

ANDREI A. ORLOV

Yetzer Anthropologies
in the Apocalypse
of Abraham

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438



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Our forefather Abraham turned the evil instincts into good.
y. Ber. 9:5, 14b

God had made Abraham master of his evil inclination.
Gen. Rab. 59:7

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Preface

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Milwaukee

Feast of the Protection of the Holy Virgin, 2019

Andrei A. Orlov

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
AGAJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ArBib	Aramaic Bible
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research Series
ASTI	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CTM	Concordia Theological Monthly
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
EJL	Early Judaism and Its Literature
FS	<i>Frühmittelalterliche Studien</i>
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HTK	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IHC	Islamic History and Civilization
JAJS	Journal of Ancient Judaism. Supplements
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBT	<i>Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie</i>
JCPS	Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series
JCTCRS	Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JJTP	<i>Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JSHRZ	Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period</i>
JSJS	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period. Supplement Series
JSOTSS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series

JSPSS	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha. Supplement Series
KUSATU	<i>Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MARI	<i>Mari: Annales de Recherches Interdisciplinaires</i>
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OrSuec</i>	<i>Orientalia Suecana</i>
PVTG	Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece
RSR	<i>Recherches de Science Religieuse</i>
SAAS	State Archives of Assyria Studies
SANE	Sources from the Ancient Near East
SB	Sources bibliques
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SCL	Studies in Classical Literature
SGTK	Studien zur Geschichte der Theologie und der Kirche
SH	<i>Slavica Hierosolymitana</i>
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
SJ	Studia Judaica
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SJS	Studia Judaeoslavica
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studia patristica</i>
SPB	Studia Post-Biblica
SPHS	Scholars Press Homage Series
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
SU	Schriften des Urchristentums
SVC	Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha
TBN	Themes in Biblical Narrative
TCS	Text-Critical Studies
TED	Translations of Early Documents
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
VetTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
YJS	Yale Judaica Series
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ŻM	Żródła i monografie

Introduction

The notion of “inclination” or “*yetzer*” has often been regarded by experts as one of the most complex and misunderstood concepts of the Jewish religious tradition.¹ *Yetzer* plays an important role in the rabbinic corpus where it became “a fundamental category through which rabbis expressed their conceptions of desire, emotions, and particularly impulses to transgress their own norms.”² In some rabbinic texts, speculations about *yetzer* are closely tied to the story of the patriarch Abraham, who, according to such rabbinic traditions, was able to overcome his evil *yetzer*. Thus, *y. Ber.* 9:5 states that “our forefather Abraham turned the evil instincts into good ones.”³ In a similar vein, *Gen. Rab.* 59:7, while interpreting the biblical phrase “the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things,” conveys in the name of R. Levi that God had made Abraham master of his evil inclination.⁴ *Sif. Deut.* 33 further elaborates the patriarch’s struggle with his *yetzer* by offering the following statement:

“Upon thy heart” (Deut 11:18) – This was the source of R. Josiah’s saying: One must bind his inclination by an oath, for you find everywhere that the righteous used to bind their inclination by an oath. Concerning Abraham, Scripture says, I have lifted up my hand unto the Lord, God Most High, Maker of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread nor a shoe-latchet nor aught that is thine (Gen 14:22–23).⁵

¹ D. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 62.

² J. W. Schofer, “The Redaction of Desire: Structure and Editing of Rabbinic Teachings Concerning ‘Yeşer’ (‘Inclination’),” *JJS* 12 (2003) 19–53 at 19.

³ H. W. Guggenheimer, *The Jerusalem Talmud: First Order: Zeraïm, Tractate Berakhot* (SJ, 18; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000) 673. The same tradition is repeated in *y. Sot.* 5:7: “Our forefather Abraham turned the evil instincts into good ones. What is the reason?: ‘You found his heart trustworthy before You.’ Rabbi Aha said, he compromised, from ‘concluding a covenant with him.’ But David could not stand it and killed it in his heart.” H. W. Guggenheimer, *The Jerusalem Talmud, Third Order: Našim, Tractates Soṭah and Nedarim* (SJ, 31; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005) 237.

⁴ *Midrash Rabbah* (eds. H. Freedman and M. Simon; 10 vols.; London: Soncino, 1961) 2.520. Another rabbinic passage from *b. Baba Batra* 17a tells that “three there were over whom the evil inclination had no dominion, to wit Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, [as we know] because it is written in connection with them, in all, of all, all.” I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra* (London: Soncino, 1935–1952) 17a.

⁵ *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (tr. R. Hammer; YJS, 24; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986) 62–63. See also *Num. Rab.* 14:11: “One golden

Other rabbinic sources underline a monumental break between Abraham and previous generations, who, unlike the patriarch, were forced to succumb to their evil inclination. *Gen. Rab.* 22:6 proposes that the *yetzer* “destroyed many generations – the generation of Enosh, the generation of the Flood, and the generation of the separation [of races]. But when Abraham arose and saw how really feeble he was, he began to crush him.”⁶ Abraham’s struggle with his *yetzer* is also sometimes tied to a pivotal event of his spiritual career, when he was ordered by God to sacrifice his son Isaac. Thus, *y. Taan.* 2:4 depicts Abraham overcoming his evil *yetzer* in the midst of the Akedah:

Rebbi Bevai Abba [said] in the name of Rebbi Johanan: Abraham said before the Holy One, praise to Him: Master of the worlds, it is open and known before You that when You said to me to sacrifice my son Isaac I could have answered and said before You, yesterday You said to me, for in Isaac will your descendants be named, and now You are saying, sacrifice him as elevation offering. Heaven forbid that I should have done this, to the contrary I suppressed my inclination and did Your will.⁷

Ishay Rosen-Zvi argues that, in this passage, “the inclination to question God is marked as the advice of the *yetzer*, which Abraham successfully overcame.”⁸ He further notes that “the term ‘to overcome the *yetzer*’ marks, from the Mishnah on, one’s struggle with oneself.”⁹

Since in later rabbinic lore a person’s possession of *yetzer* is closely connected to sexual behavior and the ability of procreation, the process of “overcoming one’s *yetzer*” can be complicated. In this respect, *Gen. Rab.* 46:2 paradoxically elaborates, in the name of R. Simeon b. Lakish, that Abraham’s circumcision was in fact an attempt to invigorate his subdued *yetzer*: “Then let him be circumcised at the age of eighty-six, when Ishmael was born? Said R. Simeon b. Lakish: [God said]: ‘I will set up a cinnamon tree in the world: just as the cinnamon tree yields fruit as long as you manure and hoe around it, so [shall Abraham be] even when his blood runs sluggishly and his passions and desires have ceased.’”¹⁰

The aforementioned rabbinic passages, which develop the theme that Abraham exerted control over his *yetzer*, may represent not merely later rabbinic inventions but possibly have their early roots in Second Temple Jewish sources. For example, already in a Qumran text, known to us as the *Damascus Docu-*

pan – *kaf*. *Kaf* symbolizes Abraham who conquered (*kafaf*) his passions and stood the ten tests to which the Omnipresent subjected him.” Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 6.617.

⁶ Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 1.185.

⁷ H. W. Guggenheimer, *The Jerusalem Talmud: Second Order Mo‘ed; Tractates Ta‘aniot, Megillah, Hagigah and Mo‘ed Qatan (Mašqin)* (SJ, 85; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015) 69.

⁸ I. Rosen-Zvi, “Refuting the *Yetzer*: The Evil Inclination and the Limits of Rabbinic Discourse,” *JJTP* 17/2 (2009) 117–141 at 133.

⁹ Rosen-Zvi, “Refuting *Yetzer*,” 133.

¹⁰ Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 1.390.

ment, Abraham's role as the friend of God is connected with his ability to overcome the "thoughts of a guilty inclination (יִצְרָה)." About the patriarch, CD II 15 – III 3 says the following: "you can walk perfectly on all his paths and not allow yourselves to be attracted by the thoughts of a guilty inclination (יִצְרָה) and lascivious eyes. For many have gone astray due to these ... Abraham did not walk in it, and was counted as a friend for keeping God's precepts and not following the desire of his spirit."¹¹

This Jewish witness points to the importance of the figure of Abraham in the development of the *yetzer* speculations in early Jewish lore. The early origins of such a conceptual trend is also supported by an early apocalyptic Jewish account, which offers extensive speculations about the patriarch's struggle with his inclination in the midst of his fight with idolatry. This early witness, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, is traditionally dated by experts to the second century C.E. Several scholars have drawn attention to the *yetzer* traditions found in this Jewish pseudepigraphon. In the beginning of the 20th century, Louis Ginzberg argued for the presence of the *yetzer hara* imagery in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Ginzberg suggested that in this Jewish text "God informs Abraham that notwithstanding *yetzer hara* ... with which man from the time has been possessed, he has a free will of his own and may choose to abstain from sin."¹² Ginzberg also drew attention to *Apoc. Ab.* 13–14, where Yahoel ordered the antagonist of the story, the fallen angel Azazel, to leave the patriarch. He suggested that this tradition can be linked to the one found in *b. Baba Batra* 17a where Abraham is listed among three righteous persons over whom *yetzer hara* had no power.¹³

Ginzberg's comments about *yetzer* speculations in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* were not unique. Henry Wicks also argued that "the idea of an evil impulse in man appears in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*," at the same time suggesting that in that work the *yetzer hara* is not a part of man's congenital endowment.¹⁴

In his discussion of the evil heart in *4 Ezra* 3:21, which scholars usually consider an example of *yetzer hara* symbolism, Michael Stone reflects on the similarity of this motif with the imagery found in *Apoc. Ab.* 23:14 where Abraham questions God about "that evil which is desired in the heart of man."¹⁵ Stone notes that the conceptual developments found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* "in one respect corresponds to the narrative part of *4 Ezra* 3. It is the story of the

¹¹ *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (eds. F. García Martínez and E. Tigchelaar; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 552–555.

¹² L. Ginzberg, "Abraham, Apocalypse of," in: *Jewish Encyclopedia* (ed. I. Singer; 10 vols.; New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901–1906) 1.91–92 at 92.

¹³ Ginzberg, "Abraham, Apocalypse of," 1.92.

¹⁴ H. J. Wicks, *The Doctrine of God in the Jewish Apocryphal and Apocalyptic Literature* (New York: KTAV, 1971) 252.

¹⁵ M. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 64.

working out of evil in the world.”¹⁶ Yet, Stone points out that in comparison with the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, “the author of 4 Ezra seems deliberately to avoid the bald statement that it was God who created the evil inclination in mankind. Perhaps this is because of the large role that free will plays in his thought.”¹⁷

The possibility of the presence of the *yetzer hara* tradition in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* has been also acknowledged by the experts who worked closely on critical editions and translations of the Slavonic manuscripts of the text. Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, in his critical edition of the Slavonic text, suggests a presence of such a motif in the phrase found in *Apoc. Ab. 23:13* which tells about “those who *desire evil* (иже злаго жаляють).” Commenting on this obscure passage, Rubinkiewicz points out that “désirer le mal – c’est une inclination mauvaise. Selon la théologie juive l’homme naît avec deux inclinations: bonne et mauvaise.”¹⁸ Another expert of the pseudepigraphical writings preserved in Slavonic, Marc Philonenko, has also discerned the possibility of *yetzer* symbolism behind several Slavonic terms.¹⁹

Finally, Alexander Kulik put forward a hypothesis about *yetzer* imagery in the scene of the protoplast’s corruption by Azazel in chapter twenty-three. In this part of the text, the concept of *yetzer* was conveyed through the Slavonic term “пощьление.” Deliberating on the phrase “this is the reason of men, this is Adam, and this is their *desire* (Slav. пощьление) on earth, this is Eve” found in *Apoc. Ab. 23:10*, Kulik suggests a possible presence of the evil inclination imagery.²⁰

The insights about the *yetzer* symbolism have been propagated by an international cohort of experts in the mainstream publications over the course of a century. Despite these efforts, the conceptual developments found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* remain completely neglected by scholars focused on tracing the history of the *yetzer* traditions. This important textual witness is not even mentioned once in the major studies of the *yetzer* concept undertaken by Frank Chamberlin Porter,²¹ Geert Cohen Stuart,²² and Ishay Rosen-Zvi.²³ One will

¹⁶ Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 64.

¹⁷ Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 64.

¹⁸ R. Rubinkiewicz, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham en vieux slave. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et commentaire* (ZM, 129; Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersyte-tu Lubelskiego, 1987) 179.

¹⁹ B. Philonenko-Sayar and M. Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham. Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes* (Semitica, 31; Paris: Librairie Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1981) 89.

²⁰ A. Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (TCS, 3; Atlanta: Scholars, 2004) 27.

²¹ F. C. Porter, “The Yeçer Hara: A Study in the Jewish Doctrine of Sin,” in: *Biblical and Semitic Studies* (Yale Historical and Critical Contributions to Biblical Science; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901) 93–156.

²² G. H. Cohen Stuart, *The Struggle in Man between Good and Evil. An Inquiry into the Origin of the Rabbinic Concept of Yeşer Hara* (Kampen: Kok, 1984).

search in vain for any reference to the *Apocalypse of Abraham* in the most recent focused studies of the various aspects of the *yetzer* symbolism.²⁴

Despite this evident lack of attention, I will argue that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* ought to be seen not simply as a marginal witness. Rather, it is an important conceptual landmark in the long-lasting development of various *yetzer* anthropologies which anticipated later rabbinic developments. The text operates not with one but with several notions of *yetzer*, expressed at least by four different Slavonic terms. These terms are related to several anthropologies of *yetzer*, some of which are reminiscent of early biblical concepts, while others are strikingly similar to the late rabbinic notions. Considering these scholarly gaps, this study provides an in-depth exploration of the multifaceted nature of the *yetzer* traditions in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and their connection with the demonological and eschatological developments in this early Jewish pseudepigraphon.

²³ I. Rosen-Zvi, *Demonic Desires: Yetzer Hara and the Problem of Evil in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

²⁴ N. Ellis, *The Hermeneutics of Divine Testing* (WUNT, 2.296; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015) 125–152; Y. Kiel, *Sexuality in the Babylonian Talmud: Christian and Sasanian Contexts in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); M. Kister, “The Yetzer of Man’s Heart,” in: *Meghillot: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls VIII-IX* (eds. M. Bar-Asher and D. Dimant; Jerusalem: Bialik Institute and Haifa University Press, 2010) 243–284 [Hebrew]; C. A. Newsom, “Models of the Moral Self: Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism,” *JBL* 131 (2012) 5–25; Schofer, “The Redaction of Desire,” 19–53; E. Shanks Alexander, “Art, Argument, and Ambiguity in the Talmud: Conflicting Conceptions of the Evil Impulse in b. Sukkah 51b–52a,” *HUCA* 73 (2002) 97–132; P. W. van der Horst, “A Note on the Evil Inclination and Sexual Desire in Talmudic Literature,” in: *Jews and Christians in their Graeco-Roman Context: Selected Essays on Early Judaism, Samaritanism, Hellenism, and Christianity* (WUNT, 1.196; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) 59–65.

CHAPTER ONE

Yetzer Terminology in the Apocalypse of Abraham

1.1 Methodological Difficulties

1.1.1 Terminological Uncertainties

Previous studies have demonstrated that the notion of *yetzer* underwent a complex conceptual and semantic evolution through the history of the Hebrew language from the oldest known occurrences in the Hebrew Bible until its various uses in the rabbinic literature.¹ While in the Hebrew Bible *yetzer* often signifies “form,” “framing,” or “purpose,” being associated with the processes of “drawing,” “forming,” or “creative activities of potters,” one can also detect its meaning as “disposition” or “possibility to choose.”² In the Dead Sea Scrolls, its meaning sometimes was overlaid with an additional “sense of corporeality.”³ Various rabbinic texts often envision *yetzer* as “inclination,” “urge,” “desire,” or “tempter.”⁴

But even the earliest biblical usage of *yetzer* is laden with “sufficient semantic elasticity,”⁵ which provides “a wide range of metaphorical possibilities including the ideas of formed substances, human inclination, disposition, instinct, council, and desire.”⁶ Such semantic obtrusiveness is especially visible in the Greek translations,⁷ where several terms are used to render *yetzer*’s various semantic facets, including διαβούλιον, διάνοια, ἐπιθυμία, ἐνθύμημα, and πλάσμα.⁸ Many of these Greek terms are behind the Slavonic terminology for *yetzer* in

¹ Cohen Stuart, *The Struggle in Man*, 81.

² Cohen Stuart, *The Struggle in Man*, 81.

³ Cohen Stuart, *The Struggle in Man*, 81.

⁴ Cohen Stuart, *The Struggle in Man*, 81.

⁵ Ellis, *The Hermeneutics*, 49.

⁶ Ellis, *The Hermeneutics*, 49.

⁷ Cohen Stuart notes that “one has to take into account the possibility of changes in the meaning of Greek words in Greek speaking Jewish communities independently of changes of the meaning of Hebrew and Aramaic words in Hebrew and Aramaic speaking communities. Therefore a Greek word, that during the second century BCE is an adequate equivalent of *yetzer*, may be useless as translation of *yetzer* as used in later times. The possibility exists that the meaning has changed of the Hebrew word or of the Greek word or of both words.” Cohen Stuart, *The Struggle in Man*, 82.

⁸ Ellis, *The Hermeneutics*, 49.

the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. This history of translations illustrates the incapability “of carrying the metaphorical weight of the Hebrew term within a single translation-equivalent.”⁹

Such a plethora of terminological options is conditioned by various social and ideological contexts. In this respect, Ellis rightly observes that the *yetzer* terminology “often bore the weight of its own technical and religious meaning due to the theological or philosophical influences already present within the various cultures and communities.”¹⁰

1.1.2 Conceptual Ambiguities

Besides the terminological difficulties, the precise theological meaning of *yetzer* is also hard to establish since such meaning is determined by a broader ideological context. Clarifications of such broader settings are especially difficult in some pseudepigraphical texts, like *4 Ezra* or the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, which contain early specimens of *yetzer* symbolism. These texts were transmitted in multiple religious and social milieus that sometimes subtly changed their original ideologies especially in relation to their protology and eschatology. Such protological and eschatological settings have paramount significance for determining the various molds of *yetzer* speculations which often unfold in the midst of stories of the protoplast’s creation and fall. However, the precise scope and mold of these protological settings are difficult to establish due to their vague and fragmentary presentations, especially in the pseudepigraphical writings and the Qumran documents.

Early Jewish documents unveil memories of several strikingly different conceptions of the creation and the fall. In some of them, the division of a primordial androgynous humankind into two genders became understood as the “fall.”¹¹ This aspect is significant because one of the first instances of *yetzer* terminology appears in the second chapter of the Book of Genesis which de-

⁹ Ellis, *The Hermeneutics*, 49.

¹⁰ Ellis, *The Hermeneutics*, 49. Ellis further points out that “in sum, a variety of terms in Greek, Latin, and other languages were employed to transfer the metaphors for the created body, the heart, the mind, the flesh, and then the human inclination and other metaphysical tendencies. Furthermore, as variances and developments in theological and philosophical anthropologies occurred across centuries, cultures, and individual authors and the term commonly used in the 200’s B.C. may no longer be an appropriate gloss for *yetzer* in a work from the A.D. 200s that operating from a different theological or philosophical orientation.” Ellis, *The Hermeneutics*, 49–50.

¹¹ Thus, April DeConick notes that “many Christian and Greek thinkers associated sexual differentiation with the fall and embodiment of the soul.” A. DeConick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* (SVC, 33; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 17. Scholars often point out that in such a mythological framework “the return to the original state of humankind involves a rejection of the body, along with its corporeality and sexuality, and a return to a pure state of spiritual androgyny. The corporeal female, according to this scheme, is twice fallen,

scribes humankind's creation as the gendered pair. Could it be that the usage of such terminology may unfold here in the midst of another aetiology of evil? Furthermore, even in instances where the *yetzer* is unambiguously tied to the fall of the protological couple in the Garden of Eden, the precise connections of the *yetzer* symbolism with the alleged antagonists of the first human mishap are not always clear. Is Adam's "evil heart" still a human heart, or can it be envisioned as a "psychodemonic" entity? Does it become a metaphor for the otherworldly antagonist who now paradoxically reifies inner *yetzer*? Finding answers for such questions is not easy since surviving texts and fragments often do not provide a full picture of their "etiologies of corruption" and "mythologies of evil" which could clarify for us the exact meaning of their *yetzer* symbolism. These and other problems represent major impediments for those scholars who attempt to investigate the evolution of the *yetzer* symbolism through various religious and social milieus over extended periods of time.¹² It is therefore not surprising that every new study of the *yetzer* imagery attempts to offer a novel model of the historical and conceptual development of such symbolism. Summarizing this scholarly situation, Ellis observes that "modern scholarship has disagreed on both the basic meaning of *yetzer* at any particular stage of development, and also the term's developmental history from early post-exilic through rabbinic literature. Even the exact meaning of *yetzer* as found in its most frequent usage in the rabbinic literature has eluded scholarly consensus."¹³

In this respect, it is significant that even ancient speculations on *yetzer* strive to underline the puzzling and sometimes impenetrable complexity of its symbolism. Rabbinic discourse about *yetzer* found in *b. Sukkah* 52a can serve as a good illustration of such conceptual ambiguity when it suggests that "the evil inclination has seven names. The Holy One, blessed be He, called it evil ... Moses called it the uncircumcised ... David called it unclean ... Solomon called it the enemy ... Isaiah called it the stumbling block ... Ezekiel called it stone ... Joel called it the hidden one."¹⁴

once from the first spiritual Adam and once more from the second corporeal Adam." Kiel, *Sexuality in the Babylonian Talmud*, 122.

¹² Hindy Najman, in her recent book, expresses a lament about the impossibility of such projects. She notes that "any attempt to wring a full-blown account of the origin of human sinfulness, one that can then be identified or compared with detailed later accounts, is mistaken and is bound to be shaped by the scholar's anachronistic assumptions." H. Najman, *Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future: An Analysis of 4 Ezra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 81.

¹³ Ellis, *The Hermeneutics*, 51.

¹⁴ Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah*, 52a. In relation to this passage, Solomon Schechter notes that "the names applied to the Evil *Yetzer* are various and indicative both of his nature and his function ... Other names applied to this *yetzer* are: the foolish old king who accompanies man from his earliest youth to his old age, and to whom all the organs of man show obedience; the spoiler who spares none, bringing man to fall even at the advanced age of

These conceptual and terminological difficulties impede the discernment of the *yetzer* symbolism even on the level of rendering this concept into English language. Rosen-Zvi points out that conventional English translations of the Hebrew term *יצר*, including “disposition,” “inclination,” “impulse,” “instinct,” and “tendency,” “fail to present the *yetzer* as a reified object residing inside a person.”¹⁵

1.1.3 Translational Challenges

As previously mentioned, the major studies on the *yetzer* symbolism have consistently ignored the conceptual developments found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Such scholarly neglect can be partially explained by some difficulties in the extant text of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* which may have obscured the *yetzer* imagery. The surviving Slavonic manuscripts attest to the long journey which these textual witnesses underwent in various linguistic and religious milieus where their translators, unfamiliar with the initial ideological settings of the original document, re-interpreted them again and again in light of various theological concerns in different religious and social environments. Most of the Slavonic manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* were incorporated into the so-called *Explanatory Palaea (Tolkovaja Paleja)*, a historiographical compendium in which canonical biblical stories were mixed with non-canonical elaborations and interpretations. Such integration represents the typical mode of existence of the Jewish pseudepigraphical texts and fragments in the Slavic milieus where such materials were usually transmitted as part of larger historiographical, moral, hagiographical, liturgical, and other collections that contained both ideologically marginal and mainstream materials.

We have already reflected above on the ambiguous nature of the *yetzer* terminology even in the sources which survived in their original languages. The discernment of the *yetzer* terminology and imagery becomes even more challenging in such texts, like the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which underwent multiple translations. Many features of the Slavonic text point to the fact that the original language of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* was Semitic, either Hebrew or Aramaic.¹⁶ Most scholars also believe that the Slavonic prototext of the *Apoca-*

seventy or eighty; and the malady. He is also called the strange god, to obey whom is as much as to worship idols.” S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1909) 243–244.

¹⁵ Rosen-Zvi, *Demonic Desires*, 12.

¹⁶ A. Rubinstein, “Hebraisms in the Slavonic ‘Apocalypse of Abraham,’” *JJS* 4 (1953) 108–115; idem, “Hebraisms in the Slavonic ‘Apocalypse of Abraham,’” *JJS* 5 (1954) 132–135.

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