



# THE IMAGE OF JACOB ENGRAVED UPON THE THRONE: FURTHER REFLECTION ON THE ESOTERIC DOCTRINE OF THE GERMAN PIETISTS

Verily, at this time that which was hidden has been revealed  
because forgetfulness has reached its final limit;  
the end of forgetfulness is the beginning of remembrance.

—Abraham Abulafia, *ʿOr ha-Sekhel*, MS Munich, Bayerische  
Staatsbibliothek 92, fol. 59b



One of the most interesting motifs in the world of classical rabbinic aggadah is that of the image of Jacob engraved on the throne of glory. My intention in this chapter is to examine in detail the utilization of this motif in the rich and varied literature of Eleazar ben Judah of Worms, the leading literary exponent of the esoteric and mystical pietism cultivated by the Kalonymide circle of German Pietists in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The first part of the chapter will investigate the ancient traditions connected to this motif as they appear in sources from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages in order to establish the basis for the distinctive understanding that evolves in the main circle of German Pietists to be discussed in the second part.

As I will argue in detail later, the motif of the image of Jacob has a special significance in the theosophy of the German Pietists, particularly as it is expounded in the case of Eleazar. The amount of attention paid by previous scholarship to this theme is disproportionate in relation to

the central place that it occupies in the esoteric ruminations of the Kalonymide Pietists.<sup>1</sup> From several passages in the writings of Eleazar it is clear that the motif of the image of Jacob is covered and cloaked in utter secrecy. I will mention here two of the more striking examples that illustrate my point: in his commentary on the liturgy Eleazar concludes a section in which he discusses several issues related to this image with the assertion *'ein lefaresh yoter*, "the matter cannot be further explained."<sup>2</sup> In a second passage from a text that is essentially a commentary on the *'Amidah*, the traditional standing prayer of eighteen benedictions, Eleazar again mentions the image of Jacob engraved on the throne and quickly notes: *we-'ein lefaresh ha-kol ki 'im be-'al peh la-'ish ha-yare' bor'o be-khol 'et*, "the matter cannot be fully explained except orally to one who fears his Creator at all times."<sup>3</sup> The reluctance on the part of Eleazar to disclose matters pertaining to the motif of the image of Jacob is not something incidental or inconsequential. On the contrary, I assume that there is a profound secret here that may provide the scholar with an important key with which to discern the esoteric doctrine of the German Pietistic theosophy. A precise textual analysis should enable us to uncover this secret.

The thesis that I put forth here is that in the circle of Judah the Pious—as is known in particular from the writings of Eleazar of Worms—there was transmitted an esoteric doctrine predicated on bisexuality in the divine realm. As Alexander Altmann,<sup>4</sup> Joseph Dan,<sup>5</sup> and more recently Asi Farber,<sup>6</sup> have already noted, in the composition entitled the "Secret of the Nut" (*sod ha-'egoz*), contained in Ashkenazi sources, a composition that according to all three scholars preserves an older esoteric tradition of *merkavah* speculation, the nut that symbolizes the divine chariot is described in bisexual images. More specifically, the bisexuality was expressed in terms of the symbolism of the nut depicting the structure of the chariot, in the description of the throne itself, as well as in the distinction between the *hashmal* and *hashmalah* (scripturally, the two are identical in meaning—the word *hashmal* appears in Ezekiel 1:4 and 27, and *hashmalah* in 8:2—but in the various recensions of the *sod ha-'egoz* text and the Pietistic literature influenced by it, they are two distinct entities).<sup>7</sup> Farber suggested that the origin of this sexual symbolism is not to be sought in the Ashkenazi reworking of the composition, but in the "ancient proto-kabbalistic form of the secret" that circulated from the Orient.<sup>8</sup> Rather than adding these sexual images to the secret of the nut, the Pietists weakened or actually removed them by altering the text. Farber thus takes issue with Dan's hypothesis that the Pietists themselves added these sexual references to the received texts, a hypothesis that stands in marked contrast, as Dan himself acknowledges, with his view that

Pietistic theosophy is to be distinguished from kabbalistic on the grounds that they did not advocate a male-female polarity within the divine.<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding the obvious tendency on the part of the Pietists to minimize or even obscure the sexual nature of these images,<sup>10</sup> a careful reading of their writings shows that there are veiled allusions to the bisexual nature of the throne world.<sup>11</sup> According to Farber, therefore, we must distinguish between the “exoteric” side of the Pietistic theology that attempted to attenuate or even suppress sexual images and the “esoteric” side that described aspects of the divine world in overtly sexual terms. This esoteric aspect was not fully committed to writing but was transmitted orally from master to disciple.<sup>12</sup> Another illustration of the esoteric side of the Pietistic theology, also related to the bisexual nature of the glory, can be found in the use of the aggadic motif of the image of Jacob engraved upon the throne in the writings of Eleazar of Worms.

More precisely, the thesis that I propose to demonstrate is that the relation between the upper and the lower glory according to the esoteric theology of the German Pietists must be understood in terms of the union of male and female potencies. I will set out to show, moreover, that for the Pietists the lower of these potencies—identified as the cherub in the theosophic texts attributed to Judah and the compositions of Eleazar and as the image of Jacob engraved on the throne by Eleazar—is itself equated with the union of two cherubim that correspond to the divine names (YHWH and Adonai) and the two attributes (mercy and judgment); through a complicated numerological exegesis (discussed later) the two names are said to comprise the 613 commandments or the Torah in its totality. The Pietists draw the obvious theurgical implications: by performing the 613 commandments one unites the two names within the lower glory, an act that prepares it for its union with the upper glory.<sup>13</sup> This implies that in the esoteric doctrine of the German Pietists one can find an exact parallel to two of the cornerstones of theosophical kabbalah: mythologization of the divine realm as male and female, on the one hand, and the theurgical understanding of the commandments, on the other.<sup>14</sup> This doctrine, in my opinion, must be viewed as part of the truly “esoteric” teaching cultivated by Judah and Eleazar and their followers, that can be reconstructed from the texts largely buried in manuscripts. To be sure, the Pietists were extremely cautious about disclosing these matters in print. Yet, once disclosed it can be seen that this theosophic doctrine may provide the ideational basis for the pietistic worldview including notions of the divine will,<sup>15</sup> divine love,<sup>16</sup> communion with God (*devequt*),<sup>17</sup> performance of the *mišwot*,<sup>18</sup> especially prayer,<sup>19</sup> and the subjugation of sexual desire.<sup>20</sup> These are matters that lie outside my

immediate concern, but it is clear to me on the basis of my research that one could fruitfully re-examine the whole question of the relationship between theosophy and pietism in the case of the Ḥaside Ashkenaz. Finally, it is evident that in contrast to the theosophic kabbalah that developed in Provence and northern Spain, the bisexual nature of the glory in the religious thought of the Pietists remains in the realm of the esoteric in the exact sense of the term, that is, something that cannot be disclosed in writing to the populace. Even so, the assumption that the divine world in the writings of the German Pietists comprises masculine and feminine elements, and that the task of every Jew is to unite the two names of God that correspond to the divine attributes or the two glories, brings their secret teaching into close proximity to the orientation of the kabbalists, a view that has been affirmed by a number of contemporary scholars.<sup>21</sup>

## II

The motif of Jacob's image engraved on the throne is mentioned in Targum Yerushalmi to Genesis 28:12,<sup>22</sup> and in slightly different terminology in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on the same verse.<sup>23</sup> According to the targumic rendering, the angels who accompanied Jacob ascended to notify the angels above that Jacob, whose icon (ʿiqonin) was engraved on the throne, was below; the angels thus descended to have a look at the earthly Jacob. The midrashic elaboration in the targumim thus provides a motivation for the angels' movement as well as an explanation for the strange locution, "ascending and descending." The same motif appears in *Genesis Rabbah* 68:12<sup>24</sup> and in B. Hullin 91b. In both of these sources the matter is placed in the context of another well-known motif regarding the enmity or envy of the angels toward human beings.<sup>25</sup> That is, according to the statements in *Genesis Rabbah* and B. Hullin, the angels, who beheld Jacob's image above, were jealous and sought to harm Jacob below. The influence of the talmudic reworking of this motif is apparent in several later midrashic sources as well.<sup>26</sup>

The specific background of this image is not entirely clear.<sup>27</sup> Some scholars have suggested that Jacob represents primordial Adam and hence the icon engraved on the throne is to be construed as the universal image of humanity.<sup>28</sup> Other scholars have intimated that the aggadic image of Jacob engraved on the throne is connected with speculation on the demiurgic angel or the Logos as it appears in Philo (one of the standard names for the Philonic Logos is Israel, the firstborn of God<sup>29</sup>) or the fragment of the Jewish apocryphal text, *Prayer of*

*Joseph*, cited by the church father, Origen.<sup>30</sup> The notion of an angel named Jacob-Israel is also known from Jewish Christian texts, as reported mainly by Justin,<sup>31</sup> and appears as well in Gnostic works such as the Nag Hammadi treatise *On the Origin of the World*,<sup>32</sup> and in Manichean texts.<sup>33</sup> Such a tradition, perhaps through the intermediary of Philo, passed into Christian sources wherein the celestial Jacob or Israel was identified with Jesus who is depicted as the Logos and Son of God.<sup>34</sup> A reference to the demiurgic quality of Jacob may be found in the following comment in *Genesis Rabbah* 98:3 on the verse, "Hearken to Israel your father" (*we-shim'u 'el yisra'el 'avikhem* [Gen. 49:3]). According to R. Yudan the verse should be recast as "hearken to the God of Israel your father" (*shim'u le-'el yisra'el 'avikhem*), but an even more daring reading is proposed by R. Pinehas: *'el hu' yisra'el 'avikhem*, that is, Israel your father is a God, for "just as the Holy One, blessed be He, creates worlds so too your father creates worlds, just as the Holy One, blessed be He, divides the worlds so too your father divides the worlds."<sup>35</sup> The demiurgic role accorded Jacob is highlighted as well in a passage from another midrashic collection: "But now thus said the Lord—Who created you, O Jacob, Who formed you, O Israel' (Isa. 43:1): R. Pinehas said in the name of R. Reuben: the Holy One, blessed be He, said to His world, My world, My world, who created you and who formed you? Jacob created you and Israel formed you, as it is written, 'Who created you, O Jacob, Who formed you, O Israel.'"<sup>36</sup> From another passage in *Genesis Rabbah* 78:3 it is clear that the image of Jacob is a divine or at the very least an angelic power. In this context the expression *sarita* in the verse, *ki sarita 'im 'elohim*, "for you have striven with divine beings" (Gen. 32:28), is thought to be derived from the word *serarah* (rule, authority or dominion). According to the midrashic reading of the verse, therefore, Jacob is an archon (*sar*) together with God, and thus his image is engraved above on the throne.<sup>37</sup> Simply put, this verse is understood by the anonymous midrashist as imparting information about the apotheosis or divinization of Jacob. Interestingly enough, evidence for such a reading of the verse is found as well in Jerome's commentary on Genesis: "Sarith enim, quod ab Israel vocabulo derivatur, principium sonat. Sensus itaque est: Non vocabitur nomen tuum supplantator, hoc est, Jacob; sed vocabitur nomen tuum princeps cum Deo, hoc est, Israel."<sup>38</sup> Support for my interpretation of the *demut ya'aqov* motif is found in a passage attributed to R. Joshua ben Naḥman in *Lamentations Rabbah* 2:2, commenting on the verse, *hishlikh mi-shamayim 'areš tif'eret yisra'el*, "He cast down from heaven to earth the majesty of Israel" (Lam. 2:1).<sup>39</sup> In that context the image of Jacob engraved on the throne is named on the basis of the verse just cited *tif'eret yisra'el*

and is compared parabolically to a king's crown (*‘aṭarah*).<sup>40</sup> This image was transformed, as we shall see, in Eleazar's writings from a literary motif to a theosophic symbol.

Other aggadic passages could be quoted to prove the point that in the rabbinic tradition, especially as expressed in Palestinian amoraic sources, Jacob was treated as a divine or angelic being. Thus, for example, in an aggadic statement attributed to R. Berachiah in the name of R. Simon the name Jeshurun in Deuteronomy 33:26 is interpreted as a reference to *yisra'el sabba'*, Israel the elder, that is, Jacob, thus prompting a comparison (supported by relevant scriptural texts) of God and Jacob.<sup>41</sup> An even bolder reading of this verse in another midrashic setting emphasizes the angelic or divine status of Israel-Jeshurun: "There is none like God, O Jeshurun': Israel says, there is none like God, and the Holy Spirit responds, except Jeshurun."<sup>42</sup> As Michael Fishbane has noted, the theologoumenon preserved here in an extraordinary fashion subverts through the voice of the Holy Spirit the standard theological assertion attributed to Moses regarding the utter incomparability of God. In contrast to the seemingly normative claim of Scripture, the midrashic text affirms that there is one who is like God, namely, Jeshurun.<sup>43</sup> The divinization of Israel-Jeshurun is underscored by the semantic ambiguity of the response of the Holy Spirit, *'el yeshurun*, which, as Fishbane observed, "may be read either as an ellipsis for *'el(ah) yeshurun* ('except Jeshurun'), or as the more daring assertion, *'el yeshurun* ('Jerushun is (like) God')."<sup>44</sup> In any event, the underlying theological assumption of this pericope, like the other midrashic statement referred to above, is that Jeshurun represents the angelic Jacob who is comparable to the deity. Along similar lines in another passage we find the following interpretation of Genesis 33:20, "He set up an altar there and called it El-elohe-Yisrael": "He said to Him: You are God in relation to the beings above and I am god in relation to the beings below."<sup>45</sup> It would appear that Jacob is the one who addresses God and thus makes the analogy that just as God is the divine authority above so he is the one who rules below. However, in a baraita in B. Megillah 18a it seems that God is the one who addresses Jacob:

R. Aḥa said in the name of R. Eleazar: Whence do we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, calls Jacob "god"? As it is written, "He called him El, the God of Israel" (Gen. 33:20). If you suppose that Jacob called the altar by the name "god," then it would have been necessary to read "Jacob called it." Rather it says, "He called him," i.e., Jacob, and who called him? El, the God of Israel.



It is worth noting in passing that a variety of medieval commentators understood the midrashic passage in light of the talmudic one.<sup>46</sup> Although from a scholarly vantage point it is necessary to distinguish between these two sources, there is no doubt that in both of them one can find traces of the older myth regarding the divine or angelic status of Jacob.<sup>47</sup>

A reverberation of this aggadic tradition concerning the angelic status of Jacob is discernible in the *Hekhalot* corpus related to the celestial *hayyah* whose name is Israel.<sup>48</sup> The connection between the aggadic tradition regarding the image of Jacob engraved on the throne and the esoteric conception of an angelic creature named Jacob or Israel is evident in the *qerovah* of Yannai to Genesis 28:12,<sup>49</sup> wherein one reads an elaborate description of the angels, who surround the throne, seeing the image of Jacob and sanctifying God who is called the "Holy One of Israel" or the "God of Israel," terms that indicate the special relationship between God and the people who are symbolized by the persona of Jacob.<sup>50</sup> This notion is attested to as well in several midrashic sources of which I will here cite two examples. The first comes from a fragment of *Midrash Yelammedenu*:

Another explanation, "Behold the angels of God were ascending and descending upon it" (Gen. 28:12). From the day that the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, the angels were praising the Holy One, blessed be He, saying "Bless the Lord, God of Israel" (Ps. 41:14), but they did not know who was Israel. When Jacob reached Bet-El the angels who accompanied him ascended to heaven and said to the ministering angels, "If you wish to see the man in whose name we bless the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, descend and see that very man." The angels descended and saw his image. They said, "Certainly this is the form (*ṣurah*) and this is the image (*demut*) engraved upon the throne of glory." All of them responded and said, "Bless the Lord, God of Israel."<sup>51</sup>

The second example is from a parallel in *Numbers Rabbah*: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Jacob: 'Jacob, you have increased the glory in My eyes for, as it were, I have set your icon on My throne, and in your name the angels praise Me and say, 'Bless the Lord, God of Israel' (Ps. 41:14), 'That which is glorious in My eyes is honorable' (Isa. 43:4)."<sup>52</sup> Yannai has added to the midrashic view the idea that the angels too are called by the names Jacob and Israel. Hence, the image of Jacob simultaneously alludes to the earthly man and the heavenly angel. The same motif can be found in a host of *piyyuṭim*, for

example, the poem recited liturgically as the *yošer* for Shavuot, *ʿereš maṭah we-raʿashah* of Eleazar Qallir,<sup>53</sup> and the *qerovah* for the afternoon service on Yom Kippur, *ʿetan hikkir ʿemunotekha*, by Elijah bar Mordecai.<sup>54</sup>

In this connection it is worthwhile to note that David Halperin has called our attention to an ancient targum to Ezekiel 1:26, preserved in manuscript, that explains the reference to the “semblance of a human form” upon the throne in terms of Jacob’s image.<sup>55</sup> That is to say, according to the targumic author, the anthropomorphic glory who sits on the throne is in the image of Jacob. Put differently, the image of Jacob serves as a symbol for the human form of the glory. This notion too is clearly reflected in the *piyyuṭ* literature, for example, the *qerovah* of Qallir that begins with the words, *we-ḥayyot ʿasher henah merubba ʿot kisse*.<sup>56</sup> The *payyeṭan* mentions all the details of the chariot in the appropriate order, following the biblical text, with one striking exception: in lieu of mentioning the image of the human form on the throne, Eleazar writes: *tavnit tam yifen ḥaḡuḡah ba-kisse*.<sup>56</sup> In other words, the aggadic image of Jacob engraved upon the throne replaces the biblical image of the human form seated upon the throne.

A related but somewhat different view is enunciated in a passage from *Pirqe Rabbi ʿEliʿezer*: “The ministering angels ascended and descended upon it and they saw the face of Jacob and said, ‘This face is like the face of the creature (*ḥayyah*) that is in the throne of glory.’”<sup>57</sup> According to this text, then, the image of Jacob refers to the angelic creature that comprises all four creatures who bear the throne. An allusion to this tradition is found in the *Midrash Sekhel Ṭov* of Menaḥem bar Solomon who cites the aforementioned passage from *Genesis Rabbah* describing the icon of Jacob engraved on the throne of glory. However, in his description of the angels ascending to glance upon this icon, he diverges in one significant detail from the received text of the earlier source: “They ascended and saw the fourth creature that was in the throne of glory whose name was like his, i.e., Israel.”<sup>58</sup> Echoing this tradition, Judah ben Barzillai makes the following observation in his *Commentary on Sefer Yeširah*: “The Holy One, blessed be He, created the face of Jacob by means of a great splendor (*hadar gadol*), and it is explained in the aggadah that the face of Jacob is engraved on the throne. It is explained as well in the dream of Jacob our patriarch, with respect to the matter, ‘Behold the angels of God were ascending and descending upon it,’ that those [angels] above would descend to see the face of Jacob our patriarch, how it resembled the face of the creature that was under the throne of glory.”<sup>59</sup> A slightly different version of this tradition is found in *Midrash ʿOtiyyot de-R. ʿAqiva*: “‘And the image of their face was an image of a man’ (Ezek.



1:10), this is the image of Jacob engraved on the throne of glory."<sup>60</sup> In this passage the image of Jacob is related to the four creatures who bear the throne described collectively as the image of man. It appears that the words of this midrashic text influenced the eleventh-century exegete Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes (Rashi)<sup>61</sup> who thus described the four creatures in his commentary to Ezekiel 1:5: "'An image of a man,' this is the image of the countenance (*demut parşufo*) of Jacob our patriarch." Similarly, in his commentary to the words in B. Hullin 91b, "they looked upon his icon above," Rashi wrote: "The human countenance (*parşuf 'adam*) that is in the four creatures is in the image of Jacob." The four creatures comprise one form that is described as an image of a human in the appearance of Jacob. The relationship between this image and the glory that sits on the throne, also described as an image of an anthropos, is not sufficiently clear. It is possible, however, that underlying a particular layer of esoteric tradition is the notion that the glory interchanges with the anthropomorphic form that comprises all four creatures.<sup>62</sup>

Confirmation of this possibility is found in the teaching of the German Pietists of the Kalonymide circle. Thus, for example, one reads in the *Hilkhot ha-Merkavah* of Eleazar of Worms, which is part of his comprehensive work, *Sode Razayya*<sup>3</sup>:

Thus the prophet must see the throne of glory and upon it an angel, and of necessity the four creatures are one creature. . . . "Each one had four faces, the face of the first had the face of a cherub, the face of the second had the face of a human, the third had the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle" (Ezek. 10:14). The face of the first was the face of a cherub and the face of the second the face of a human.<sup>63</sup> The word "face" is [repeated] twice (*pene pene*) with respect to the cherub and twice with respect to the face of a human, but with respect to the face of the lion and that of the eagle [the word] "face" (*pene*) is written once, for it is written, "Let us make man in our image and in our likeness. God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him" (Gen 1:26-27). "This is the book of the generations of man on the day that God created man, in the likeness of God He made him," (ibid., 5:1) "for in the image of God He made man" (ibid., 9:6). [The word] *pene* is written four times with respect to the human and the cherub. . . . Thus there are four [occurrences of the word] "likeness" (*demut*) and twice "appearance" (*mar'eh*). . . . Corresponding to them are [the words] "in our image and

in our likeness" (*be-šalmenu ki-demutenu*), "man in His image in the image" (*ha-ʾadam be-šalmo be-šelem*). Therefore, with respect to the human face and that of the cherub [the word] *pene* [is written] four times. Therefore, Ezekiel and Daniel were called the "son of man" (*ben ʾadam*), i.e., one who knows that you have seen the image of a human (*demut ʾadam*).<sup>64</sup>

It follows that, according to Eleazar, the four creatures of the chariot are but one creature,<sup>65</sup> and the principle image of that creature is that of an anthropos or a cherub—the two are related to the same form.<sup>66</sup> Thus, in another passage Eleazar writes:

"They had the figures of human beings" (Ezek. 1:5), i.e., the essence of their appearance was that of a human, the cherub of the creatures. "They had the figures of human beings," the most cherished is their beginning, i.e., the cherished image is that of an anthropos. "The figures of human beings," their beginning is an anthropos. "The figures of human beings. However, each had four faces" (*ibid.*, 5–6), their beginning was the head, i.e., the anthropos who was the head and most important amongst them. This is [the meaning of] "in the direction in which one of the heads faced" (*ibid.*, 10:11), that is the cherub.<sup>67</sup>

The principle form of the four creatures, which collectively comprise one entity, is that of an anthropos, also identified as the cherub. Thus, in another work, commenting on the attribution of a human face to the celestial creatures who bear the throne, Eleazar writes that "the essence of their appearance was that of a human who is a cherub."<sup>68</sup> The latter is identified specifically as the singular creature (*ḥayyah*) that comprises all four creatures.<sup>69</sup> It is noteworthy that a view very similar to that of Eleazar is expressed in writings that were composed in the Pietistic circle of the Special Cherub (*ḥug ha-keruv ha-meyuḥad*).<sup>70</sup> In the case of these writings there is no doubt that the form that comprises all four creatures is identified as the cherub who sits upon the throne. I will cite here three examples that illustrate the point. The first is a passage from one of the main texts of this circle, the *Baraita of Joseph ben Uziel*:

Concerning that which is written, "Then the glory of the Lord left the platform of the House and stopped above the cherubim" (Ezek. 10:18), the glory of the Lord is the cherub, and the cherub is the creatures (*ḥayyot*), "and the glory of the God of Israel was above them, and this is the same

creature (*ḥayyah*) that I had seen below the God of Israel" (ibid., 19–20). . . . The cherubim, wheels, and all the work of the chariot are called one creature, and this creature is the cherub. Adam was created in its image and likeness, as it says, "and on top, upon this semblance of a throne, there was the semblance of a human form" (ibid., 1:26).<sup>71</sup>

The second example is taken from the *Sod ha-Sodot* of Elhanan ben Yaqar of London: "The Presence of the Lord moved from the cherub,<sup>72</sup> the creature (*ḥayyah*) is called the cherub, it is the entirety of the chariot, for the whole chariot is one creature (*kol ha-merkavah ḥayyah 'aḥat*), and there is one life force for all of them, as it says, 'for the spirit of the creatures was in the wheels' (Ezek. 1:20), and all of them are one just as the limbs of a person."<sup>73</sup> The third example is drawn from the *Sefer ha-Qomah*, the commentary on the ancient work, *Shi'ur Qomah*, composed by Moses ben Eleazar ha-Darshan,<sup>74</sup> a work that has obvious affinity to the *keruv ha-meyuḥad* material: "One creature rises above the Seraphim and that creature is the cherub . . . and the Presence has authority over the cherub."<sup>75</sup> From this passage it is evident that an ontic distinction between the divine Presence (*Shekhinah*) and the cherub is upheld, even though the latter is accorded the highest angelic status.<sup>76</sup> However, from other passages in this work the distinction is more ambiguous as the cherub is described in terms that are appropriately predicated of the Presence itself.

The cherub sits on the throne and it is the image (*demut*) of the Holy One, blessed be He, as long as His shadow is upon him, and this is [the import of] what is said, "in the hands of the prophet I was imaged" (Hosea 12:11). . . . This is the cherub that changes and is seen in all these aspects.<sup>77</sup>

Concerning the cherub it is said, "Your stately form is like the palm" (Song of Songs 7:8), the *a"t ba"sh* [of the expression, "like the palm," *damtah le-tamar*] is numerically equal to [the expression] *ha-keruv*.<sup>78</sup> . . . And that which is written, "Great is our Lord and full of strength" (Ps. 147:5), ["full of strength," *we-rav koah*, equals 236 which stands for one of the standard measurements of the Creator in the *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition] and this is the cherub. [The expression] *we-rav koah* has the letters of *keruv*. . . . This cherub is called in the Torah the Lord and the one.<sup>79</sup> Thus one must say that this cherub appeared to the prophets. Having proven that the cherub appeared to the prophets, it must be said that the glory of God is the cherub, as it says,

“the glory of the Lord [appeared in a cloud]” (Exod. 16:10), i.e., [the word] *nir’ah* (“appeared”) is numerically *zeh ha-keruv* (“this is the cherub”),<sup>80</sup> as it says, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter” (Prov. 25:2), one must conceal it and not reveal it except to the modest.<sup>81</sup>

According to these passages, in marked contrast to the former, the cherub is identified with the Presence or glory, at the very least in its visible aspect upon the throne. Let me mention yet another passage in this work wherein one may discern some effort to harmonize the two positions without, however, completely obliterating the distinction between the angelic cherub and the divine glory: “It is always called a cherub when there is not an abundance of the emanation of the Presence (*hamshakhat ha-shekhinah*) upon it, even though all is one. Therefore, it is called ‘king of all kings’ (*melekh malkhe hamelakhim*), for it enthrones kings like the angel of the countenance (*sar ha-panim*), Moses our master, and his disciples, i.e., prophets who were like him, for the Presence rested upon the angel of the countenance and the prophets, and through his influence it enthroned them, but God forbid that the children should be like the father.”<sup>82</sup>

In the passages from Eleazar that I have cited above, the image of Jacob was not mentioned at all, but in other places in his writings he does mention this motif explicitly in conjunction with the four creatures who bear the throne. Thus, for example, in his commentary on Ezekiel’s chariot he writes:

“Each of them had a human face” (Ezek. 1:10), this is the face of Jacob. . . . An archon from the supernal archons wrestled with him and Jacob prevailed.<sup>83</sup> . . . Therefore he was placed first in the verse, “Each of them had a human face,” *u-demut penehem pene ’adam*, which is numerically equal to “and they had the image of the face of Jacob,” *u-videmut pene ya’aqov hem*.<sup>84</sup> And the final letters [of *u-demut penehem pene ’adam*] are *tamim* on account of Jacob, the “mild man,” *’ish tam* (Gen. 25:27).<sup>85</sup>

In another work of Eleazar we find the following passage that parallels the one just cited:

“Each of them had a human face” (Ezek. 1:10), for the man is the most glorious of all countenances since he rules over them all. . . . He created Adam two-faced (*du-parşufin*) and the male went first. So too the human face, which is the essence, goes first for the human image is the image of Jacob. . . . Therefore it comes first in the verse *u-demut*

*penehem pene* 'adam, the final letters are *tamim* on account of Jacob, the "mild man," 'ish *tam*. [The expression] *u-demut penehem pene* 'adam numerically equals *u-vi-demut pene ya* 'aqov *hem*.<sup>86</sup>

The appearance of the anthropoid creature that comprised the four celestial creatures of the chariot is that of Jacob. Indeed, the creatures constitute the heavenly Jacob. A brief allusion to this motif is discernible in one of Eleazar's liturgical poems wherein the divine voice proclaims: *ga* 'awati *le-tif* 'arti *yisra* 'el *menashsheq be-* 'orah/*demut pene* 'adam *meḥabbeq le-to* 'arah.<sup>87</sup> The word *ga* 'awah, grandeur, reflects more specifically the use of this term in older Jewish esoteric literature where it connotes the luminous form of the enthroned glory.<sup>88</sup> Hence, Eleazar poetically conveys the image of the divine form kissing the illuminated splendor of Israel. *Prima facie*, it may seem that the latter expression simply refers to the mundane community of Israel.<sup>89</sup> From the continuation of the poem, however, it is evident that the "majesty of Israel," *tif* 'eret *yisra* 'el, is a technical designation of the form (*to* 'ar) that has the appearance of a human. In this context, therefore, as in the passage from *Lamentations Rabbah* mentioned above, the biblical expression "majesty of Israel" is transformed into a symbol for the icon of Jacob engraved on the throne.<sup>90</sup> The double image of kissing (*menashsheq*) and hugging (*meḥabbeq*) reflects the particular locution of a passage in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, discussed below, wherein the glory is said to embrace (*megappet*), fondle (*meḥabbeq*), and kiss (*menashsheq*) the visage of Jacob engraved on the throne at the time that Israel below utters the Trisagion (Isa. 6:3) in prayer.<sup>91</sup> Support for my interpretation may be gathered from another passage from Eleazar that is an exegesis of the verse, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me" (Song of Songs 7:11): "This is to teach that the desire of the chariot (*ma* 'aseh *merkavah*) is upon the image of Israel (*demut yisra* 'el), and this is what is written 'upon Israel is His grandeur,' 'al *yisra* 'el *ga* 'awato (Ps. 68:35)."<sup>92</sup> From the context it is clear that the expression *ma* 'aseh *merkavah* is employed here in a rather unconventional way as a designation of the divine glory that is enthroned upon the chariot;<sup>93</sup> I have therefore rendered it simply as the "chariot" rather than the more literal translation "work of the chariot." It seems, moreover, that the *demut yisra* 'el, the image of Israel towards whom the desire of the glory is directed, is the icon of Jacob engraved on the throne.<sup>94</sup> The erotic passion conveyed in the verse from Song of Songs is alluded to as well in the liturgical refrain, "upon Israel is His grandeur," that is, the grandeur, *ga* 'awah, is synonymous with *ma* 'aseh *merkavah*, the enthroned glory, and Israel is a

shortened way of referring to the image of Israel, *demut yisra'el*, the iconic representation of Jacob upon the throne that represents the anthropomorphic form of the angelic creatures. In the following section I will deal at much greater length with the meaning of the icon of Jacob in the esoteric teaching of Eleazar and the particular nuance of the aforementioned erotic imagery. Suffice it here to say that, for Eleazar, the four creatures constitute one creature that is in appearance like Jacob and thus may be identified as the iconic form of Jacob engraved on the throne.

The theosophic implications of Eleazar's thought are drawn out and elaborated upon in the commentary on Ezekiel's chariot by Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen of Castile, a text whose literary dependence upon the commentary of Eleazar has been well noted in scholarly literature<sup>95</sup>: "The four creatures are one creature that is divided into four, and it is the creature whose name is Israel on account of the face of Jacob engraved in it, for his name was Israel."<sup>96</sup> In another composition, the *Perush ha-'Otiyyot*, Jacob alludes to the identification of the image of Jacob and the heavenly creature whose name is Israel: "The name of the one creature that is in the four creatures is Israel and it is in the image of the icon of Jacob, our patriarch, peace be upon him, as it says, 'Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel etc.' (Gen. 32:29)."<sup>97</sup> In another passage from this work the matter is reiterated: "The head of the holy creatures is in the image of the icon of Jacob, our patriarch, peace be upon him, for he was the head of the creatures of the chariot."<sup>98</sup> As will be explained more fully below, the theosophic recasting of the esoteric tradition preserved in the Ashkenazi material entails that the creature whose name is Israel is identified with the image of Jacob, the lower glory in relation to the attribute of *Tif'eret*, which is the upper glory. It emerges from the texts of Jacob ha-Kohen that the creature divided into four creatures is the glory that is below in the world of angels corresponding to the divine gradation that is the glory above in the sefirotic pleroma.

The words of Jacob are repeated, albeit in slightly different language, in the *Sefer ha-'Orah* of his student, Moses of Burgos: "The four creatures are one creature that is divided into four, and this is the creature whose name is *Tif'eret Yisra'el* on account of the fact that the face of Jacob, whose name was Israel, is engraved in it."<sup>99</sup> A parallel version to that of Jacob ha-Kohen is also found in an anonymous commentary on the tenth chapter of Ezekiel called *Sod ha-Merkavah ha-Sheniyyah*, that apparently was composed by a participant in the circle of Jacob and Isaac ha-Kohen<sup>100</sup>: "That which he mentioned in the four creatures that he saw in each appearance the form of an anthropos refers to the small countenance (*'appe zutre*), and this is the icon of



Jacob engraved in the four holy creatures, concerning whom it says, 'How will Jacob survive? He is so small (*qaṭon*)' (Amos 7:2). However, the upper glory (*ha-kavod ha-elyon*) that stands upon the throne, the great majesty (*ha-yaqar ha-gadol*) that is the large countenance (*'appe ravreve*), is not seen by the *hashmal*, angel, seraph, or even the throne."<sup>101</sup> This passage is based on Eleazar's commentary on the chariot, which is discussed below in more detail. In the theosophic setting of the kabbalistic reworking of the Pietistic work, the image of Jacob, which is the form of the anthropos that comprises the four celestial creatures,<sup>102</sup> is the lower glory that parallels the upper glory or the sixth emanation, *Tif'eret*. Utilizing the distinction attributed to R. Papa in B. Ḥagigah 13b between the face of the cherub (*pene keruv*) that is the small countenance (*'appe zuṭre*) and the face of an anthropos (*pene 'adam*) that is the large countenance (*'appe ravreve*),<sup>103</sup> this author implies that the lower glory is the cherub and the upper glory the human form. The matter is expressed more clearly in a second passage: "Just as in the supernal chariot [i.e., the sefirotic realm] there is the image of the four creatures and the image of Jacob amongst them . . . the large countenance, so this great light passes with increased might at the end of the splendor [*sof zohar*, i.e., the last emanation or the *Shekhinah*] until from that great light and mighty splendor is made the image of the second chariot in the likeness of the four creatures, and He created there the small countenance, the icon of Jacob, the mild man."<sup>104</sup>

It is worthwhile to cite in this context a tradition that appears in one of the recensions of *Sefer ha-Iyyun*, the thirteenth-century pseudepigraphic work of mystical contemplation<sup>105</sup>: "Afterwards the Holy One, blessed be He, created an image using the four primal elements,<sup>106</sup> like the image of a real man. These are the four camps of the Divine Presence. They are: Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael."<sup>107</sup> In her discussion of this passage, Farber suggested that perhaps there is an identification here of the angelic creatures and the glory or the body of the Presence (*guf ha-shekhinah*) mentioned immediately preceding the aforesaid text.<sup>108</sup> An alternative interpretation is offered by Moshe Idel who suggested that in this passage the expression "body of the Presence" refers not to the four angelic camps, but rather to the seven archangels who are also called "soul" (*neshamah*) in relation to God who is the "soul of the soul" (*neshamah la-neshamah*).<sup>109</sup> According to this explanation, the image of the Presence (*demut ha-shekhinah*) is not the glory itself but rather an angelic form in the structure of an anthropos made up of eight angels, the lower seven constituting the body, and the eighth one the head.<sup>110</sup> The relation between the body of the Presence and the image that comprises the four camps is that of

the body to the soul as is attested by a version of *Sefer ha-Iyyun*, apparently deriving from Moses of Burgos<sup>111</sup>: "The Holy One, blessed be He, created an image in the form of the four elements, for the Presence is in them like a soul and they are in the image of a body, the image of an anthropos, and they are the four camps of the Presence. They are: Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael."<sup>112</sup> Confirmation of this understanding, as both Farber and Idel noted,<sup>113</sup> can be found in the commentary of Moses of Burgos to the chariot-vision of Ezekiel: "Four camps of angels . . . [they are] spiritual bodies . . . in the image of a spiritual anthropos. . . . The four camps are in the image of spiritual bodies and the [*Shekhinah*] is in the image of a soul within the body."<sup>114</sup> The same viewpoint appears in zoharic literature. Thus, for example, one reads in the following passage:

These four creatures are contained one within the other for they correspond to the four directions. . . . When they are contained one within the other one body is made from them, and this is the secret that is called Adam. Several different types of [angelic] camps go out from those that are the inner secret in relation to the Point<sup>115</sup> that stands upon them. Adam: male and female. The letter that is the secret of the male is the letter *nun*, the secret of Adam in his perfection, and this letter rules over the Point, which is a *dalet*, above the four creatures. . . . When they looked momentarily it is written, "Each of them had a human face" (Ezek. 1:10), and afterwards the image of each one separated in accordance with its quality. When they all hid so that they would not look above within the secret that was upon them, no image was seen at all except the image of an anthropos, the image that comprises all images.<sup>116</sup>

A similar tradition regarding the four angels in the image of an anthropos is mentioned in the introduction to *Tiqqune Zohar*. However, in that context the anonymous author connects the anthropomorphic image in the angelic world specifically to Meṭaṭron who is described as the body of the Presence<sup>117</sup>:

The lower Presence . . . her chariot is Meṭaṭron, the body of the Presence. The Presence is [designated by the word] *mah*<sup>118</sup> . . . her chariot is Meṭaṭron. Concerning him it is said, "God's chariots are myriads upon myriads, thousands upon thousands" (Ps. 68:18). What is [the meaning of] "thousands," *shin 'an*? [This is an acrostic for the four creatures] ox (*shor*), eagle (*nesher*), lion (<sup>2</sup>*aryeh*), and human (<sup>2</sup>*adam*).<sup>119</sup> This is the secret of the chariot (*merkavah*), *rekhev mah*<sup>120</sup> precisely.<sup>121</sup>

It is difficult to decide definitively if this matter reached the kabbalists from ancient sources preserving an older form of theosophic speculation according to which Meṭaṭron was identified as the divine chariot inasmuch as he comprised all four living creatures or even represented the enthroned glory itself. In any event, the fact that one stream of tradition connects the image of Jacob with the glory, and a second stream connects that image with the creatures that bear the throne, in my view strengthens the supposition that the kabbalists were elaborating in novel ways upon an ancient tradition concerning the anthropomorphic form of the chariot.

It is important for our discussion to note that, according to the targumic author cited by Halperin, the motif of the image of Jacob is mentioned in the context of the chariot-vision of Ezekiel, whereas in the other sources discussed above it is connected with Jacob's dream-vision of the ladder.<sup>122</sup> Interestingly enough, in one of the major textual units of the corpus of mystical speculation on the chariot, the *Hekhalot* literature, the ladder becomes a clear symbol for the ascent to the chariot. Thus, in a key passage in *Hekhalot Rabbati* we read that the one who is free from the cardinal sins of idolatry, lewdness, bloodshed, slander, false oaths, profanation of the divine name, impudence, and baseless hatred, and who observes all of the ritual proscriptions and prohibitions, is worthy to ascend to the chariot "to gaze upon the King and His glorious throne," and such a person is like "a man who has a ladder in his house."<sup>123</sup> The possibility that the ladder mentioned here is related to the ladder of Jacob is strengthened, in my opinion, by a second passage in *Hekhalot Rabbati* wherein the descent of the angels to the world and their ascent back to heaven is described in terms reminiscent of the image of the angels descending and ascending upon Jacob's ladder.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, in a later text, the *Sefer ha-'Orah* of Moses of Burgos, the author cites a passage in the name of his teacher, Jacob ha-Kohen, concerning the throne and the world of the chariot. *Inter alia*, Jacob ha-Kohen describes the angels in terms reflecting the aforementioned text in *Hekhalot Rabbati*: "They ascend upon the ladder of the streams of fire, one with the permission of the other . . . until they reach the hosts of 'Aravot."<sup>125</sup> The connection between the ladder of Jacob and the chariot figures prominently in a tradition that appears in one of the Pietistic compositions that Dan attributed to Judah the Pious<sup>126</sup>:

There are angels who are not worthy to see the body of the chariot, but sometimes there is an illumination below like the sun that shines by way of a window as a pillar, so there are visions upon the river<sup>127</sup> and the stream. So it was in the case of Jacob, our patriarch, for an opening corresponding

to the chariot was opened, facing the throne of glory, and there was an illumination of the visions from heaven to earth, referred to as the "ladder that was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky" (Gen. 28:12).<sup>128</sup>

This passage attests that in the circle of Judah the Pious there was a tradition that assumed that the ladder beheld by Jacob referred to an illumination that shone upon him from an opening before the throne of glory. This illumination is described as a ladder connecting heaven and earth, for by means of it Jacob saw what he did in the world of the chariot. There is also an allusion in this passage to a technique known from other Pietistic sources that involved a body of water as a medium of visualization.<sup>129</sup> That is, the illumination cast from above and beheld below is comparable to a vision of something as reflected in a river or stream. Jacob's vision of the chariot was an indirect one. No mention is made here of the image of Jacob engraved on the throne, although it is reasonable to assume that underlying this passage is some such motif; that is, Jacob is granted a vision of the chariot that is described as the ladder set on the ground and whose head reached the heavens. The link that connects heaven and earth is Jacob, for he is in both places insofar as he is below but his image is engraved above. In a passage from Eleazar of Worms' comprehensive compendium of esoteric and mystical secrets, *Sode Razayya*,<sup>3</sup> cited by Nathan Naṭa ben Solomon Spira in his *Megalleh 'Amuqot*, one can discern a further development of the aggadic motif such that Jacob is himself the ladder: "From the earth to the throne of glory above there are twenty-two matters . . . and this is what is written, 'he lay down in that place' (Gen. 28:11), read in it [a reference to] twenty-two [*kaf-bet* in the word *wa-yishkav*, he lay down] in that place, from the image of Jacob below to the image of Jacob on the throne, for 'its top reached the sky,' for there were twenty-two steps."<sup>130</sup> Another and earlier example for this development, that indeed may have influenced Eleazar's formulation, may be found in the *Midrash Leqaḥ Tov* of Tobias ben Eliezer: "'A ladder was set on the ground,' this refers to Jacob our patriarch himself, 'and its top reached the sky,' for the image of his icon was engraved on the throne of glory."<sup>131</sup>

To review the evidence that has been examined up to this point, in the earliest sources the motif of the icon of Jacob engraved on the throne may have been related to the hypostatization of the Logos. The appropriateness of the persona of Jacob to represent the Logos is due to a merging of two factors: first, this biblical patriarch, the ideal Israel, symbolically and typologically replaces Adam; and, second, the Logos is typically portrayed as the macroanthropos. It is thus entirely

plausible that the adamic figure of Jacob should symbolize the Logos. Moreover, in some of the relevant sources I have uncovered another stream of tradition according to which the icon of Jacob is identified as the angelic creature that has the face of a human and comprises all four creatures who bear the throne. It is possible that the celestial image of Jacob is a mythic portrayal of the demiurgic angel who is most commonly referred to as Meṭaṭron in Jewish esoteric sources.<sup>132</sup> In this connection it is of interest to mention a tradition expressed in a later mystical treatise, a commentary on the seventy-two-letter name of God, apparently from the circle of *Sefer ha-Temunah*,<sup>133</sup> the text has been printed in *Sefer Razi'el* and is extant in several manuscripts.<sup>134</sup> In one passage reference is made to the "palace of Meṭaṭron" described further as the "pure intellect that overflows to the soul of the innocent, pure, and perfect man."<sup>135</sup> The pure intellect obviously alludes to the Active Intellect that is the supernal anthropos as is explicitly mentioned in another passage from that very text. The identification of Meṭaṭron and the Active Intellect is known from many sources—both philosophical and mystical—written in the High Middle Ages.<sup>136</sup> In the text that I am presently discussing the anonymous author identifies the palace of the intellects, which are angelic beings, and the supernal world. Yet above that world is another realm of existence referred to by the technical rabbinic eschatological term, the world-to-come, which is also identified as the "palace of Jacob, the palace of Meṭaṭron, for the souls of the righteous from the lower world come there. Meṭaṭron is the Active Intellect, and this is the power of Shaddai,<sup>137</sup> everything is one power."<sup>138</sup> From here it may be inferred that Jacob is identified with Meṭaṭron who is the Active Intellect. Even though the author employs standard medieval philosophical terminology, it is reasonable to assume that there is an echo here of an ancient tradition based on the identification of the heavenly Jacob and Meṭaṭron who stands in the position of the Logos or the divine Intellect depicted mythically as the supernal anthropos. In the text under discussion there is no mention of the image of Jacob engraved upon the throne. However, the connection between the image of Jacob and Meṭaṭron is alluded to in a passage that apparently belongs to the older *Hekhalot* literature copied by Aaron ben Yeḥiel in his book, *Qorban 'Aharon*, from a manuscript of the commentary on liturgical poems by Eliezer ben Nathan of Mainz in the possession of Ephraim Zalman Margalioṭ.<sup>139</sup> In that passage Meṭaṭron, the angel of the countenance (*sar ha-panim*), is identified as Jacob who is said to be inscribed upon the throne and upon the heart of Meṭaṭron.<sup>140</sup> One of the clearest indications of this tradition is found in the Ashkenazi Pietistic commentary on the names of Meṭaṭron extant in various manuscripts

and printed as *Sefer ha-Hesheq* in Lemberg in 1865.<sup>141</sup> Commenting on one of the names of Meṭaṭron, the anonymous Pietist writes: "חסידה is numerically equal to 'upon the throne' (בכסא, i.e., both expressions = 83), for he [Meṭaṭron] is engraved above on the throne of glory."<sup>142</sup> While the aggadic notion of Jacob's image engraved upon the throne is not mentioned here, it is obvious that precisely this theme has been appropriated by the author of this text and applied to Meṭaṭron. It is likely that such an appropriation was made possible by the fact that in the older merkavah sources, the name Israel is associated with Meṭaṭron, specifically his crown.<sup>143</sup>

In my opinion, an echo of this tradition is reflected as well in the writings of Abraham ibn Ezra when he mentions the aggadic motif of the image of Jacob engraved upon the throne. Thus, for example, in one place in his commentary on the Torah he writes: "The explanation of '[He fixed the boundaries of peoples] in relation to Israel's numbers' (Deut. 32:8): the sages, blessed be their memory, said that the form of Jacob, our patriarch, is engraved on the throne of glory, and this is a great secret. The attestation to this is 'For the Lord's portion is His people' (ibid., 9), this is the great level that 'He did not do for any other nation' (Ps. 147:20)."<sup>144</sup> Ibn Ezra notes that there is a great secret in the words of the sages, but he does not explain the content of the secret. The key to the allusion is the matter of the throne upon which the image is engraved. In the writings of ibn Ezra the term "throne" has at least two significations: it refers either to the world of the heavenly spheres in general<sup>145</sup> or to the tenth sphere in particular.<sup>146</sup> It appears to me that in the context of the aforementioned passage the throne alludes to the tenth sphere.<sup>147</sup> If this supposition is correct, then it follows that the image of Jacob engraved upon the throne should be identified as the first intellect that comprises within itself the intelligible world. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, in the philosophical thought of ibn Ezra, the first intellect in the chain of being is Meṭaṭron, also called *yoṣer bere'shit*, the demiurge.<sup>148</sup> Thus, the secret to which ibn Ezra alludes is the identification of the image of Jacob with Meṭaṭron who is the form of the intellect that stands above the tenth sphere. Whereas the governance of every nation depends upon the stars and zodiacal signs, the providence of Israel depends solely upon the very image that is the first intellect, the macroanthropos in whose image the microanthropos (represented ideally by Israel) is created.<sup>149</sup>

Further evidence for the identification of the image of Jacob as Meṭaṭron can be found in the literary corpus of Abraham Abulafia. Thus, for example, let us consider the following passage in the latter's *ʿOr ha-Sekhel*: