

TEMPLE AND TIMAEUS  
In *The Great High Priest*, 2003.  
© Dr Margaret Barker

‘If therefore it should be shown to you that Plato and his successors have agreed in their philosophy with the Hebrews, it is time to examine the date at which he lived and to compare the antiquity of the Hebrew theologians and prophets with the age of the philosophers of Greece.’ Eusebius *Preparation for the Gospel* 10.14

Pythagoras brought this teaching to Greece, along with the rest of Kabbalah...  
If I declare that Kabbalah and Pythagoreanism are of the same stuff, I will not be departing from facts. Johann Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, Book 2 (1517)

The Jews claimed that their traditions and scriptures had influenced the Greeks, not just at the end of the second temple period, but in the very earliest period of Greek philosophy. Josephus believed that Pythagoras had been influenced by the teaching of the Jews, and quoted the work of Hermippus on Pythagoras, to the effect that his teaching had been ‘in imitation of the doctrines of the Jews and Thracians, which he transferred into his own philosophy’ (*Against Apion* 1.22)<sup>1</sup>. Josephus offered many examples of Jews in contact with the Greeks, including an incident when Aristotle engaged in learned debate with a Jew in Asia Minor. Clement of Alexandria, in his *Miscellanies*, listed many who had benefited from the teaching of the Jews; Numa, king of the Romans, although a Pythagorean, ‘benefited from the teaching of Moses and forbade the Romans to make an image of God...’ He quoted Aristobulus: ‘Plato too had followed our legislation and had evidently studied carefully the several precepts contained in it’. He claimed that the story of the Exodus and the Law of Moses had been translated into Greek before the time of Alexander the Great, and that Pythagoras ‘transferred many of our precepts to his own system of doctrines’. He quoted Numenius, the Pythagorean philosopher: ‘For what is Plato but Moses speaking in Attic Greek?’ (Misc.1.15,22). Plato and Pythagoras are the names that occur time and again.

Origen’s work against Celsus was another aspect of this debate; was Christianity just Platonism for the masses? ‘Celsus had attacked the pretensions of Christianity, that their religion was the ancient Wisdom that had inspired the Greek philosophers.’<sup>2</sup> Eusebius devoted the whole of his fifteen volume work *The Preparation for the Gospel* to this same subject. He took elements from Plato and showed that they were derived from the Hebrew Scriptures. ‘(Plato) altered the oracle... “I am that I am” into “What is that which always is and has no becoming?”’ (Preparation 11.9 comparing Exod.3.14 and Timaeus 27D). ‘And now beside the description “God holding the beginning and end and middle of all things” set... “I God am the first and I am with the last”’ (Preparation 11.13 comparing Laws 4.715 and Isa.41.4). The argument in the Timaeus that there had been one pattern for the creation

---

<sup>1</sup> Thus too Origen *Celsus* 1.15.

<sup>2</sup> D.J.O’Meara *Pythagoras Revived* Oxford 1989 p.214.

presupposed belief in one God. The Creator in the Timaeus is good, as is the God of the Hebrew Scriptures (Preparation 11.21). The philosophy of Plato, he concluded, was 'in very many things in agreement with the doctrines of the Hebrews' (Preparation 13.13).

It would be easy to dismiss these texts as predictable claims to national or confessional superiority, and not to be taken too seriously, but this would be a mistake. The similarity between much of Plato and the Hebrew tradition is too great for coincidence. Even though the current fashion is to date many of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Persian period, to suggest that Plato (died 348BCE) was an influence on their formation would require a very late date indeed. If we go behind Plato to Pythagoras, acknowledged to have been an influence on the later philosopher even though the precise extent of that influence still debated, another possibility emerges. The link between Plato and the Hebrew tradition could have been through Pythagoras, as the ancient apologists had said. A glance at the dates involved, and a simple study of feasibility, shows that such claims could have been well founded. There are striking similarities, and if we allow for the fact that the teachings attributed to Pythagoras have been for the most part rationalised and presented as science, whereas the parallel Hebrew texts are still in the form of myths and worship material, the case for Pythagoras having had contact with the older Hebrew tradition is strong. It is necessary to look first at the very little known of, and claimed for, the life and original teachings of Pythagoras, and then to attempt to trace his influence through into Plato and especially into the Timaeus.

In popular perceptions of the history of ancient Greece, the sixth century is antiquity, the era of the Seven Sages, yet the first temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 586BCE and most of what we consider Old Testament history had happened by that time<sup>3</sup>. The latest date proposed for Ezra (398BCE, but most would put him sixty years earlier) coincides with the death of Socrates in 399BCE. The pre-Socratic philosophers flourished at the very end of the 'Old Testament period. We also read: 'Over the origins of Greek philosophy and science... lies the shadow of a great traditional name.'<sup>4</sup> This name is Pythagoras of Samos, who lived in the sixth century, at the very time when the great changes were taking place in Jerusalem. After a period of scepticism, scholars are now more confident about the value of certain ancient sources for reconstructing the life and thought of Pythagoras<sup>5</sup>, and so it is of considerable interest to note in Iamblichus' *Life of Pythagoras* that Pythagoras travelled in his youth, that he went to Sidon, 'conversed with the Phoenician hierophants' and was 'initiated in all the mysteries of Biblos and Tyre and into the sacred operations which are performed in many parts of Syria'<sup>6</sup>. He lived in a Phoenician temple at Mount Carmel before travelling on to Egypt. Herodotus, who lived about a century after Pythagoras, described people in

---

<sup>3</sup> The apologists emphasised the great age of Hebrew tradition in comparison with Greek. Taking the Old Testament histories literally, they calculated the date at which Moses must have lived and showed that it was some fifteen centuries before the time of the Seven Sages of Greece (Eusebius Preparation 10.4).

<sup>4</sup> W.Burkert tr. E.L.Minar *Lore and Science on Ancient Pythagoreanism* Cambridge MA 1972 p.1

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.4

<sup>6</sup> Iamblichus *Life of Pythagoras*. Tr. T.Taylor (1818) London 1965, p.7

Palestine as Syrians who practised circumcision (Histories 2.104)<sup>7</sup>, and so it is not impossible that the temples of 'Syria' which Pythagoras knew included those of the Hebrews. Eusebius speculated in a similar way: 'Pythagoras spent some time with the Persian Magi and became a disciple of the Egyptian prophets at the time when some of the Hebrews appear to have made their settlement in Egypt and some in Babylon.' (Preparation 10.4). Although the dates of his life are not known for certain, he must have been in the area of Palestine before the return of the people from Babylon and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, and he must have been in Egypt and Babylon during 'the exile'. Since there is archaeological evidence which may indicate the presence of Greeks in late first temple Jerusalem, i.e. the end of the seventh century BCE<sup>8</sup>, it is not impossible that the young Pythagoras came that way on his travels and that he had contact with the thought of the first temple. *This is very important, because most of the evidence for the teachings of Pythagoras shows that it was very similar to what can be reconstructed of the teachings and practices of the first temple priesthood.*

Dates are all important. Despite the recent trend among Old Testament scholars to date the Hebrew Scriptures in the Persian period or even later, few would deny the authenticity of the Babylonian record, that a city named Jerusalem was attacked at the beginning of the sixth century BCE. There was *something* there. Scholars are also putting increased emphasis on the extent to which the Hebrew Scriptures were written to express one particular point of view, that of the returned exiles (or Persian colonists, in the more extreme view), at the expense of anything that might have existed earlier. Nor does anyone doubt that one of the curious characteristics of the books of Samuel and Kings (the former prophets) is their discrediting of the history and achievements of the older regime in Jerusalem. *The literary remains alone indicate a massive cultural disruption in the sixth century, and the consistency of the evidence elsewhere suggests that this disruption centred on the temple and its priesthood.* The first temple in Jerusalem, as we reconstruct it from the Deuteronomic histories, was 'reformed' by Josiah and then physically destroyed by the Babylonians. All the evidence elsewhere, however, shows that this was far from being an accurate and sympathetic account of the first temple. This means that whatever Pythagoras might have learned of Hebrew tradition will not be in the *surface text* of the present Hebrew Scriptures.

If Pythagoras had travelled in this region, as the tradition records, he would have met with 'the Older Testament'<sup>9</sup>. He would have known the older creation story, perhaps even the world of Job, where *yhwh* was not the only name for God, where the earth was measured, and the sons of God sang together as they witnessed the creation. He would have known of a seven based number system which antedated the two versions of the faith, the one based on

---

<sup>7</sup> C.f Theophrastus *De Pietate* in Porphyry *De Abstinencia* 2.26 'the Syrians, of whom the Jews are a part...'

<sup>8</sup> B.Sass 'Arabs and Greeks in Late First Temple Jerusalem' *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* Jan-June 1990 pp.59-61. The evidence is sherds with letters which may be Greek. 'The biblical, extra-biblical and archaeological sources testify to the presence of Greeks in late Iron-age Judah', p.61.

<sup>9</sup> My book of that name, London 1987, reconstructed aspects of the first temple cult and showed how they survived in Christianity.

the Moses and Exodus traditions, the other on the days of the creation<sup>10</sup>. He would perhaps have known the astronomers and astrologers who knew the correspondence of heaven and earth (Job 38.3), and who produced the curious and complex treatises which have survived only among the Enoch texts (1 En.72-82), revealed by the angel Uriel to Enoch the high priest figure (1 En.75.3). The Great Hall of the temple which 'Enoch' knew had a pattern of stars on its ceiling (1 En.14.11), and as late as the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, Theophrastus could describe the Jews as a nation of philosophers who sat up at night looking at the stars (Fragment preserved in Porphyry, *On Abstinence* 2.26). In the first temple there had been rooftop altars and 'equipment'<sup>11</sup> for the host of heaven (2 Kgs 23.4,12), until the 'reforming' Josiah removed them. This is not the Old Testament world with which we are familiar, but it could well have been what the young Pythagoras found in the sixth century.

## Pythagoras

Pythagoras left no writings<sup>12</sup>, and there was a tradition of silence among his disciples.<sup>13</sup> Theirs was a secret tradition, exactly what was claimed for the temple priesthood, and so comparisons are not easy. Such information as survives has to be gleaned in the first instance from the fragments of Philolaus of Croton, a late fifth century Pythagorean who was the first to write down the teachings of Pythagoras<sup>14</sup>, and from the works of Aristotle, who was not sympathetic to Pythagoras' teachings. Aristotle warned about distinguishing pre-Platonic from Platonic material, and elements from Aristotle's lost treatise *On the Pythagoreans* survive as quotations elsewhere. Ancient commentators were unanimous that what he developed in his treatise *On the Good* were Pythagorean. There is other material in later sources, which was formerly regarded as dubious, but recent scholarship has had a more favourable opinion.<sup>15</sup> The world of the first temple has to be reconstructed in a similar way, from fragments and from the references in later, often hostile, writers. We have to distinguish between Deuteronomic and non-Deuteronomic sources, and recent scholarship here, too, has a more favourable opinion of the value of information preserved only in later texts. The

---

<sup>10</sup> This can be seen by comparing the two versions of the Sabbath commandment: Exod.20.11, based on the creation, and Deut.5.15, based on the Exodus experience. Aristotle seems to be mocking the Pythagoreans when he says of the number seven: 'There are seven vowels and the scale has seven strings, there are seven Pleiads... and there were seven against Thebes. Is it because the number is the sort of number it is that there were seven of them... or were there seven heroes because there were seven gates?' *Metaphysics* N 1093a

<sup>11</sup> The Hebrew word can mean vessels or any items of equipment.

<sup>12</sup> Josephus *Apion* 1.163 'There is no book generally agreed to be the work of Pythagoras, but many have recorded his story and of these the most notable is Hermippus.

<sup>13</sup> Iamblichus *Life* 199. There were similar 'secrets' in Plato: Epistle 7 mentions 'the greatest things' 341b which were beyond words and so not written down 341c. The authenticity of this epistle is, however, debated.

<sup>14</sup> Burkert *op.cit.*n.4 p. 276 argues that fragments 1-7, 13 and 17 are genuine because they can only be interpreted on the basis of pre-Socratic ways of thinking.

<sup>15</sup> Burkert *op.cit.*.n.4 Introduction and p.27

situation is not ideal, but the similarities between the teachings associated with Pythagoras and those of the first temple priests are too many to be mere coincidence. This is not to suggest that Pythagoras had ‘studied’ in Jerusalem. It is possible that the traditions of Jerusalem priesthood were not unique to that one place, and that Pythagoras had simply encountered them in the region. The priests of the first temple had suffered massive disruption and expulsions in the time of Josiah’s purges, and it could have been their scattered descendants from whom Pythagoras learned.

There is insufficient evidence to establish anything with certainty, and Burkert’s warning about the teaching of Pythagoras is important: ‘A perfectly certain interpretation of a philosophy is impossible when it is known to us only indirectly and mostly in the context of polemic.’<sup>16</sup> This is also true of any attempt to reconstruct the pre-Josianic temple. The number of striking similarities in apparently trivial details, however, together with more fundamental correspondences, could indicate that the world view of the older temple prompted Pythagoras’ later ‘scientific’ investigations and was the mythological framework *which so many scholars posit but none can identify*. Most of the information about Pythagorean lore concerning the creation is thought to have come through Philolaus, and Burkert argued that Philolaus actually created *the abstract form* of Pythagoras’ world view. ‘It was mythology in a scientific clothing’<sup>17</sup> Aristotle implies this: Pythagoreans ‘do not seek accounts and explanations in conformity with appearances, but try by violence to bring the appearances into line with accounts and opinions of their own’ (On the Heavens 293a). If this was the case, the task would be to compare what lay beneath the later ‘scientific’ accounts of the teaching of Pythagoras with the earliest strata in the Hebrew Scriptures. This does show more than a series of random correspondences; *it is clearly two similar systems*, one which existed as a coherent whole in a temple setting, and another whose origin and characteristic mixture of images and concepts is unrelated to that of its envioning culture, and remains a complete mystery.

The ‘pivotal conceptions’ of Pythagoras’ system were identified by Cornford as: the ideal of becoming like God and the notion of mimesis, the correspondence of macrocosm and microcosm, the conception of harmony, and the symbol known as the *tetraktys*<sup>18</sup>. There is ample and obvious evidence in the tradition of the first temple for ‘becoming like God’, with king as the divine son, and apotheosis appearing in the Enochic histories. There is also the Holiness Code, which even in its Mosaic form, exhorts all the people to become holy ones because their LORD is Holy (Lev.19-26). This was very different from the customary Greek view that gods and mortals were separate orders, but Pythagoras is said to have taught that ‘Gods and men are akin, inasmuch as man partakes of heat’ (Diogenes Laertius 8.27). The original temple tradition was the correspondence of macrocosm and microcosm, with ‘Moses’ being told on Sinai to make the tabernacle according to what he had seen in his vision on the

---

<sup>16</sup> Burkert op.cit.n.4 p.50

<sup>17</sup> Burkert op.cit. n.4 pp.298, 342

<sup>18</sup> F.M.Cornford ‘Mysticism and Science in Pythagorean Tradition’ C Q xvi 1922 pp.137-150, p 142

mountain (Exod.25.9,40).<sup>19</sup> The words of Deutero-Isaiah in the aftermath of the cultural upheaval of Josiah and the exile show that *mimesis* was a controversial issue: 'To whom will you liken God, or with what likeness compare him...?' and then 'the image that will not move', words that anticipated by two centuries Plato's phrase (Isa.40.18,20). The other examples, 'harmony' and the 'tetraktys', can also be found in the older temple tradition, as we shall see.

Some more isolated examples: Pythagoras established that the Morning Star was identical with the Evening Star<sup>20</sup>, yet this was known from the mythology of Ugarit and appears in echoes from the older temple. Pythagoras claimed that the world was round, *stroggule* (Diogenes Laertius 8.48); the older Hebrew creation story often mentioned the *hwg*, translated the 'circle' of the earth (Isa.40.22), or the 'circle' drawn on the face of the deep (Prov.8.27; Job 26.10) and the 'dome' of the heaven (Job.22.14). 'Pythagoras was the first to call himself a philosopher',<sup>21</sup> a lover of Wisdom. He invented the word. If Wisdom had been banished from the Jerusalem temple in Josiah's purge, it is not impossible that her devotees in the temple had had a name such as this. The Book of Proverbs does imply that this term was used: 'Do not forsake (Wisdom), and she will keep you; love her and she will guard you' (Prov.4.6); 'He who loves Wisdom makes his father glad' (Prov. 29.3). Philolaus associated masculine divinities with the triangle and feminine with the square, which coincides with the older temple tradition. The LORD was enthroned in the temple between the two creatures, or appeared as three angels (Gen.18), and the Living One was a fourfold presence<sup>22</sup>. Burkert said of this example: 'One might be tempted to ignore all this as a side growth on the main stem of Pythagorean Wisdom, but more careful examination reveals that this kind of lore is to be recognised not as a branch but as a root, and one which goes very deep.'<sup>23</sup> The Fourfold Living One, as Ezekiel described her in his vision, contained within herself all life, and in Proverbs 8.30 she was described as the Bond or Harmony of the Creation. She was the Mother of the sons of God, the angelic powers. The Pythagoreans used to invoke the *tetraktys* as their most binding oath: 'Nay by him that gave our generation the *tetraktys*, which contains the fount and roots of eternal nature' (e.g. Aetius 1.3.8, but this was frequently quoted)<sup>24</sup>. A likely origin for the *tetraktys* is Ezekiel's fourfold Living One, and so Burkert's conclusion about Pythagoras, drawn from completely different evidence, is significant. The picture of Pythagoras that emerges from the most ancient testimony not influenced by Plato is that he was a 'hierophant of the Great Mother mysteries...'<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Or the king being given the divine plan, 1 Chron.28.11-19, see p \*\*

<sup>20</sup> Diogenes Laertius 8.14 and 9.23, discussed in T. Heath *Aristarchos of Samos. The Ancient Copernicus* Oxford 1913 p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> Iamblichus Life 12; also Cicero Tuscan Questions. 5.3

<sup>22</sup> Three angels see p.\*\*\*, Fourfold Living One see p \*\*\*

<sup>23</sup> Burkert op.cit.n.4 p.468,

<sup>24</sup> This and most of the other quotations can be found in G.S.Kirk and J.E.Raven *The Presocratic Philosophers* Cambridge 1957.

<sup>25</sup> Burkert op.cit.n.4.p. 165.

Pythagoras was remembered as a shaman-like figure<sup>26</sup>, concerned for the purity of sacrifices and the correct dress to wear in holy places. His disciples were remembered as ‘prophets of the voice of God’ (*mantias theo phonas*, Diogenes Laertius 8.14). His movement was primarily religious, but concerned also with theories about the nature of the world<sup>27</sup>. A surface reading of the Old Testament could identify the concern for pure sacrifices and correct dress in a holy place, - both the Hebrew priests and the followers of Pythagoras wearing white but not white wool - but the scientific concerns are not immediately apparent in the Old Testament. Like the Rechabites, who may well have been refugees from the first temple and its cult of the throne chariot the followers of Pythagoras drank no wine and lived a celibate life. Like the temple mystics, such as those who compiled the Enochic *Apocalypse of Weeks*, the followers of Pythagoras had a panoramic view of human history: ‘There was a man among the Pythagoreans who was transcendent in knowledge... when he extended all the powers of his intellect, he easily beheld everything as far as ten or twenty ages of the human race’ (Porphyry *Life of Pythagoras* 30)<sup>28</sup>. The would-be disciples of Pythagoras had a five year period of probation during which they were permitted only to hear the master’s voice but not to see him. Then ‘they both heard and saw Pythagoras himself *within the veil*’<sup>29</sup>.

Josephus described the Essenes as leading the same kind of life as the Pythagoreans (Ant.15.10.4), and since he had spent some time in his youth with the Essenes (Life 2), he will have been well informed. Both groups lived in ‘silent’ communities, both held goods in common, both refused to swear oaths, both practised a morning ritual of praying towards the rising sun, all practices which could be observed by outsiders. Since, however, both groups also refused to divulge their characteristic teachings to anyone outside, and Josephus did not become a full member of the group, it will never be possible to know the full extent of the similarities between the Essenes and the Pythagoreans.<sup>30</sup>

One important characteristic of the Qumran community, who were probably Essenes, was their opposition to the temple in Jerusalem, and in particular to the high priesthood there. This was usually described as the Wicked Priest who robbed the Poor and defiled the temple, e.g. as described in the Habakkuk commentary (1Qp Hab). The Community saw themselves as both a temple and a priesthood in exile<sup>31</sup>, their inner council being the holy of holies.<sup>32</sup> They had a text (11Q Melch) which predicted the imminent return of Melchizedek, the eternal

<sup>26</sup> See Burkert op.cit.n.4 chapter 3

<sup>27</sup> Isocrates *Busiris* 28 attributes to Pythagoras an interest in temple rituals and sacrifices which he had learned in Egypt. See also C A Huffman in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. A.A.Long, Cambridge 1999 p.71

<sup>28</sup> Also Iamblichus *Life* 16

<sup>29</sup> Iamblichus *Life* 17; also Burkert op cit n.4 p.179, that Pythagoras’s name was not uttered, Diogenes Laertius 8.10.

<sup>30</sup> For a full discussion of the similarities see I Lévy *La Légende de Pythagore de Grece en Palestine* Paris 1927 pp.264-293.

<sup>31</sup> See my *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* pp.316-337

<sup>32</sup> ‘House of holiness, 1QS VIII, IX meaning the holy of holies see 4Q156.2, a fragment of a Leviticus Targum

high priest of the first temple who had been present in the kings (reincarnated? Ps.110.4), and was also recognised in Jesus (Heb.7). The Melchizedek text mentions ‘teachers who had been hidden and kept secret’<sup>33</sup>, the Damascus Document mentions ‘the hidden things in which all Israel had gone astray’ (CD III) and also describes the era of the second temple as the age of wrath (CD I). The community looked to a Righteous Teacher, and, since they had preserved the Enoch texts which also described the second temple teachers as an apostate generation, we can assume that they regarded themselves as having preserved the teachings of the first temple. *These people, waiting for the return of the true high priest and the true teachings, were those whose lifestyle resembled that of the Pythagoreans.*

The most striking example of a correspondence between the tradition of the first temple and that attributed to the Pythagoreans is the belief that there was a fire at the centre of the universe, described by Kingsley as ‘one of the most vexed questions in the history of Greek philosophy’<sup>34</sup>. What is described as the beliefs of the Pythagoreans, however, is *exactly the lore of the holy of holies in the first temple*. This extraordinary fact is the context in which other less obvious similarities must be considered. The whole matter is complicated by the paucity of sources, and by the uncertain channels through which the ideas on both sides were transmitted. It has been suggested that this central fire derived from the experience of volcanic phenomena in Sicily, or perhaps from Empedocles’ theory of a fire at the centre of the earth, but this does not explain the imagery used.<sup>35</sup> Anatolius, writing in Alexandria in the third century CE on the symbolic properties of numbers, said the Pythagoreans taught ‘that at the centre of the four elements there lies a certain unitary fiery cube...’<sup>36</sup> He adds a quotation from Homer to show that he understood the fiery cube to be Tartarus. One aspect of the problem, if we adopt the volcanic phenomena explanation, is to explain how the centre of the earth became the centre of the universe, *and then how it came to be described as a cube*. A second aspect of the problem is that the central fire had various names: it was *Dios phulake*, Zeus’ sentry post (Aristotle *On the Heavens* 293b). A quotation from Aristotle’s lost work *On the Pythagoreans* gives more names: ‘The more genuine members of the school regard fire at the centre as the creative force which gives life to the whole earth and warms its cold parts. Some call it *Zenos purgos*, Zeus’ defence tower, *Dios phulake*, and *Dios thronos*, throne of Zeus (Simplicius *On the Heavens* 511.26)<sup>37</sup>. According to Philolaus it was ‘*hestia tou pantos*, the hearth of the universe, *Dios oikos*, the house of Zeus, the mother of the gods, the altar, bond and measure of nature.’ (Aetius 2.7.7). Plato described it as the home of Zeus and the gods: ‘And he gathered all the gods together in their most honourable home which stands at the centre of the universe and watches over everything that belongs to the world of becoming’ (Critias 121c2-3). ‘This idea of the centre of the universe as a watch post is particularly striking; usually in Greek the idea of the gods ‘watching over’ the world of

<sup>33</sup> Thus DJD XXIII (1998), but G.Vermes *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* Penguin 1997 renders this part of line 5 of the 11QMelch ‘will assign them to the sons of heaven’.

<sup>34</sup> P.Kingsley *Ancient Philosophy Mystery and Magic. Empedocles and the Pythagorean Tradition* Oxford 1995, p.172

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. pp.180-182

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p.183

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. pp.187,195.

mortals is associated with a view from high up in the heavens, not from the centre of the universe.’<sup>38</sup>

Kingsley observed: ‘To call the Pythagorean central fire the throne or home of Zeus is incomprehensible from the standpoint of Greek mythology.’<sup>39</sup> A fiery cube at the centre of the universe, however, which is the throne and home of God, describes exactly the holy of holies in the first temple. The tabernacle/temple represented the creation, and the holy of holies was the cube shaped structure at the heart of it which was the place of the divine presence in its midst. It was the place of the heavenly throne and the heavenly hosts, and a Greek would have described it as ‘the throne of Zeus’ and ‘the home of the gods’. The holy of holies was lined with gold (1 Kgs 6.20) to represent the fire around the King in his beauty (Isa.33.14, 17), described in the earliest known ascent text as ‘the second house built with tongues of fire’ (1 En.14.15). The holy of holies was described as a tower: in Isaiah 5.2,<sup>40</sup> *migdal*, LXX *purgos*, and in Habakkuk 2.1 *masor* LXX *phulake*, the very words used to describe the fiery centre of the universe. Ezekiel’s vision of the throne suggests that the holy of holies was seen as the Mother of the sons of God, and that the holy of holies was the place of the measurements and engravings of the creation. It was the place from which the LORD looked out onto the created world: ‘The LORD is in his holy temple, The LORD’s throne is in heaven, his eyes behold, his eyelids test, the children of men’ (Ps.11.4). That this was the holy of holies of the first temple which passed into the teachings of Pythagoras is consistent with evidence in a much later source. Anatolius also observed that the Pythagoreans equated the number One with this centre, and with the present moment.<sup>41</sup> The holy of holies was the ever present eternity in the midst of the creation. As Day One and also as the Living One, it was the Mother of the gods, the bond and measure of nature and the source of life. Since the place where the atonement blood was offered was also within the holy of holies, it was also the altar. *This degree of correspondence cannot be coincidence. Temple usage derived from mythology and temple practice attested elsewhere but the origin and framework of the Pythagorean system remains a mystery even though commentators frequently conclude that there must have been a mythology underlying the teachings of Pythagoras. .*

The Pythagoreans also held that the creation was made from two: the Limit *peras* and the Unlimited *apeiron*, which corresponds to a remarkable degree to the teaching of the non-Deuteronomic stratum of Hebrew religion. For the Pythagoreans, Limit was unity, goodness and rest, (and an odd number), and was also thought to be three dimensional<sup>42</sup>. Unlimited was the opposite, (and an even number). ‘The Pythagoreans have said there are two principles (*archai*)... (but added) .. that the limited (*peperasmemon*) and the unlimited (*apeiron*) [and the Unity (*to hen*)] were not the attributes of certain things e.g. of fire or earth or anything else of this kind, but that the Unlimited itself and the One itself were the

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid..p.201.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p.195.

<sup>40</sup> Recognised in later tradition as the holy of holies see p \*\*\*

<sup>41</sup> Kingsley op.cit.n.41 p.183

<sup>42</sup> Burkert op.cit n.4. p 43

substance (*ousia*) of the things of which they are predicated. This is why number was the substance of all things (Aristotle Metaphysics A5 987a). This implies that the Limit was the One.

Elsewhere it is recorded that the One was formed from Limit and Unlimited: ‘They hold that the elements of number are the even and the odd, and of these the former is *apeiron*, unlimited and the latter *peperasmemon*, limited. The One is from both of them, for it both even and odd, and Number from the One and Numbers, as has been said, are the whole heaven.’ (Metaphysics 986a) Some two centuries earlier, Deutero-Isaiah had said of the heavens: ‘Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these. He who brings out their host by *bmspr...*’ which could be understood as ‘causes their host to come forth by means of number’). This implies that the Limit and the Unlimited together formed the One, which was the source of the creation. Aristotle criticised the Pythagoreans for this teaching: ‘It is strange also to attribute generation to eternal things, or rather, this is one of the things that are impossible. There need be no doubt whether the Pythagoreans attribute generation to them or not; for they obviously say that when the One (*hen*) had been constructed (whether out of planes or of surface or of seed or of elements which they cannot express), immediately the nearest part of the Unlimited began to be drawn in and limited by the Limit.’ (Metaphysics N3 1091a). If the One was the first to be formed from Limit and Unlimited, this would correspond to Day One. Several Pythagorean teachings about the One suggest that it was originally the Holy of Holies which was Day One. It was envisaged as three dimensional, it was Good, it was the fiery cube, it was the first to be created and it was hermaphrodite.<sup>43</sup>

Understood as the Limit and the Unlimited, these are strange expressions, but as ‘bound’ and ‘unbound’ they immediately indicate the Eternal Covenant of the priestly tradition. The ‘bonds’ of the eternal covenant (also described as the covenant of *salom*, meaning peace, wholeness, integrity), characterise the older creation story in the Hebrew Scriptures. The boundary or limit was fundamental to this system; the disordered was limited and defined by ‘engraving’ and fixing. This process is indicated by the words from the root *hqq*, although this is not clear from the variety of ways the word is translated into English<sup>44</sup>: the LORD set *bounds* for the sea (Job 38.10; Jer.5.22) and *ordinances* for the heavens (Job 38.33; *bounds* Ps.148.6), *bounds* to the length of human life (Job 14.5) and a *set limit* (Job 14.13)<sup>45</sup>, *drew* a circle on the face of the deep (Prov.8.27), he *described* a circle on the face of the waters at the boundary between light and darkness (Job 26.10<sup>46</sup>), assigned to the sea its *limit* and *marked out* the foundations of the earth (Prov.8.29), made a *decree* for the rain (Job 28.26). The Prayer of Manasseh described this vividly: Thou who hast made heaven and earth with all their order; who hast shackled the sea by thy word of command, who hast confined the deep

---

<sup>43</sup> Burkert op.cit.n.4. respectively pp.43, 22, 268, 232, 36. It is interesting that the excerpts from Iamblichus *On Physical Number* preserved in Psellus show that the soul is produced from a *cubic* number. See O’Meara op.cit n.2.p 221.

<sup>44</sup> These examples are from the RSV

<sup>45</sup> There is a related word in Job 13.27: ‘a *bound* to the soles of my feet.’

<sup>46</sup> The limit is often described as a circle or vault *hwg*: God walks on the *vault* of heaven (Job 22.14), described a *circle* on the face of the waters (Job 26.10; Prov 8.27).

and sealed it with thy terrible and glorious Name ( Prayer 3). 1 Enoch preserves fragments of a poem about the eternal covenant, and the great ‘oath’ which forms the heavens and the earth, maintains the bounds of the sea and keeps the sun, moon and stars in their courses (1 En.69). When these bounds were transgressed, the whole created order collapsed; ‘They have passed over the laws (*toroth*), overstepped the *statutes* (but Heb. is singular, the *boundary/limit*), made ineffectual the everlasting covenant (Isa.24.5 translating literally). The ‘Unbound’ was the ‘deep’, which flooded over the earth in the time of Noah as a result of human wickedness, but did not exist in the new creation of John’s vision: ‘A new heaven and a new earth... and the sea was no more’ (Rev.21.1). Everything was within the Holy of Holies and so it was all ‘Limit’. Binding/limiting the sea was the great sign of divine power: (Job 26.10; 38.10; Jer.5.22; Prov. 8.27,29; also Ps.104.9 using another word for boundary, *g<sup>e</sup>bul*).<sup>47</sup> The Pythagoreans similarly conjectured that ‘Evil belongs to the unlimited and good to the limited’ (Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics B6 1106b).

The Limit was the essential nature of anything, as can be seen from the Pythagoreans’ account of the creation. If their system was like that of the temple, then the heaven would have been the veil, the boundary around the One, and so ‘What lies beyond the heaven is the Unlimited...’ would have been the deep in the darkness outside the veil (Gen.1.2). This Unlimited ‘is taken in and limited’ i.e. by the Limit (Physics 203a). The fullest description of the process is also the most obscure: ‘The Pythagoreans held that the void exists and that spirit and void enter into the heaven itself which as it were, breathes forth. The void (*kenon*) separates the natures’ (Physics 213b). This ‘obviously corrupt wording’<sup>48</sup> could once have been an account like that in Genesis 1, if we understand the Limit to be the Creator, and the Unlimited to be whatever the Spirit hovered over in order to create<sup>49</sup>. The Spirit, by extending the divine influence, brought Limit to the Unlimited and established the order of creation insofar as each nature was separated and distinguished.

The first stage of this process in the biblical account was Day One, the Pythagorean One from which all things came forth. What lies beyond heaven i.e. outside the veil of the temple, is Unlimited until the Limit beyond brings order, and thus a part of itself, into the process. The earlier account of the creation, underlying Genesis, described a process of generation, ‘These are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were created’ (Gen.2.4) – but the fatherhood element had been suppressed by the reformers *This is exactly the teaching for which Aristotle had criticised the Pythagoreans, namely, that they attributed generation to eternal things*. The similarities to the older temple tradition are clear. The Pythagoreans thus believed that the creation had a beginning, and Philolaus also taught that the cosmos would be destroyed (Aetius 2.5.3), another parallel with the Hebrew tradition (e.g.Isa.51.6). Pythagoras was the first to use *kosmos* (meaning an ordered state) of the universe (Aetius 2.1.1),<sup>50</sup> another

---

<sup>47</sup> Hence the question ‘Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?’ Mk.4.41.

<sup>48</sup> Burkert p 35

<sup>49</sup> The Neopythagoreans did understand Limit and Unlimited to be God and Matter; see J.Burnet *Early Greek Philosophy* London and Edinburgh 1892 p.306

<sup>50</sup> Kirk op cit n.19 p 229

biblical element (Isa.45.18, and the whole of Gen.1). The end of the Genesis story was that what had been created and separated out was *good*, and that all was at *rest* on the Sabbath. The goal of the Hebrew creation story was order and rest, not motion, and the Unity, Goodness and Rest of the Pythagoreans can easily be linked to Day One, the holy of holies.

The Pythagoreans believed that the numbers were the principles of all things: ‘The so-called Pythagoreans were the first to take up mathematics. They advanced this study and having been brought up in it, they thought its principles were the principles of all things... In numbers they thought they observed many resemblances to the things that are and that come to be... such and such an attribute of numbers being justice... another being decisive moment... since all other things seem to be made in the likeness of numbers in their entire nature (Aristotle Metaphysics A.5 985b)’. The Pythagorean numbers remain a mystery; Burkert even wondered if ‘a quite specific mythical cosmogony forms the background of the Pythagorean number theory’<sup>51</sup>. ‘Their numbers are ‘mathematical’ and yet, in view of their spatial, concrete, nature, they are not. They seem to be conceived as matter (*hule*), and yet they are something like form (*eidos*). They are, in themselves, being (*ousia*), and yet not quite so.’<sup>52</sup> How the One became the Many, the Numbers of the creation, is not clear, but in temple tradition, this would have been one of the secrets of the holy of holies. It was the *raz nihyeh* of the Qumran Wisdom texts. It is therefore very interesting to read that the first secret revealed to Enoch when he stood before the throne was ‘the *division* of the kingdom’ (1 En.41.1), since ‘the kingdom’ was one of the names by which the holy of holies was known.<sup>53</sup> Isaiah observed the Holy One bringing out the host of heaven ‘by number’ (Isa. 40.26) a familiar text whose meaning is not immediately obvious. It could be describing how the first created beings were somehow associated with number.

Pythagoras is also known for his teaching about the transmigration of souls, although which souls and under what conditions is not certain. ‘He maintains that the soul is immortal; next that it changes into other kinds of living things, also that events recur in certain cycles and that nothing is ever absolutely new and finally that all living things should be regarded as kin. Pythagoras seems to have been the first to bring these beliefs to Greece. (Porphyry Life of Pythagoras 19). ‘Transmigration of souls’ is not a term used in discussing biblical religion, but it could have derived from the Hebrew belief in the return of major figures such as Elijah, or the great prophets. The evidence in the gospels is late (‘Some say you are John the Baptist and others Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets’ Mat.16.14), but the whole phenomenon of pseudepigraphy is ancient and has yet to be explained. It may have been based on the belief that the great figure actually returned in another lifetime to write these texts, and returned many times. Who wrote the books of Moses? And who rewrote parts of them to produce Deuteronomy? The scrolls of the prophets were augmented over the years by unknown figures whom we call ‘disciples’, but they may well have believed themselves to

---

<sup>51</sup> Burkert op cit n p.38

<sup>52</sup> Burkert op..cit. n p.45

<sup>53</sup> When the Christians spoke the Kingdom of God what they described was the holy of holies e.g. in the Gospel of Thomas, see my *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* p.334

be the new embodiment of their master, giving new oracles. ‘Coming in/with the Name of the LORD’ is another phrase to ponder, since all the kings were believed to be Immanuel, God with his people. And what of Melchizedek, the eternal priest, who met Abraham, ‘was’ David and ‘was’ Jesus. ? There was also the established practice of writing contemporary history as the past repeating itself. The return from the exile was a new creation, a new Exodus, and also a new migration of Abraham; Isaiah 51 uses all three images. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE was described as the first destruction, witnessed by Jeremiah’s scribe Baruch (2 Baruch) , and ‘Ezra’ writing the Scripture in the mid-fifth century BCE was in fact the account of the collection of the Hebrew Scriptures and the fixing of the canon at the end of the first century CE: (2 Esdr.3.1 ‘In the thirtieth year after the destruction of our city’; 2 Esdr.14 describes how Ezra dictated the Scriptures to scribes).

Pythagoras is said to have taught about *daimones*, beings intermediate between humans and God, and to have believed himself to be midway between ordinary humans and God (Aristotle Fragment 192). Pythagoras was remembered as divine and his teachings were held to be of divine origin (Iamblichus, On the Pythagorean Life 5), and the Pythagoreans claimed to be able to see *daimones* (Aristotle Fragment 193). This bears a strong resemblance to the belief in apotheosis attested in the non-canonical texts of the Hebrew tradition. Certain humans were transformed and became mediators, usually of heavenly secrets or messages of judgement. That angels could be seen was never questioned.

Pythagoras also taught about the music of the spheres, later understood to mean the sound of the moving heavenly bodies<sup>54</sup>. (Criticised by Aristotle On the Heavens B9 290b12: ‘The theory that the movement of the stars produces a harmony... is nevertheless untrue’). This resembles the Hebrew tradition of the song of the angels, who were thought of as the stars. Job, which has preserved much from the earlier period, mentions the song of these stars/angels at the moment of the creation: ‘When I laid the foundation of the earth... the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy’ (Job 38.4,7). Later temple tradition linked music to cosmic harmony and renewal and those who stood in the Presence had to learn the song of the angels (e.g. Ap.Abr. 17.5-7, where Abraham has to sing the song that Iael taught him.) The heavenly music was the song of renewal, the sound which restored the creation, and it was the characteristic music of the holy of holies.<sup>55</sup> In the older account of the creation recorded in Proverbs 8, Wisdom is the one who holds things together/in harmony (Prov.8.30 Lxx, *harmozousa*)<sup>56</sup> The inconsistencies in later interpretations of Pythagoras’s theory of cosmic music suggest ‘that this concept has nothing to do with mathematical or musical theory but comes from a deeper root...’<sup>57</sup> in mythology not in science.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> C.f Plato Republic 530d: Astronomy and harmony ‘are sister sciences... as the Pythagoreans say.’

<sup>55</sup> See p.\*\*\*

<sup>56</sup> What does Ps 19.1-5 mean? Apparently it is the voice of the heavens declaring the glory of God.

<sup>57</sup> Burkert op cit n.4 p.355

<sup>58</sup> See also G Strachan *Christ and the Cosmos* Dunbar 1985

A widely attested tradition also associates Pythagoras with the numerical ratios of musical intervals<sup>59</sup> His musical theory was closely related to numerical cosmology, and Burkert believes that it may have been the potency of music to influence the human spirit that made this study a major element in the quest for the secrets of the universe.<sup>60</sup> Since the temple and tabernacle were both thought to replicate the measures of the creation, it is interesting that several people have noted the relationship between the proportions of the temple and the musical scale. The cube, with all its sides of equal length was the note of unison, and the measurements of the Great Hall, in addition to those of the Holy of Holies, ‘expressed, in ratios of architectural proportion, the same musical tones which were implicit in the unison or fundamental note of the Holy of Holies.’<sup>61</sup> One can prove nothing; the builders of the temple may not even have been aware of the significance of the measurements they used, but it is a fact that the measurements of the temple were deemed to be a part of the mystery of the creation, and they do fit the proposed theories of harmony.

The characteristic calendar of the temple was also related to music. ‘The harmony of space’ expressed in the structure of the temple ‘found an equivalent embodiment in the Israelites’ annual divisions of time.’<sup>62</sup> The seven based calendar system, with the seven day week, and then the seven weeks between Passover and Weeks, and then the festivals of new wine and new oil at further intervals of seven weeks<sup>63</sup>, then the Sabbath year after seven years and the Jubilee in the fiftieth year after seven times seven years. Seven was, without any doubt, *the* sacred number, and yet the culmination of this calendrical system was fifty: seven times seven plus one. The Sabbath year and the Jubilee were regarded as fundamental laws revealed to Moses on Sinai (Lev.25.1), and therefore they must have been a part of the great vision of the creation which Moses had to replicate in the tabernacle. Strachan has argued that this system of 49 and 50 was based on the concept of musical harmony. Seven complete octaves, which should correspond to twelve musical fifths, in fact do not, but differ by what is known as the Pythagorean Comma, ‘One of the greatest mysteries of the science of sound.’ Tame suggested that this discrepancy was known to the ancient philosopher musicians, who accepted that the harmony of mortal music was imperfect and thus a sign of human imperfection. ‘The Comma is not a slight interval less than the seven octaves, but in excess of them. In the ancient world this was widely conceived as a symbol of renewal.’<sup>64</sup> Strachan suggested that it is this ‘extra’ which explains the fiftieth year, the Jubilee, the addition to the seven times seven years. The significance of the Jubilee would certainly fit the idea of restoring the cosmic harmony, since the Jubilee was a conscious return to the time and state when the Creator had finished his work and saw that everything was good.

---

<sup>59</sup> Burkert op.cit.n.4 p. 375

<sup>60</sup> Ibid..p.378

<sup>61</sup> Strachan op.cit n.69 p.24

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 40

<sup>63</sup> These hitherto unknown temple festivals are described in the Qumran Temple Scroll see J.Maier *The Temple Scroll* Sheffield 1985

<sup>64</sup> D.Tame *The Secret Power of Music* Wellingborough 1984 pp. 248,250.

The Pythagorean Comma could also account for the disputes between the advocates of the solar and the lunar calendar, the first temple and the second. The ratio of the solar year (365.256 days) to the lunar year (354.367 days) is almost exactly the ratio of the Pythagorean Comma, the perceived distinction between heavenly and earthly harmony, perfection and imperfection<sup>65</sup>. The first temple had used a solar (heavenly) calendar, as did the priestly group at Qumran, whose lifestyle resembled that of the Pythagoreans. Eleven fragments of their calendar were found (4Q320-330), and the temple Scroll shows that their year was divided into seven periods of fifty days. In their hymns they sang of the law of the Great Light of Heaven...the certain law from the mouth of God (1 QH XX formerly XII), and they also used the Book of Jubilees, an alternative version of Genesis calculated in terms of Jubilees. Those whom they regarded as the apostate used the lunar calendar, proof of their fallen state.

Iamblichus records that ‘What pertains to computation in numbers was discovered in Phoenicia’<sup>66</sup>, and, according to Neugebauer<sup>67</sup>, the origin of the Greek alphabetical number system must have originated whilst the Greeks were still using the full Phoenician alphabet, as three letters which did not survive in the classical Greek alphabet continued in use as numbers.<sup>68</sup> He suggested Miletus in Asia Minor and the eighth century BCE as the time and place for adopting these numbers. The practice of using Phoenician *letters as numbers* would then have been an established practice in the time of Pythagoras, and the root of his mathematics was also linked to Phoenicia. This could be no more than coincidence, but for the later Hebrew tradition of *describing the creation in terms of letters*. The best known example is from (the much later) 3 Enoch 13, where Metatron, the exalted and transformed Enoch, describes his crown on which were inscribed ‘the letters by which heaven and earth were created.’ Insofar as they were on his high priestly crown, they would have been the four letters of the Name, but other sources record that all twenty two letters were used to create.<sup>69</sup> The setting of this scene is important; Enoch/Metatron is being transformed into a heavenly prince, exalted above the angels of Day One (3 En.14). This is a development of the royal rituals in the holy of holies, which appear elsewhere as the traditions of Moses on Sinai. Now on Sinai Moses was told the Law, the plan for the tabernacle, the future history of his people and all *the measurements* of the creation (2 Baruch 59). Josephus said of the tabernacle, having described its precise measurements: ‘This proportion of the measures of the tabernacle proved to be an imitation of the system of the world.’ (Ant. 3..6.4).

---

<sup>65</sup> Strachan op.cit n.70 pp 52-56.

<sup>66</sup> Iamblichus *Life* 29

<sup>67</sup> O Neugebauer, *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity* Providence Rhode Island 1957 p.11

<sup>68</sup> The antiquity of the Hebrew alphabet was an important element in the apologists’ claims that Moses taught Plato (Eusebius Preparation 10.5. Also Tatian Address to the Greeks 31)

<sup>69</sup> Thus Sepher Yetsira 2.2 ‘The twenty two letters: God carved them and shaped them, weighed them and changed them round and combined them and then created with them all that has been created and all that will be created.’ Bezalal who built the tabernacle, also knew how to combine the letters by which heaven and earth were created (b.Ber.55a)

This is where we must look for the roots of the Pythagorean link between ‘science and religion’ or between ‘ethics and mathematics.’ The confusion about Pythagoras’ use of ‘numbers’ may stem from the ambiguities of the Hebrew word *sepher*, which can mean far more than just ‘number’. Words from this root can be mean cipher, or story, or account, or decree or lawbook, to count, and to describe.<sup>70</sup> If Pythagoras taught that all things were number, this may have arisen from the structure of the Hebrew language: to count and to describe are the same verb, number and story are the same word<sup>71</sup>. This would be consistent with another curiosity about the teaching of Pythagoras: the odd number was good and the even number was not. This is contrary to the natural sense of these words in Greek, where *artios*, ‘even number’ has the meaning of complete, perfect, precise, and *perissos*, ‘odd number’ has the meaning of excessive, surplus or superfluous. ‘Thus Greek terminology for even and odd is in its tendency diametrically opposite to the Pythagoreans’ number theory.’<sup>72</sup> It is generally agreed that Pythagoras’s teachings originated outside Greece; the range of meanings of the Hebrew *spr*, is consistent with Iamblichus’ view that ‘What pertains to computation in numbers was discovered in Phoenicia’<sup>73</sup>

Burkert also suggested that the Pythagoreans were the first to connect mathematics and philosophy.<sup>74</sup> Kirk expressed this as the bond between religion and science: ‘Religion and science were not, to Pythagoras, two separate departments, between which there was no contact, but rather two inseparable factors in a single way of life.’ He quoted Proclus on Euclid: ‘Pythagoras turned geometrical philosophy into a form of liberal education by seeking its first principles in a higher realm of reality.’ ‘Several passages in Aristotle even suggest a close connexion in Pythagoreanism between mathematics and ethics.’<sup>75</sup> It might be more accurate to say that Pythagoras was keeping to the older ways, that he did not separate mathematics, philosophy and ethics.

The only biblical writer who claims to have been a priest in the first temple is Ezekiel<sup>76</sup>. Since his prophecies are dated exactly to the period when Pythagoras could have been in Palestine, anything in them will be of great significance. Ezekiel has no obvious account of the creation, but there is a long and detailed description of the temple. Since the tabernacle/temple was built to represent the creation, what he says about the temple will indicate something of his understanding of the creation. The recurring emphasis is on *the measurements*. Ezekiel sees an angel with a line of flax and a measuring reed (Ezek.40.3), and he learns exactly how the temple should be, and how the land should be. Everything is in terms of measurements. He has to give the people an accurate account of what he has seen, in order that they may not be ashamed of their iniquities and ‘measure the proportion/measurement.’ He

---

<sup>70</sup> In the (much later) Kabbalah, the Sephiroth were the powers which emanated from the Divine.

<sup>71</sup> Respectively the qal and pi’el forms of *spr*, and the derived noun is *mspr*.

<sup>72</sup> Burkert op.cit.n.4 p.437.

<sup>73</sup> Iamblichus *Life* 29.

<sup>74</sup> Burkert op.cit.n.4. p 413

<sup>75</sup> Kirk op cit n.30 p.228

<sup>76</sup> Ezek.1.3. Some scholars think that the vision by the River Chebar in the 30<sup>th</sup> year (Ezek.1.1) was to mark his entry at the age of 30 into active priesthood (Num.4.3).

has to teach them the form of the house and its proportion, its exits and entrances, and all its forms and all its statutes ('engraved things'), and all its forms and all its laws. He has to write them 'before their eyes', so that they keep all the 'form' and all the statutes and do them' (Ezek.43.10-11 translating literally). Two of the words used here *srh*, *hgh* are words to consider carefully: *srh* is used elsewhere to indicate the heavenly 'form', and words related to *hqq/hqh* are used in the older accounts of the creation, as we have seen, to indicate the fixed order and limits of what has been established. It is possible that what Ezekiel sees here is the measurements of the temple as the heavenly pattern which the whole of creation and human society has to copy. Making people ashamed of their iniquities implies more than a simple deviation in the matter of temple architecture<sup>77</sup>.

Ezekiel seems to describe the measurements and proportions which the temple exemplifies, and so the 'form' and the 'fixed order' of the temple issues in the fixed orders and laws of society. Ezekiel's vision of measurements includes not only the temple but also the just division of the land (Ezek.48) and the just basis of commerce, with fair weights and measures (Ezek.45.10-12). This is consistent with the evidence in later sources as to what Moses had learned on Sinai. Given that this Moses tradition had absorbed the older holy of holies tradition, Moses learned the laws for human society, the prescriptions for the tabernacle which represented the creation, and the measurements: of the sanctuary, the abyss, the winds, the raindrops, the air, the eras of history, the angels. Moses also learned about judgement, wisdom, understanding and knowledge (2 Baruch 59.4-11)<sup>78</sup>. The secrets of the older holy of holies had concerned the mystery at the heart of creation, and this was the measurements of creation and history, and the rules for society.

The older biblical account of the creation, (set out clearly in Proverbs 8.22-31, Isaiah 40.12-24 and Job 26 and 38, but apparent elsewhere too in older texts) *also centred on numbers*: the weight of the wind and the measure of the waters (Job 28.25), the dimensions of the foundations of the earth and the number of the clouds (Job 38.5,37). 'Measurements' were important: limit, height, depth, breadth (Job.11.7-9). Isaiah depicted the power of the Creator in terms of his measuring: 'Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and marked of the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales...?' (Isa.40.12). He brings out the stars by number (Isa.40.26). The LORD measured the earth (Hab.3.6). The nations of the world were divided up to correspond to the number of the sons of God (Deut. 32.8)<sup>79</sup>. The boundary or limit was also fundamental to this older system; the disordered was limited and defined by 'engraving' and fixing. This process is indicated by the words from the root *hqq*, (used by Ezekiel in the context of the correct form of the temple and the laws which expressed this), This is exactly what Ezekiel implied; the statutes had been broken.

<sup>77</sup> When Joash restored the temple it was restored to its 'measure' and made firm 2 Chron 24.13.

<sup>78</sup> An excellent treatment of these lists of measurements in 'List of Revealed Things in Apocalyptic Literature' in *Magnalia Dei. The Mighty Acts of God... in memory of G.E.Wright*, ed. F.M.Cross and others. New York 1976 pp.414-452.

<sup>79</sup> Reading with Lxx and 4 Q Deut<sup>d</sup>

The anointed angel figure who was thrown from heaven was described as the seal of perfection or the one who sealed *the measurement/proportion* (Ezek.28.12)<sup>80</sup>, interesting in the light of the word play in the Gospel of Philip: ‘Messiah has two meanings – the anointed one or the measured’ (CG II.3.62)<sup>81</sup>. Philo described the Logos as the seal, the archetypal idea, *archetypos idea*, the pre-measurer, *prometretes*, of all things (Q Genesis 1.4). The measurements of the temple and the temple city continued to be important, as can be seen from the fragments of the new Jerusalem texts found at Qumran<sup>82</sup>, the Mishnah tractate *Middoth* which is entirely devoted to temple, measurements and the usage in the Merkavah texts, where measurement, *middah*, has the sense of ‘mystery’. ‘Akiva my son, descend and bear witness of this measurement/mystery, (*middah*), to the creatures. Then R Akiva descended and taught the creatures this mystery/measurement (*middah*)’<sup>83</sup>. It would be interesting to know what ‘mysteries’ the young Pythagoras had learned, especially as Iamblichus observed in his *Life of Pythagoras*: ‘It is said that what pertains to computation and numbers was discovered in Phoenicia’<sup>84</sup>.

There is no hint of these measurements in Genesis 1; all that remains of the older system is the emphasis on dividing and separating. The Unity of Day One manifested itself in the visible world as a diversity. There is an unmistakable similarity, though, between the process of creation as described in Genesis 1 and teaching attributed to Pythagoras. The Unlimited, unitary and undifferentiated was ‘outside the heaven’ and penetrated the world by being breathed in by the heaven to separate natural things (*phuseis*) from one another, being enclosed and partitioned off (*enapolambanomenon*) in the limited.’<sup>85</sup> If one understands ‘heaven’ as the veil of the temple, and the undifferentiated Unity as Day One, the holy of holies, then the Spirit coming through the veil in order to bring life and to separate ‘according to their kinds’ makes a striking similarity.

The older Hebrew system appears in greater detail in the non-canonical texts: 2 Baruch 59.4-12 lists the weights, measures and quantities of the creation revealed to Moses on Sinai. The *Similitudes* of Enoch show this knowledge in its original context, the holy of holies. Enoch stands by the throne and see show the kingdom is divided (1 En.41.1) i.e. how the Unity is separated out into the creation. He then saw how the winds were divided, and the fixed orbits of the sun and moon, the weighing of the stars and the proportions of their light (1 En.43.2). There is a similar list in 1 Enoch 60: the first and the last in heaven, the height, the depth, how

<sup>80</sup> Ezek.28.12 is an obscure text: *hwtm tknyt* could be seal of ‘measurement’, but some MSS have *hwtm tbnyt*, seal of ‘the model’, *k* and *b* being similar letters.

<sup>81</sup> *msh* means both ‘anoint’ and ‘measure’ in Syriac, Jewish Aramaic and Rabbinic Hebrew. The *hiph`il* means to draw in outline.

<sup>82</sup> Restored from 4Q554-5, 5Q15, 1Q32, 2Q14, 4Q232, 11Q18 in G.Vermes *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* Penguin Harmondsworth 1997. Also M Chyutin *The New Jerusalem Scroll from Qumran*. Sheffield 1997.

<sup>83</sup> P Schäfer *The Hidden and Manifest God* New York 1992 p.119

<sup>84</sup> Life ch.29.op.cit.n.4 p.85

<sup>85</sup> Burkert p. 35 quoting Aristotle Physics 203a6, 213b22,

the winds are divided and weighed, the power of the light of the moon and the division of the stars. Such knowledge is promised to the righteous at the end of the seventh week in the *Apocalypse of Weeks*: the breadth and length of the earth and the measure of all of them, ... the height of heaven and on what it is founded and how great is the number of the stars, and where the luminaries rest... (1 En. 93.11).

Nothing can be proved, but there are striking similarities between the teachings attributed to Pythagoras and his disciples, and the traditions of the first temple priesthood. This can be seen even more clearly in Plato's *Timaeus*, widely believed to depict Pythagorean beliefs.

## Timaeus

The historical setting of *The Timaeus* is the late fifth century, not later than 421 BCE, and Timaeus himself is depicted as an old man, perhaps a third generation Pythagorean, and so a contemporary of Philolaus.<sup>86</sup> The actual dialogue was written towards the end of Plato's life, in the 360s, and is remarkable for several reasons: it is the earliest Greek account of a divine creation, stars appear here for the first time as divinities<sup>87</sup>, and it is a theological work, but with no name for God. *The Timaeus* describes the processes of the creation before the appearance of the visible world; much of it therefore deals with Day One, and any correspondence would be with the secret tradition. Although later texts show in some detail that the secrets of the Holy of Holies concerned the initial processes of the creation, the antiquity of the belief is confirmed by Job 38. Job could not claim to be wise because he had not witnessed the foundation of the earth and its measurements, nor had he heard the sons of God, the morning stars, singing as the world was formed, nor had he seen limits imposed on the sea. He could not bind the stars in their orbits nor number the clouds. Ezekiel's equivalent vision, as he was handed the scroll, was a vision of the Living One. *The Timaeus uses the same term Living One and seems to be setting out the same mythology in scientific dress. Ezekiel's prophecies are dated to exactly the period when Pythagoras would have been in Syria, and the remarkable similarities have to be explained. The Timaeus could be even closer to Pythagoras than the lore preserved in Philolaus and elsewhere, because it 'originated' only two generations after Pythagoras and is not a series of disjointed fragments, many of which were preserved by a critic and a rival, and all of which passed through several hands.*

The *Timaeus* was much used by Philo; parts of his exposition of Genesis, *On the Creation of the World*, are simply quotations<sup>88</sup>. Philo identifies Timaeus' Demiurge with the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, but this is not the same as saying that he was the first to do this<sup>89</sup>, or that it

---

<sup>86</sup> A.E.Taylor *A Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* Oxford 1928 p.14

<sup>87</sup> D.Lee *Timaeus and Critias* Harmondsworth 1965 p.9

<sup>88</sup> E.g. Tim 28a in Creation 12; Tim 29d-30a in Creation 21-23. For a complete list see D.T.Runia *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* Leiden 1986 pp 353-358

<sup>89</sup> Thus Runia op.cit.n.4.p.135

was a simple correspondence. Aristobulus, writing early in the second century BCE, implied that the Timaeus had been based on Hebrew sources: '(Moses) has been very carefully followed in all by Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, who said that they heard the voice of God when they were contemplating the arrangement of the universe so accurately made and indissolubly combined by God.'<sup>90</sup> When Philo recognised the Demiurge as the Creator depicted in the Hebrew Scriptures, he knew that those Scriptures had also spoken of a Second God, the Logos. The early Christians read the Hebrew Scriptures in the same way, but modern scholars by and large do not. They still find only one God in the Hebrew Scriptures, and thus have problems relating the Timaeus to the Bible other than through the route of Philo adapting the Hebrew Scriptures. When Philo wrote of the Father and Maker (e.g. Creation 7, 10, 21), he was not simply copying the Timaeus: the ancient Song of Moses had described the Father, Begetter, Maker and Establisher of his people (Deut.32.6). Philo distinguished carefully between the One who was Father of the universe, and the Second God, his Logos, in whose image the human was made 'for nothing mortal can be made in the likeness of the Most High One and Father of the universe' (Q.Genesis.2.62). It was this Second God who corresponded to Timaeus' Living Creature, the model for the visible creation.

It used to be thought that whatever had no parallel in the early Rabbinic writings must have been imported from the Greek philosophers,<sup>91</sup> but this approach belongs to the history of scholarship. Rabbinic Judaism is now recognised as *a substantive change from second temple Judaism*. 'Far from being trustees of the accepted tradition of Israel, the sages were leaders of a bold reform movement that developed in the aftermath of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, and took its shape in the first centuries of the Common Era.'<sup>92</sup> The implications of this are enormous. The polemic against the Second God which characterised so much early Rabbinic writing<sup>93</sup> can be recognised as a struggle within the Hebrew tradition and not as a struggle against Hellenisation. Philo's Second God was no innovation, but an expression in the Greek language of what had been Hebrew temple tradition from the time of the monarchy. What Philo said about the Second God is important evidence for the nature and role of that Second God, and *the fact that there are so many similarities to the Timaeus is no longer proof that Philo simply adapted Plato*. Philo's Logos was the LORD of the Hebrew Scriptures, 'the antecedent to all that has come into existence' (Abraham 6), 'the archangel... neither uncreated as God nor created as you, but midway between the two extremes' (Heir 205-206), 'the eldest and most all-embracing of all created things' (All. Int.3.175). The Logos was the high priest, (thus linking the tradition to the temple) the Firstborn (Abraham 102), 'the Image of God through whom the whole universe was framed' (Spec.Laws 1.81), 'the Bond of all things' (Flight 112), 'the Covenant' (Dreams 2.237), 'the Seal' (Flight 12). The Logos divided and kept things distinct (Heir 130), as well as uniting them. The Logos, (a masculine noun) was also Wisdom (a feminine noun), but Philo had no problem with this: 'Let us pay no

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Eusebius *Preparation* 13.12

<sup>91</sup> e.g. A.F.Segal *Two Powers in Heaven* Leiden 1978 p.165

<sup>92</sup> G Boccaccini *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism*, Grand Rapids 2002' p.xiii, surveying the current position from which he builds a theory of the prehistory of Rabbinic Judaism in the second temple period.

<sup>93</sup> See Segal op.cit.n.7 passim.

heed to the discrepancy in the gender of the words, but say that the daughter of God is not only masculine but also father, sowing and begetting in souls the aptness to learn...’ (Flight 52). In this Philo is consistent with the tradition of the Second God having both genders. Briefly, Wisdom and Logos are both heavenly beings, both are linked to the symbol of the menorah, both are the Image, both are the Firstborn, both are agents of the creation, both are bonds of creation, both were given Israel as their inheritance, both served in the temple i.e. as high priests, both led souls to God and transformed them. This list is not exhaustive, but, as I wrote some time ago, those who would distinguish Logos from Wisdom have a hard case to argue.<sup>94</sup>

What I am proposing reverses the established ideas of cause and effect. Philo was not simply adapting the Hebrew tradition to a more fashionable Greek model. The problems do not lie in bridging the thought worlds of Plato and Genesis in the time of Philo, but in trying to establish what lay beneath the surface form of Genesis and establishing the bridge, centuries before Philo, between the older Hebrew tradition and the *Timaeus*, exactly as Aristobulus and others had claimed. Runia made the usual assumption when he wrote ‘In attempting to explain Moses by means of Plato’s *Timaeus*, Philo certainly did not solve all the exegetical problems involved’<sup>95</sup> but later recognised: ‘Neither the Middle Platonist use of Tim 41ab nor the Stoic doctrine of cosmic cohesion can fully explain Philo’s frequent use of the image of the *desmos* (bond) in relation to the Logos and the powers of God. So it is difficult to determine whether we are dealing with a personal predilection (at least partly resulting from his reading of the *Timaeus*) or with one of the many gaps in our knowledge of Philo’s philosophical reading material.’<sup>96</sup> A gap in our knowledge of his ‘Judaism’ is not considered! Philo drew his bonds from the older creation tradition, which also gave him the image of the seal. When discussing Philo’s ‘shift in imagery’ to include that of the seal and its imprint, where the ideas are regarded as seals which stamp their form on the unformed, Runia could find no obvious source. ‘The description of the ideas as seals and the model as the archetypal seal is quite unPlatonic, and is to be attributed to Middle Platonist interpretation.’<sup>97</sup> It was in fact a fundamental part of the imagery of the first temple, the seal of the Name, the letters by which the world was created, being worn by the high priest, and the guardian angel being regarded as the ‘seal’ of perfection or proportion.

The first temple had known El Elyon, God Most High and Father of the sons of God, whose Firstborn had been Yahweh, the LORD, the Great Angel, the Holy One of Israel. The high priest king in Jerusalem had been Immanuel, the presence of the Great Angel with his people. He had become divine at his anointing, and had been given the four names: ‘Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’, names which became in the Greek simply ‘the Angel of Great Counsel’ (Isa.9.6). Alongside this - and there is insufficient

---

<sup>94</sup> See my *The Great Angel. A Study of Israel’s Second God*. London 1992 p.131. The whole of chapter 7 discusses the roots of Philo’s Logos in the first temple and the identity of Logos and Wisdom.

<sup>95</sup> Runia op.cit n.4 p 155

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.p.240.

<sup>97</sup> Runia op.cit.n.4 p.163.

evidence to see the scheme whole or even to see it with the eyes of those who recorded the little we have – there had been the female aspect of God Most High, the Queen of Heaven and Mother of the sons of God, who had been the Mother of the LORD and therefore also of the earthly high priest king. But the LORD also had a female aspect; the Second God was both male and female, as Philo knew. In Timaeus' muddled account, the Demiurge corresponds to God Most High, and the Eternal Living Creature corresponds to the Second God<sup>98</sup>.

Timaeus himself is introduced as an astronomer who has studied the nature of the universe from the origin of the cosmic system to the creation of the human (Tim.27a). A comparison of his account of the creation and what can be recovered of 'The Older Testament'<sup>99</sup> reveals some extraordinary similarities. Timaeus begins his account with a series of statements: that one must distinguish between what 'is and never becomes' from what 'is always becoming but never is', between the changing and the eternal; that a pattern is necessary for the product to be good; that anything which changes must have had a beginning and so the visible creation must have been brought into being; and that both the world and creator are good. These premises, which the dialogue does not question, could all have originated in the Hebrew tradition. The distinction between the eternity of God and the transient nature of physical life and human history is a commonplace in the Hebrew Scriptures. 'The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand for ever' (Isa.40.8). 'The heavens will vanish like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be for ever, and my deliverance will never be ended' (Isa.51.6; also Pss 9.7; 33.10-11; 37.18-20; 90.1-10; 102.11-12; 104.31-32). The divine pattern to which the craftsman works is fundamental to the accounts of the tabernacle and the temple, which represented the creation. Genesis begins with the story of how the world was created by God, and the recurring theme is that the creation was good. That God is good is fundamental to the Hebrew Scriptures. There was no envy, *phthonos*, in Timaeus' God (Tim.29e), and it was deemed necessary to make this point twice; Timaeus' Creator was different from the Greek gods. 'Timaeus is thinking of the common Greek view that *to theion* is *phthoneron*, 'grudging' in its bestowal of good things'.<sup>100</sup> Pythagoras had, apparently, been the first to call the heaven, *ouranos*, the cosmos, *kosmos*, (Diogenes Laertius 8.48, the word used here by Tim.28b). According to Burnet the older meaning of *kosmos* had been the battle array of an army.<sup>101</sup> If these two statements are correct, then Pythagoras's choice of *kosmos* probably reflected the Hebrew 'host', *saba`*, the old name for the host of heaven which was the first to be created, or rather generated (Gen.2.1; Isa.40.26). The Creator was the LORD of Hosts, a title dropped after the work of the Deuteronomists and the changes to the temple, i.e. it was the older title. None of Timaeus's premises, then, is incompatible with an origin for his ideas in the older Hebrew tradition, and the use of *kosmos* is consistent with this.

---

<sup>98</sup> It is interesting to note that the first Christians described Jesus as the Lord and the Author of Life, Acts 3.15

<sup>99</sup> My book of that name, 1987, showed that much of the older tradition of Israel had survived in Christianity.

<sup>100</sup> Op.cit..n.1. p.78. The Creator depicted by the reformed tradition could be seen as grudging; some Gnostics certainly interpreted Gen.2-3 in this way, see p \*\*\*.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. p. 65

Eusebius argued at length that Timaeus's (and therefore Plato's) premises about God were drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures<sup>102</sup>. Thus the distinction between what is and what becomes (Tim.27d) was, he said, simply an expansion of Exodus 3.14: 'Does it not plainly appear that the admirable philosopher has altered the oracle in which Moses declared 'I am that I am' into 'What is that which always is and has no becoming?' That there is only one heaven (Tim.31a) was drawn from 'Hear O Israel the LORD our God is One LORD' (Deut.6.4). That God is good (Tim.29e) was also drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures: Eusebius quoted Nahum 1.7 and Psalm 106.1. Moses had anticipated the teaching about the pattern and its copy, insofar as Genesis 1 had described a light existing before the sun was created, and Timaeus's statement that the world must have had a beginning and a cause (Tim.28a) simply repeated Genesis, as did the statement that the heavens and the stars were created before the earth and its creatures (Preparation 11.9, 13, 21, 23, 29, 30). Most significant, because this is an element of the Hebrew tradition that has been almost forgotten, Eusebius knew that there had been a 'Second Cause' 'whom the Hebrew oracles teach to be the Word of God... Moses expressly speaks of two divine Lords...' (Preparation 11.14). 'Monotheism' is usually presented as characteristic of all the Hebrew Scriptures, thus creating huge problems for understanding the origin of Christian beliefs about the Second Person. It can now be seen that 'monotheism' was a relatively late development within the Hebrew tradition, a characteristic of the Deuteronomists and the temple 'reformers', and so when the early Christians read the Hebrew Scriptures as an account of the Second Person in the history of Israel, this was not their special invention<sup>103</sup>. The recognition that there had been a Second Person in the older Hebrew tradition means that Eusebius could relate to the Timaeus with fewer problems than can a modern scholar.

Timaeus speaks of the maker, *poietes*, and father of the universe (Tim.28c), who cannot be known, and then of the architect, *tektainomenos*, who constructed the universe who is also named the Demiurge. These seem to be the same Deity. An uncertain part of the text then seems to say that an exact account of the gods and the generation of the universe is not possible (Tim.29c), which would be consistent with the hidden tradition of the holy of holies. The Framer, *xunistas*,<sup>104</sup> set up the universe of change to be good like himself. He had found the visible universe in a state of inharmonious and disorderly motion, and he had brought it to order. This is not creation *ex nihilo*. In his second account of the creation, Timaeus returns to the question of the third element: the model, the copy, and then *that into which it was copied* (Tim.49a, 50cd). This is envisaged either as a substance or as a space, containing the qualities of the four elements – earth, air, fire and water - and other things, but in a constant state of chaotic flux, 'like the contents of a winnowing basket' (Tim.52de). The Creator's first action was to introduce order, 'making them out into shapes by means of forms and numbers' (Tim.53b). The next process of creation in the Timaeus is described as binding together

<sup>102</sup> Eusebius draws on several of Plato's works; I am concentrating only on the Timaeus.

<sup>103</sup> See my *The Great Angel. A Study of Israel's Second God* London 1992. Also B Lang *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority* Sheffield 1983.

<sup>104</sup> There are many different titles for the deities, and it is not clear which is which.

(Tim.31c), an element which can only be recovered for the fragments of the older creation story which survive in the Hebrew Scriptures. There then follows what seems to be a description of the Eternal Living Creature, begotten by God and itself a blessed god (Tim.34ab). The universe itself was also begotten by the Father, who wanted to make it as much as possible like the Eternal Living Creature (Tim.37cd). Parts of this description correspond to the account in the first chapter of Genesis, where God did not create out of nothing, but, when there was darkness on the face of the waters, he brought order to the earth which was *tohu wabohu*<sup>105</sup>. On the seventh day he rested and saw that everything he had made was good. This account is not from the first temple priesthood, but still has traces of the older tradition. ‘Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them’ (Gen.2.1) implies the creation of the heavenly host, even though this has not been mentioned previously, and the origin of the host is implied in ‘These are the *generations* of the heavens and the earth, when they were created’ (Gen.2.4). They were the offspring of the Creator, as stated in Timaeus 41a when God addressed the gods.

Other elements in Timaeus’ account, such as God the Father and his sons, the Living Creature, and establishing the bonds of creation before the appearance of the creatures of land, air and water, can be recovered from fragments of the older creation story which have survived outside Genesis. First, the recurring theme in the Timaeus of God as the Father, i.e. begetter, of the Eternal Living Creature and of the universe, resembles the ancient title for El Elyon, God Most High, attested in Genesis 14.19: ‘The begetter, *qnh*, of heaven and earth’. This is usually translated by the less specific ‘maker’ of heaven and earth. El Elyon was also Father of the sons of God (Deut.32.8, in the Qumran text 4QDeut<sup>4</sup>), just as the Demiurge was the father of the sons of God (Tim.41ab). The old title for El Elyon was modified in the wake of the temple reform, as can be seen from its reuse by Deutero-Isaiah, who, as the prophet of monotheism, simply equated El and Yahweh, and made the one God male. The whole idea of divine sonship and apotheosis, which had been central to the royal cult, was democratised so that everyone was a divine son (Deut.14.1). El Elyon the ancient ‘procreator’ *qnh*, was identified as Yahweh, and the one God became the ‘maker’, *sh*, rather than the procreator. The formula was expanded to ‘Your maker, stretcher of the heaven and founder of the earth (Isa.51.13 similarly 44.24). Or Yahweh became ‘creator’ *br*’, (Isa.42.5) or creator and ‘shaper’ *ysr* (Isa.45.18). The old title for El was simply altered and taken over in some Psalms: ‘Yahweh... maker, *sh* of heaven and earth’ (Pss 115.15; 121.2; 124.8; 134.3).<sup>106</sup> The variety of descriptions of the Demiurge, especially that he was the Father of the gods and the creation, reflects the situation before the introduction of monotheism in the wake of the reforms. This suggests that the Demiurge, who fathered the Eternal Living Creature and the gods, was modelled on El Elyon. Second, there is Wisdom, the female figure described in

<sup>105</sup> This first appears in Jewish sources in Genesis Rab.1.9. R. Gamaliel II, at the end of the first century CE, was in conversation with an unnamed philosopher who claimed that the Jewish God had created out of pre-existing materials: *tohu, bohu*, darkness, water, spirit and the deep, but R. Gamaliel cited Scripture to show that all of these had been first created by God. The meaning of *tohu* and *bohu* is not known.

<sup>106</sup> N.C.Habel ‘Yahweh. Maker of Heaven and Earth. A Study in Tradition Criticism.’ JBL 91 (1972) pp. 321-337.

Proverbs 8.22-31, who was begotten as the first of the Creator's works. (The Father is named as Yahweh but this may be another reassigned text). She was with him as the visible creation was established: heaven and earth, waters and sea, but there is no mention of the three types of creature whose creation was committed to the sons of God (Tim.41b). In other words, she was the companion only *in that phase of creation which corresponded to the work of the Demiurge*, and, like Timaeus's Living Being, she was the daily delight that rejoiced before him always, rejoicing in the inhabited world and her delight was with the sons of men. (Prov.8.30-31, my translation, c.f. Tim.37c 'And when the Father who had begotten it, perceived that the universe was alive and in motion, a thing of joy to the eternal gods, He too rejoiced...'). Ezekiel had described her departure from Jerusalem, his Living Creature. Third, the bonds of creation were the bonds of the eternal covenant which were renewed on the Day of Atonement.

The imagery used in the Timaeus to describe the soul and its bonds is that of the Day of Atonement, and is but one of the many striking similarities to the older tradition. Timaeus explained that the Soul had been formed by blending the eternal indivisible with the transient divisible, to form a third. The image used is of blending something in a bowl. Taylor suggested that this corresponded to the Pythagorean Limit (the eternal indivisible) and the Unlimited (the transient divisible) blending to form the One<sup>107</sup>. These three were then distributed as the Soul, divided initially into seven portions, and then into further smaller portions set between the originals. 'The complete series of terms ... is intended to correspond with the notes of a musical scale.'<sup>108</sup> The resulting Soul, imagined as a strip, was then divided lengthwise into two, and the two halves laid across each other to form a cross. The ends of each strip were then joined to form a circle, resulting in two circles, one within the other, set at right angles, but then tilted. The inner ring was split into seven smaller rings to be the orbits of the seven heavenly bodies - sun, moon and five planets - revolving at various speeds. This completed, the One who constructed it made the bodily within it, joining them at their centres. The body of the heaven was thus visible, but the soul, that is the reason and harmony, was not. (Tim. 34c-37c). The soul was both in the midst and encircling.

Nobody could say that this is a clear account. Taylor described it as 'The most perplexing and difficult passage in the whole dialogue... The language in which Timaeus describes the making of the world's soul by the mixing together of certain ingredients in a *krater* or mixing bowl... the subsequent distribution of the product in accord with the intervals of a musical scale, and the cutting of it into strips which correspond to the celestial equator and the ecliptic, is merely symbolical.'<sup>109</sup> Whatever is being reported here is garbled, and justifies Aristotle's criticism of the Pythagoreans, albeit of another of their theories, that they made their science conform to their pre-existing ideas: '...not seeking accounts and explanations in conformity with appearances, but trying by violence to bring the appearances into line with accounts and opinions of their own.' (Heavens 293a). *The underlying myth here seems to be*

---

<sup>107</sup> Op.cit.n.1 pp.129-30

<sup>108</sup> R.G.Bury Plato vol ix Cambridge Mass. (1929) 1989 p. 36

<sup>109</sup> Taylor op.cit.n.2 p. 106

whatever was expressed in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, when mixed bloods, representing soul, were sprinkled in the temple which represented the creation. Now acknowledged to be one of the most ancient practices of the temple<sup>110</sup>, the rituals of the Day of Atonement were a part of the healing and recreation process at the New Year. The temple ritual was the act of renewal, but must have reflected the belief, now lost, as to how the world had been originally constituted. We have to compare the renewal rituals, insofar as they can be recovered, with framework into which Timaeus sets his 'scientific' account of the creation.

Deuteronomy has no place for atonement and no account of the Day of Atonement; it does not even appear in the calendar (Deut.16). This was one of the crucial elements in the older cult which the 'reformers' suppressed. Atonement had become a controversial matter by the time the Pentateuch was compiled. Although we should not expect to find in Leviticus a full and clear account of the pre-exilic practice, there is enough evidence to begin the search. Blood is the 'soul/life' *nps*, and thus it effects atonement, i.e. healing and restoration (Lev.17.11). On the Day of Atonement, blood was distributed in various parts of the tabernacle/temple which represented the visible and invisible creation, to remove the destructive and polluting effects of sin. Two types of blood were used on the Day of Atonement: the blood of a bull, for the high priest and his house (Lev.16.6) and the blood of a goat 'as the LORD' (Lev.16.8). These bloods were each sprinkled seven times within the holy of holies, i.e. in Day One/eternity, and then together they were sprinkled on the altar in the Great Hall. The Mishnah gives more detail, presumably of how the ritual was performed at the end of the second temple period, but there is no explanation of its meaning<sup>111</sup>. The high priest took the blood of the bull into the holy of holies and sprinkled it where the ark had been, using a special motion 'like a whip' whilst counting out a formula: one, one and two, one and three, one and four, one and five, one and six, one and seven. He then left that blood on a stand in the Great Hall whilst he took the blood of the goat into the holy of holies to perform the same ritual of sprinkling and counting. He then repeated the process in the Great Hall, sprinkling the bloods separately on the curtain, the heavens. He then mixed the two bloods together in a vessel, pouring the bull's blood into the goat's and then returning the mixture to the first vessel. With the mixed blood he sprinkled the golden altar in the Great Hall, and then the altar of sacrifice in the temple courtyard, before emptying the remainder of the blood under the outdoor altar. The High priest then uttered the Name aloud, the only time that this was done (m.Yoma 5.3-6.2). This is how the process of recreation was ritualised in the temple. Two types of blood i.e. soul were distributed separately with an inexplicable counting ritual in the holy of holies, Day One, and on the veil, the second day, and then, mixed together, they were sprinkled in the part of the temple which represented the visible creation<sup>112</sup>.

---

<sup>110</sup> J Milgrom *Leviticus* New York 1991 esp. pp. 3-12.

<sup>111</sup> W. Robertson Smith *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* 3<sup>rd</sup> edn London 1927 p. 216: 'The worship of the second temple was an antiquarian resuscitation of forms which had lost their intimate connection with the national life and therefore had lost the greater part of their original significance.'

<sup>112</sup> When Philo deals with Moses' blood sprinkling at Sinai, which the Targum described as atonement, see p \*\*\*, he also uses the language of the Timaeus, Q.Exod.2.33; Heir 182-185.

This ritual restored the bonds of the eternal covenant which had been broken by sin.<sup>113</sup> *The account in Timaeus immediately links the distributed soul to the bonds which encircle the creation*, and depicts these bonds as the means by which the heavenly bodies are held in their places. This binding of the heavenly bodies was part of the older creation story, as can be seen from the questions in Job: ‘Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season or can you guide the Bear with its children? (Job 38.31-32). The *Similitudes of Enoch* describe the process more clearly: through the great oath/bond, which is closely linked to knowledge of the Name, the heaven was suspended before the earth was created, the earth was founded and the sea kept within its bounds, the sun, moon and stars were held in their orbits and the Creator called to them by name (1 En. 69). On the Day of Atonement the Name was uttered at the completion of the sprinkling process, perhaps to seal what had been done. The idea of sealing the bonds was a key to the creation process as can be seen from the (undateable) Prayer of Manasseh, a prayer of repentance whose setting could well have been the Day of Atonement. ‘Do not destroy me with my transgressions.’ Manasseh described how the deep was confined and sealed with the ‘terrible and glorious Name’. In the *Book of Jubilees*, Isaac had his sons swear by the Name, the greatest oath, ‘which created the heavens and the earth and all things together’ (Jub.36.7).<sup>114</sup> The Name was worn on the high priest’s forehead and was the letters by which heaven and earth were created. It was also represented by a cross as early as the time of Ezekiel, as can be seen from the account of the destroying angels. Those to be saved were marked by the sign of the LORD, the letter *tau*, which in Ezekiel’s time was a cross (Ezek.9.4 translated ‘mark’ in many English versions). Thus the bonds of the creation, in the first temple, had they been sealed with the Name, would have been sealed with a cross.<sup>115</sup>

This is exactly what the account in Timaeus implies as Justin knew (Apology 1.60); the two strips of the world soul were bound together in the shape of a cross. Timaeus described how one of the bonds was further split to provide the seven orbits for the sun, moon and five planets, and how these seven were set to produce and mark time, ‘living creatures with their bodies bound by the ties of the soul’ (Tim.37cd). Timaeus then explained that the pattern for this system of soul circles had been an eternal Living Being, and that the Creator determined to have an even more exact copy of her, except that the copy could not be eternal. This would

---

<sup>113</sup> These bonds appear in some older texts e.g. the Hebrew of Ezek. 20.37, where the restored are readmitted within the covenant bond, and Ps. 2.3, where the restrained powers try to break free from the Lord and his Messiah. See p \*\*\*

<sup>114</sup> See my *The Great Angel* London (1992) pp.97-113.

<sup>115</sup> This appears in the ancient ritual for consecrating the nave of a church, i.e. the part which corresponds to the *hekal* of the temple and thus to the visible creation. Two alphabets were written diagonally across the nave from corner to corner, thus forming the X the seal of the Name and the letters by which the world was created. Bezalel who created the tabernacle knew how to combine the letters which created heaven and earth b.Ber.55a. See J Wilkinson ‘New Beginnings and Church Dedications’ in *Creation and Liturgy. In Honor of H.Boone Porter* Washinton pp 2251-264, although he does make the detailed temple-creation connection.

be 'the moving image of eternity' (Tim.37d)<sup>116</sup>. In order to complete the copy, there needed to be as many forms of life as there were in the perfect Living Creature. 'There are four of these: the gods in heaven, birds in the air, animals that live in water, and animals that go on dry land' (Tim.40a). These were the creatures of the four elements: fire, air, water, and earth. Genesis 1 has only three of these: creatures of air, water and land. The fourth group, the creatures of fire, were the angels of Day One who have disappeared from our Genesis. These gods were made mostly of fire, distributed as an adornment for the heavens, i.e. they were stars, and they were given two types of movement only: rotation and moving forward.

Timaeus' Living Creature, *zoon*, the pattern for the visible creation, is what Ezekiel saw leaving the temple. The prophet described what he saw as the *zoon*, singular (e.g. Ezek.1.21,22: 10.15,17 LXX), or *zoa* plural (e.g. Ezek.1.13,14,15 LXX) but for a divinity this is a commonplace in Hebrew. Ezekiel also described four Living Creatures as components of the One, just as in Timaeus 39c, 'As many as exist in the Living Creature, so many should the world possess... and these forms are four...'. Other words in Ezekiel's descriptions suggest that he knew the distinction between the heavenly 'form' and its visible 'appearance'. Ezekiel was describing the visible form of something not normally seen (it was behind the veil in both senses), and so he distinguished between the 'form' of the rings and their 'appearance', the 'form' of the throne and its 'appearance', and so on. The similarity to the role of Timaeus' Living creature is striking.

Ezekiel's text is a curious mixture of feminine and masculine word forms. S/he was surrounded by a ring within a ring, and these were full of 'eyes'. Now 'eye', *ʔyn*, is a word with several meanings: Zechariah, some two generations after Ezekiel, described the seven lamps of the menorah as the 'eyes' of the LORD which 'wandered' through the earth (Zech.4.10; also in 2 Chron.16.9, but this would have been written later). These 'eyes' must have been the sun, moon and five planets. Might these also have been the 'eyes' in the ring around the Living One? This would explain why one of Timaeus's rings was split to make orbits for the seven wandering heavenly bodies, the older mythology being modified for a more sophisticated astronomy. There is another link, too, between the 'wandering eyes' and the ritual of the Day of Atonement. If this is only coincidence, it is a curious coincidence. The high priest in the Holy of Holies counted one, one and one, one and two, one and three... whilst sprinkling the creating/renewing blood with a movement 'like a whip' (m.Yoma 5.4). In the Mishnah the word is *mslyp*, a word not found in the Hebrew Scriptures, where *the word for 'whip' is from the same root as the word for the 'wandering' eyes: both are swt*. As the high priest used 'soul' to restore the bonds of the creation, might his movement originally have been connected to the 'wandering' stars, before he emerged from the holy of holies to restore the visible creation? According to the poem in 1 Enoch 69, the great oath kept the heaven, the earth, the sea and the sun, moon and stars securely in their places.

Some of Ezekiel's description of the Living One is beyond recovery. One verse (Ezek.10.12) seems to describe 'all flesh', in the sense of 'all created things' as in the LORD providing for

---

<sup>116</sup> Philo knew the Bond and the Image as the Logos.

‘all flesh’ (Ps.136.25) or ‘all flesh’ perishing if the Spirit was withdrawn (Job.34.15). The LORD made a covenant with ‘all flesh’ (Gen.9.16). ‘All flesh’ together with (?)backs, hands and wings were (?)within the rings full of ‘eyes’. Later texts, which preserved the older temple lore, show that ‘the spirits of all things’ were believed to have been created on Day One, and so it is not impossible that this was the original meaning of these curious words.

Elsewhere Ezekiel describes a fe/male angel figure who was thrown from heaven and from her shrine (Ezek.28.12-19), and his description confirms that the figure had been the ‘pattern’. The poem has been reworked and now describes the king of Tyre, but originally the angel had been the guardian of Zion, unless we are to believe that several angel figures left the temple and cult in Jerusalem during the time of Ezekiel. S/he had been full of wisdom and perfect in beauty, the anointed or measuring cherub who protected or overshadowed (Ezek.28.14). S/he was described as ‘the seal of proportion, *toknit*’ or ‘the seal of the pattern, *tabnit*’ (Ezek.28.12, the two words looking similar in Hebrew). Either meaning would correspond to what we find in the Timaeus. This angel had become proud and had corrupted Wisdom, and so fire came forth from her midst and s/he was consumed. The ‘seal’ elsewhere is the role of the Servant the LORD, the high priest, who held the creation together. He was the ‘eternal covenant’ (Isa. 42.6; 49.8, rather than ‘covenant to the people’) and he had been ‘drawn in outline and appointed’ a literal translation of *`srk w`thk*, RSV ‘kept you and given you.’<sup>117</sup> This is the context for Philo’s unPlatonic image of the seal.

The Eternal Living Creature contained all life, as did the fourfold Pythagorean *tetraktys* ‘the fount and roots of eternal nature’. They must have been identical as it is unlikely that one system would have had two sources of life<sup>118</sup>. Now the renewal ritual of the Day of Atonement was an outpouring of life/soul to the creation, and the blood of the goat represented the life of Second God present in the high priest king. The outpouring of his life renewed the creation, hence the juxtaposition of images in Peter’s sermon: ‘the Holy and Righteous One, the Author of Life’, followed by a description of the Day of Atonement and the Anointed One returning from heaven (Acts 3.14-15, 19-21).

At his ‘birth’ the king had received the throne name, which in the Greek became simply ‘Angel of Great Counsel’ - Wisdom – but whose Hebrew original had been fourfold: ‘Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’ (Isa.9.6 RSV). Translated more literally from the Hebrew, they bear a remarkable correspondence to aspects of Timaeus’ Eternal Living Creature. The similarity to Wisdom is clear ‘Wonderful Counsellor’; it must have been a god, since the universe which was its copy was a blessed god (Tim. 34b) ‘Mighty God’; it was eternal but its copy was in time (Tim.38c) ‘Father of Time’; it contained all things together within itself (Tim.30c) ‘Prince of shalom = wholeness’.

---

<sup>117</sup> Isa.49.8 LXX *eplasa*

<sup>118</sup> Hippolytus *Refutation* 6.29 attributed to the Valentinians the belief that Sophia was the fourfold *tetraktys*.

Hengel wondered some time ago about the relationship between Jewish wisdom (not Wisdom!) speculations and analogous Greek conceptions, but did not even consider the possibility that Aristobulus (and others) had been correct when they claimed that Moses had influenced the Greeks and not vice versa. He wondered if the world soul of the Timaeus had influenced the depiction of Wisdom in Proverbs 8, since *harmozousa*, joining together, and *euphrainomen*, v.30-31 seems so very close to the Timaeus. Both these translations, however, are close to the Hebrew original, and the question should perhaps have been: How could the Hebrew have been so close to the ideas of the Timaeus? The Demiurge as a personal creator god, he suggested, would have been close to Jewish thought, and perhaps the description in Wisdom 7.22-8.1 had been drawn ultimately from the Timaeus... Such is the power of pre-supposition.<sup>119</sup> The description in Wisdom 7 probably does have much in common with the Soul of the Timaeus, but this is because the two have a common origin.

Having described the Living One who was the pattern for the creation, Timaeus's Demiurge then addressed the gods who were his first creation, the beings of fire. He was their Demiurge (maker) and Father, in other words, these beings were the sons of God. Although all that had been bound together could be dissolved again, such dissolution would not be good. 'You will never be dissolved nor taste death as long as you find my will a stronger and more sovereign bond than those with which you were bound at your birth' (Tim.41B). There are echoes here of the rebel angels, who decided to break the bond, defy the will of the Great Holy One, and bind themselves by a great oath into a bond of defiance (1 En.6.4). The bonds of the sons of God and their rebellion against them was a fundamental aspect of first temple theology e.g. 'Sons have I reared and brought up but they have rebelled against me' (Isa.1.2).

In order to make the world a perfect replica of the Living One, the Demiurge declared, three more types of mortal had to be created: creatures in the air, creatures in the water, and creatures on the land. Since the Demiurge could only create what was immortal, the gods were commanded to create these three remaining kinds, 'weaving together mortal and immortal'. The Demiurge then divided the impure remains of the world soul to correspond with the number of the stars, and left the gods to form bodies for the souls from borrowed portions of earth, air, fire and water, loans which would have to be repaid. This too is biblical: 'Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return' was the curse on Adam (Gen.3.19) and Elihu knew that it was not only humans who returned to dust; when the Creator took back his spirit, 'all flesh would perish together and the human would return to dust (Job 34.14). [Philo interpreted Genesis 1.26 as indicating that the Creator delegated certain tasks to his angels; (the text) 'plainly shows that he took fellow workers' (Creation 75). The Creator handed over to the heavenly powers the creation of human beings: 'he allowed his subject powers to have the fashioning of somethings' (Tongues 175; also Flight 68-70)].

Other parallels in the Hebrew Scriptures are equally remarkable. Deutero-Isaiah, at a time when the older system was being superseded, denied that such gods existed: 'Tell us what is to come hereafter that we may know you are gods... Behold you are nothing...' (Isa.41.21-

---

<sup>119</sup> M.Hengel *Judaism and Hellenism* ET London 1974, vol 1.pp162-3; Runia op cit. n.4. pp.207-207

24). When Adam had eaten from the forbidden tree, the Lord, the Second God, addressing we know not whom, said 'The man has become like one of us...' (Gen.3.22). The other gods were known to the Hebrew storytellers. Psalm 82, however, reflecting the older beliefs, describes another scene in the life of the gods and shows that they had been responsible for the affairs of the earth, just as in the Timaeus. They had failed in their duties of justice and care, and so they were to be punished. 'You are gods, sons of the Most High all of you. Nevertheless you shall die like a man, and like one of the princes you shall fall.' (Ps.82.6-7, my translation), words echoed in the Timaeus. Psalm 58 describes the failures of these gods on earth and includes their victims' prayer that God would destroy them, not unlike the supplications described in 1 Enoch : 'The souls of men make their suit to the holy ones of heaven saying bring our cause before the Most High' (1 En.9. 3). As in the Timaeus, the immortality of the gods could be revoked. The bond of the eternal covenant which held the creation together could be destroyed: Isaiah's vision of the collapse of the created order is proof of this (Isa.24.4-5), and Jeremiah's assurance that the eternal covenant was secure and would never be revoked shows that this was an issue in the period of the exile (Jer.31.35-36). The promise to Noah, that the eternal covenant *with all flesh* was secure for all future generations, was itself a product of the crisis of the exile, after the destruction of the first temple (Gen. 9.12-17).

It is clear that two Hebrew texts from the sixth century BCE have much in common with the Timaeus and with the teaching of Pythagoras. Ezekiel described a fourfold Living creature who held all life, whom he saw set in a ring within a ring. In his vision, he distinguished between the forms and their appearances. He also described an angel high priest who was the seal of perfection/proportion, and had been the anointed/measuring cherub in the mountain garden of the gods. Deutero-Isaiah (Isa.40.12-26), issuing a challenge to unknown opponents, described the Lord as the Creator who measured the waters, the heavens and the earth - no mention of creating the mortals of air, water and land - a Creator who had no likeness, who brought out the host of heaven by number and sat above the circle of the earth. The prophet mocked those who made an image that did not move. He also depicted the Lord challenging the gods and declaring that they were nothing (Isa.41.21-24).

The similarities between Pythagoras, Timaeus and texts such as these are remarkable and, given the traditional dates for the Greek philosophers and the Hebrew prophets, cannot be coincidence. There are two possibilities: either the Hebrew Scriptures are to be dated so late that visions and oracles attributed to Ezekiel and poetry attributed to Deutero-Isaiah, could have been influenced by Pythagorean philosophy from Italy; or there is truth in the later tradition that Pythagoras spent time in Syria in his youth, during the lifetime of Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah, and while there had contact with the people who shared their world view. Clearly there were other influences into the Timaeus, there being, for example, no point of contact in the Hebrew tradition for the belief that humans could be reincarnated as animals (Tim.42c). The dominant mythology and theology, however, correspond to that of the Older Testament, which has been reconstructed independently of any of the Pythagorean or Platonic texts. It seems that the Pythagorean tradition is another route back to the ancient high priesthood. The similarities between the Essenes and the Pythagoreans, and the natural

affinity between Christianity and Platonism would have been due to their common origin in the first temple.