of righteousness and faith” (39:6).²⁰ This figure is something like an archetype, one who is responsible for and to the righteous and has a “dwelling beneath the wings of the Lord of Spirits” (39:7), where Enoch “wished to dwell [...] my spirit longed for that dwell-

ing.” (39:8) This primordial office may have been set aside for Enoch, who claims that “There my portion has been from the first, for thus it has been established concerning me in the presence of the Lord of Spirits.” (39:8) In the concluding passage (70–71²¹), we find that Enoch does indeed take the mantle of the Chosen One: his name is “lifted up into the presence of that Son of Man” (70:1), his body and spirit undergo a transformation (71:11) and in a long encomium an angelic being announces that Enoch is “that son of man [i.e., human] who was born for righteousness” (71:14).

The Chosen One still remains the prophetic or revelatory motif of Enoch; he is the one who will reveal “all the treasures of what is hidden” (46:3). His primordial nature is emphasised when he is given a name that has existed since before all of creation (48:3). He will save the righteous from iniquity (48:7), destroying the wicked (48:9).²² He is enthroned upon the throne of glory (61:8; 69:27).²³ It appears that, although the office of the Chosen One has been reserved for Enoch, he still has to undergo a transformation in order to attain

¹⁸ Nickelsburg 2001, 451–53.

¹⁹ Particularly interesting in this regard may be the implicit notion that Enoch was removed from the earth by God in the past, but is soon to return and inaugurate the end of days as described in the text. There are many points of contact between the Similitudes' apocalypse and that of Revelation.

²⁰ We find this foreshadowed in the Epistle's opening lines which describe “The righteous one” who will rise, walk in righteousness, and receive from God mercy, truth, and authority, and who will ultimately “judge in piety and righteousness; and walk in everlasting light” (*I En* 92:4).

²¹ Scholars think this is the latest element, appended to the rest of the text, and several translations have been offered (Nickelsburg – VanderKam 2012, 315–19).

²² The aggressive focus on the righteous-unrighteous divide hints at an “Enochic community” behind the Similitudes, although this would not be the sect at Qumran (Nickelsburg – VanderKam 2012, 65).

²³ The Similitudes' Chosen One takes motifs from several figures from Israel's textual history, incorporating aspects of the Davidic Messiah-King, 2 Isaiah's Servant of YHWH, and the enthroned eschatological judge, “one like a son of man” from Dan 7 as well as the pre-existent Wisdom of Prov 8:22–31 (Nickelsburg – VanderKam 2012, 118). All these have influenced the development of messianic thought in Judaism, but there are few texts other than the Gospels and Revelation which combine them into a single figure as the Similitudes does.

it. This process is something like an angelification, for after being in God's presence "my face was changed, for I was unable to see" (39:14; cf. 71:11), and thus "his face was full of graciousness like one of the holy angels" (46:1).

So we see that up until the Common Era, the figure of Enoch is associated with motifs that evolve from the brief biblical reference, while incorporating external ideas. He travels through heaven, witnessing secrets unknown by other humans; he is the scribe, recording the order of the cosmos and history and absorbing the angelic duty of documenting the actions of human beings; he is righteous, and has a special role in regard to the righteous (who can likely be identified as the people of Israel – or at least those among them who obediently keep God's laws²⁴); there is a primordial placement which he was intended to fulfil as this Righteous and Chosen exemplar, which has by the time of the *Similitudes* a hint of angelic status, and which positions him as judge of humankind and inaugurator of the eschaton. From the 2nd century BCE onwards the assault on the unrighteous grows, as does the description of their punishment, indicating the tension which the authors perceive in their world: the land of Israel was in turmoil at this time, subject to conquest after conquest as the people suffered under the harsh vicissitudes of different rulers. The authors are keen to see the final judgment, when God will reward the faithful and punish those who persecuted them. We see also that the person and nature of Enoch grows more central as the textual tradition evolves. Where AB and BW are principally concerned with the cosmos, and Enoch functions as messenger and recorder of certain revelations, by the time of the

Similitudes it is he, as the Chosen One, who has become the subject of revelation, one hidden before time who will only be revealed when his influence is required. And while the first booklets place Enoch as witness and recorder of the sins and virtues of human beings (81:1), by the latest he himself enacts judgment for those actions (48:7–9).

From perhaps only a century later than the latest elements of *1 Enoch*, *2 Enoch* presents a less fierce and more intellectual, as well as cohesive, picture of the patriarch.²⁵ The text introduces Enoch as a wise and great scholar (1:1) who was taken to see the highest realms and God himself along with his throne and angels. Once taken, he ascends sequentially through the seven heavens, seeing again the atmospheric elements, the myriad angelic forces, and paradise and hell, and is again asked to intercede on behalf of a group of rebellious angels, this time quickly refusing.²⁶ Here Enoch is not

²⁵ *2 Enoch* appears to be more of a single composition than *1 Enoch*, drawing on all or most elements of the existing corpus of earlier traditions; but a lot of doubt still surrounds it. It is probably originally Jewish but may be Jewish-Christian; recent research suggests it probably originated in the 1st century CE, but may be later and has certainly undergone many levels of redaction (Böttrich 2012, although there are other arguments both for and against an early dating, Orlov 2012). The text itself suggests a Greek original, though a prior Hebrew version is also possible (Macaskill 2012). It currently exists in two main versions, significantly different in length, each of which has evolved independently since their separation. While it has been preserved intact only in an Old Church Slavonic translation dating from the 11th–12th centuries CE, we have a recently discovered Coptic fragment from the 8th–10th centuries CE which has enabled some clearer assertions but is too small to allow much certainty beyond its existence outside the Slavonic church (Hagen 2012).

²⁶ His response is a rhetorical mirror of his previous question: "Who am I, a mortal man,

²⁴ Nickelsburg – VanderKam 2012, 99.

recording, but we do again find that all human deeds are being recorded for posterity (19:5). In 2 *Enoch* this is just one aspect of the pervasive angelic monitoring and control of all phenomenal aspects of the world: there are “angels over seasons and years [...] rivers and oceans [...] fruit and grass [...] everything that breeds” (19:4) and even “archangels who are over the angels [who] harmonize all existence, heavenly and earthly” (19:3).

The purpose of Enoch’s elevation is unremarked until, on the brink of the seventh heaven, Gabriel commands him to “Stand up, and come with me and stand in front of the face of the Lord forever” (21:3).²⁷ In order to be presented before God, Enoch is redressed “in clothes of glory” and anointed, whereby “I had become like one of his glorious ones, and there was no observable difference” (22:10). This identification with the angelic host is foreshadowed in the previous literature (most clearly the *Similitudes*), but from this point, Enoch takes on a primordial function which quickly surpasses what we might have expected: initially he is made recorder, writing the entire course of history, natural and human, the fate of all souls, and even every language and the rules humans live by. After this indoctrination, God personally begins to educate Enoch, and shares with him the

that I should pray for angels? Who knows where I am going and what will confront me?” (7:5). Translations are from Andersen (1983); as we are interested here in the putative original text and its narrative, I have concatenated the two versions he provides from different manuscript traditions into one.

²⁷ As in the *Similitudes*, the place which Enoch will take in the highest heaven is his “eternal inheritance” (55:2). In the 2nd century BCE, Ben Sira had claimed Enoch “was taken into the *pannim* [presence/face]” (49:14), perhaps indicating already then an emerging association of Enoch with the divine face.

secrets of the process of creation to which not even the angels were privy. Enoch now knows “everything”: he reels off a list of his knowledge, which encompasses both time and space “for either from the lips of the Lord or else my eyes have seen from the beginning even to the end [...] the heavens and their boundaries and their contents [...] the armies and their movements I have measured [...]” (40:1–2). But there is a conceptual slip in the text, and in some manuscripts we find Enoch moves seamlessly from boasting of his recording and measuring of the cosmos, to claiming to have designed it.²⁸ This must be a scribal error of some form, but the slip makes clear just how easy it is to jump from recorder to orchestrator; from one who measures and systematises, to one who instils the possibility of that measurement.²⁹

Enoch has again undergone a physical transformation in his encounter with God: When he returns to the world, having completed his testimony, his face is “chilled” in order that humans can safely look at him (37:1–2).³⁰ Even so, he has been so changed that all earthly desires are foreign to him, and even food is not required (56:2). And once he has declared his moral missive, the people embrace him and adorn him with yet

²⁸ 40:6. This occurs in all manuscripts of the long version, and as Andersen notes, “would be more appropriate in the mouth of the creator” (1983, 165). The reason for this strange passage is unclear and little discussed, but later in both versions Enoch claims to have personally prepared a place of judgment in the afterlife for each soul (49:2–3). It later becomes a feature of the Medieval Slavonic text *Merilo Pravednoe*, where Enoch is “manager of the earth” (Andersen 1983, 217).

²⁹ On this theme of the “divider” as uniting the creative (divine) and epistemological (human) in Philo’s *Logos*, see Cox 2007.

³⁰ Notably in 2 *Enoch*, his appearance becomes changed immediately as his angelic guides appear to him (1:7).

another accolade: now he is “the one who carried away the sin of mankind” (64:5). This salvific role, while a logical conclusion from his capacity in prescribing righteous behaviour, is yet another step toward a nature which could not have been predicted from the earliest books. He is no longer “a human taken to heaven and transformed into an angel, but a celestial being exalted above the angelic world.”³¹

2 Enoch draws significantly on popular Jewish philosophy, which the author recasts in a mythical setting.³² While the booklets of *1 Enoch* were preserved by sectarians such as the Qumran community, something which indicates the “outsider” background of a group unhappy with the direction of Israel’s religion and offering an alternative narrative, *2 Enoch* manages to take these traditions and incorporate them into a somewhat middle-class, Hellenised atmosphere which, although still not at one with the popular religion of Judaea, is relatively content with the current state of society and religion. Enoch’s testimony does not damn the unrighteous but encourages personal good deeds, and the fire and brimstone of *1 Enoch*’s later strata are replaced with a complex and philosophically-inclined depiction of the creation of the visible world from the invisible. This new emphasis combined with a Hellenistic individualism may have helped to solidify the focus on the person of Enoch as a kind of mediator of redemption; the absence of nationalistic Hebrew history is only part of a dynamic which is both personal and universal. However, this development would not have been possible without the transformation that takes place in the Similitudes, for it is only here that Enoch first became a person

of cosmic importance, rather than simply a prophet: it is only because of Enoch’s elevation to the status of Chosen One that he can in *2 Enoch* take the new role as one of the heavenly host, a translation which paves the way for the later developments.

Enoch and Metatron in Rabbinic Judaism

At some point, Enoch’s elevation into heaven and incorporation into the angelic retinue earns him a new name: Metatron. Whether this angel pre-existed his identification with Enoch we do not know, but there is a strong case for the direct continuity of the Enoch literature into the later traditions where our hero is mentioned.³³ From around the 5th–9th centuries CE, in the rabbinic centres of Palestine and Babylon, we find a group of texts known as the *Hekhalot* (palaces) literature.³⁴ These tell of two rabbinic sages who ascend into heaven, are met by angels, and after some trials are granted a vision of God and join the angels in singing his praise. Dozens of angels feature, but the most prominent is Metatron. In the most textually solid and singular work, *Sefer Hekhalot* (*3 Enoch*), Metatron tells his own history of having been taken from earth as the human Enoch, the sole righteous member of his generation (*3 En* 4–15). Despite objection from the angels, this human, choicest in faith and righteousness (6:3), was lifted into heaven on the wings of the Shekhinah to serve

³¹ Orlov 2005, 211.

³² Böttrich 2012.

³³ Scholem famously claimed that Metatron had originated in the angel Yahoel and only later became associated with Enoch (1987, 89). The earliest references to Metatron are 3rd century CE (*Visions of Ezekiel* and *b.Sanh* 98b) and do not mention Enoch; his two other appearances in the Babylonian Talmud likewise. The link is made in the 4th century *Targ Ps-J* but this may be a late addition (Mortensen 2006). Orlov (2005) has provided a detailed analysis which supports the linear development of Metatron’s characteristics from Enoch’s, although this has not been universally accepted. On Metatron generally see Abrams 2001.

³⁴ Boustán – Himmelfarb – Schäfer 2013.

the throne of glory, and had bestowed upon him wisdom, understanding, prudence, knowledge, mercy, Torah, and all “excellent, praiseworthy qualities” over above the angels (8:2).³⁵ R. Ishmael stands mute as Metatron recounts his blessings: with 72 wings, 365,000 eyes, and a physical span the length of the world, with a throne like God’s own at the entrance to the 7th heaven, a robe and crown fashioned by God himself, transformed into fire and made prince and ruler over all angels, one could perhaps be forgiven for thinking Enoch has now reached his apogee. And if this were not enough, God titles him “The lesser YHWH.”

While Enoch was guided around heaven by angels in his earlier literature, it is now Metatron who leads R. Ishmael, offering many of the same visions as he himself had: he enumerates the leagues of angelic beings who preside over aspects of heaven, ensuring its daily functioning; he reveals the letters of creation, the names of God which are so potent as to allow fire and ice to exist together; the souls of the righteous and the wicked that have not yet been created, and the souls of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the history of humanity from Adam to the Messiahs;³⁶ the spirits and names of the stars, and finally the right hand of God. If we are in any doubt about the success of Enoch’s translation into heaven and his acceptance into the angelic host, this would quell it. He is now without doubt a heavenly being.

This “boundary-crossing” is a fixed motif of the Enoch-Metatron literature: he goes between earth and heaven, from mortal to angel, and finally even touches on the

boundary of divinity; and throughout this he encounters a persistent rivalry with the angels.³⁷ Enoch was elevated to heaven in contrast to the fallen watchers and reverses their role of petitioning God on behalf of humans (*1 En* 15:1); he learns secrets which God concealed from the angels (*2 En* 24:3); he is disputed by the angels when lifted up to heaven (*3 En* 6). In all these texts, Enoch is presented as victorious over, or simply more important than, the angels.³⁸ Already by the time of *2 Enoch*, he has usurped the role of the angels, becoming the intermediator par excellence, transmitting information to human beings about the heavenly world and displacing the more traditional *angelus interpres*; by *3 Enoch* he has become the most potent angel, “unique among all the denizens of the heights” (*3 En* 48D:9) and in the latest additions to that text he is the being through whom all interaction with God must pass,³⁹ the divine mouthpiece, and he even enacts every word that God speaks (*3 En* 48C:10). At this point Enoch’s revelatory function is such that it is said to be he (as Metatron) who revealed the Torah to Moses (*3 En* 48D:8). It is only R. Akiva’s slip, mistaking Metatron for a second deity in heaven, which provokes a reversal of his fortunes where the angel Anafiel is called to whip him and make him

³⁷ Coblenz Bautch – Assefa 2012, 185.

³⁸ Recalling again the relevance of Enoch to early Christology, Jesus is said to be superior to the angels because “the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs” (Heb 1:1–4, cf. Phil 2:9, Eph 1:21). Of course, Jewish tradition in general has been keen to emphasise the rivalry between angels and humans, and has ensured that the latter always come out on top. Cf. the many traditions regarding angelic opposition to Adam’s creation, and Ber.Rab. 17:4’s rewriting of Gen 2:19–20 which has Adam and the angels compete at naming the animals.

³⁹ “Any angel and any prince who has anything to say in my presence should go before him and speak to him.” (*3 En* 10:4)

³⁵ Translations are from Alexander 1983.

³⁶ Like much rabbinic literature, *3 Enoch* describes two messiahs: one from the line of Joseph and one from the line of David.

stand from his throne (3 *En* 16).⁴⁰

Given this background, the interest in Metatron shown by successive generations of kabbalists is not surprising.⁴¹ He is the single most important angelic figure, and his heritage in the patriarch Enoch is noted, although it is far from the crux of his nature. Indicating the deep immersion in Arab Neoplatonic philosophy which the early kabbalists, especially those in Castile, display, Metatron now has become a primordial archetype, identified with a nexus of concepts such as the Active Intellect, the Torah, the Tetragrammaton, and the Hebrew alphabet, all of which serve to connect the absolute, ineffable God with his creation, and through which revelation can happen.⁴² Metatron here is something like the first condensation of divine energy into a definite form, and so his anthropomorphic form is a necessary aspect of his “First Adam” status.⁴³ In an interesting (and unintentional) nod back to the Similitudes, 13th century kabbalist Abraham Abulafia describes Metatron as an office which the Messiah will inherit, donning his name and cosmic nature

as he is anointed.⁴⁴ At another point Abulafia makes the angel the “oldest of all created things”⁴⁵ and for R. Asher ben David it was Metatron in whose image man was created.⁴⁶ This first creation even slips into a virtual demiurgic potency for Abulafia.⁴⁷ This is all a long way from the initial conceptions of Enoch as simply a patriarch, even a particularly righteous one; but we can recall the conclusion of the Similitudes, where Enoch is named before the sun and moon were created (1 *En* 48:2–3), and by the time of 2 *Enoch* was he who would heal humanity’s primal sin (2 *En* 64:5). It is surely no accident that in his function as the first man, Metatron is also named *tzaddiq*, or the Righteous One.⁴⁸ By this point, Metatron has become so far woven into the divine identity that it is difficult not to have some sympathy for R. Akiva’s quintessential mistake, and by the latest stages of the tradition, in 18th century Poland, Enoch-Metatron has become “an entity distinguished by a unique ontological status, as one who has transcended mundane reality and underlies the structure of the entire universe.”⁴⁹

It is notable that in earlier texts such as Similitudes, written at painful and unsure junctures of history, in a land which was the focus of military and political rivalries and subject to repeated conquests, Enoch himself

⁴⁰ Cf. b.Sanh 98b, where the reason for Akiva’s mistake is that Metatron did not stand before him, the human; the implication that only God may sit before human beings whereas angels must stand, reinforcing the notion that, to the extent that Enoch is now an angel not a human, he must accept the lower role that entails.

⁴¹ The transmission of earlier Enoch-Metatron traditions to kabbalists in Spain and France was possible largely due to the efforts of the German Pietists who preserved and revised Hekhalot texts. Their versions display significant corruptions in comparison with earlier fragments found in the Cairo Genizah, although we cannot tell where or when these accrued (Schäfer 1984, Wolfson 1995).

⁴² Sagerman, 2011, 156. The Active Intellect identification takes place explicitly already in the 12th century with ibn Ezra (Wolfson 1990, cf. Idel 1998, 349 n 27).

⁴³ For 2 *Enoch*’s competition with Adam for primordial status, see Orlov 2005, 211–52.

⁴⁴ Abulafia 1999.

⁴⁵ *Otzar Hayyim*, fol. 775a

⁴⁶ Wolfson 1995.

⁴⁷ Sagerman 2011, 308.

⁴⁸ Abulafia 2001a, 47. Abulafia’s assertions that Metatron conceals both good and evil aspects, whereby he can emit the divine attribute of judgement in order to test individuals (e.g., 1999, 114), may reflect an earlier tradition which presents Enoch somewhat ambiguously: at different points he has been labelled as a sinner, and it has even been suggested that he was taken by God at one of his few good points in order that he didn’t lapse again (*Ber.Rab.* 5:24; Philo, *Abr.* 7–59).

⁴⁹ Paluch 2014, 34.

was a passive receptacle of revelation, often wrenched from earth in his sleep and dragged into heaven to foresee the doom of humankind. But for the later mystics of Iraq (the authors of *3 Enoch*) and Europe (Abulafia), somewhat more comfortable in societies which generally accepted them, the protagonists display a pro-active confidence, storming heaven and using theurgic means to manipulate the angels. Abulafia in particular saw the method of attaining revelation as one which the mystic must force through a unique meditative process which would bring him into the presence of God,⁵⁰ becoming one with the angel Metatron, and where no longer would the “unrighteous” suffer for their crimes in the end of days, but all nations would undergo a metaphysical transformation and be brought together as one people to worship God.⁵¹ This suggests to this author that the contextual environments have been a significant factor in the development of these texts as well as in the nature of Enoch’s evolution.

Conclusion

In this brief article we have looked at the development of Enoch over the course of some 2,000 years, in the textual imaginations of various different communities. The stages of Enoch as they are now available to us from Jewish sources can be described as follows.

1. Enoch, the patriarch, is granted a prophetic vision and allowed access

to secrets relating to the heavenly order, the workings of the cosmos, and the structure of history. It is his duty to transmit this information to humanity.

2. Because of his righteousness, Enoch is made to “stand in front of the face of the Lord forever”, and is thereby identified with a primordial archetype which incorporates both the enthroned “son of man” and the Angel of the Presence.
3. As a result of this transformation, Enoch is capable of transmitting not only the factual revelation provided to him, but the knowledge and experience of God which only he is allowed. In this role he functions as something of a “buffer” between human and God, translating the experience into human terms via his own being.
4. As a fully heavenly being, Enoch-Metatron becomes an abstract archetype which connects the divine and human spheres, making possible the interaction and passage of information between them.

A curious aspect of Enoch’s history, then, is that through his heavenly travels and his being lifted out of everyday existence, Enoch’s trailblazing path eventually led to the complete erasing of his personal identity; by the time of the kabbalists Enoch-Metatron is an archetype which the human mystic seeks to become identified with, a path which can be followed and an office to be assumed. That this end is hinted at even in the beginnings indicates that the evolution of Enoch in Judaism evidences both change and continuity.

⁵⁰ The process known as *tzeruf otiot*, the manipulation of letters. In a development which recalls Enoch’s scribal affiliation, the kabbalists devoted much of their time to linguistic and numerical contortions in order to establish the relationships between different words and the figures they represent. In the case of Metatron, the numerical equivalence with the divine name Shaddai (the Hebrew letters of each sum 314) is frequently mentioned (Wolfson 2000, 148).

⁵¹ E.g., Abulafia 2001b.

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