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The Body of God in Ancient Rabbinic Judaism: Problems of Interpretation

An ever-increasing number of recent studies are contesting a notion that is very widely accepted in traditional Judaism and also in Biblical and Talmudic scholarship: divine incorporeity. This paper deals with ancient rabbinic texts (0-500 CE) on the question of God's body. These texts have given and continue to give rise to many controversies. How should we read an anthropomorphic text? If God indeed has a body according to the rabbis, what is the nature of this body? If the God of ancient Judaism is a corporeal being, how is this corporeity related to the Christian or pagan notion of divinity, which also contains a corporeal aspect?

Le corps de Dieu dans le judaïsme rabbinique ancien. Problèmes d'interprétation

Des travaux récents et de plus en plus nombreux ont remis en question une idée fortement établie dans le monde traditionnel juif mais aussi dans celui de l'étude scientifique des textes bibliques ou talmudiques, celle de l'incorporéité divine. Le présent article est centré sur les textes des rabbins de l'Antiquité (Ier-Ve siècles), traitant de la question du corps de Dieu. Ces textes ont suscité des débats et continuent d'en susciter. Comment faut-il lire un texte anthropomorphique ? Si Dieu a un corps pour les rabbins, quelle est la nature de ce corps ? Si le Dieu du judaïsme antique est corporel, quelle relation entretient-il avec la notion païenne ou chrétienne de la divinité, qui comporte aussi une facette corporelle ?

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On the question of the body of God, the Christian position would seem to be paradoxical. It maintains the idea of the incarnation of God in the body of a human being. At the same time, in the writings of the Church Fathers, God is conceived as an invisible and fundamentally nonmaterial being.[1] This paradox, however, can be explained from both a philosophical and a scriptural perspective. With regard to the first aspect, the Church Fathers were heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. Aristotelianism and Platonism were agreed on the existence of a fundamentally nonmaterial divinity.[2] From a scriptural perspective, the verse Jn 1:18 is particularly eloquent on this point: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."[3] This is because God, the Father, is unknowable and can be seen only because he sent his Son. The Son of God, who is corporeal, gives access to the knowledge of God the Father, who is not.[4]

Judaism, on the other hand, is generally thought to believe in an invisible God. The proof of this is that it denies any representations of divinity, the divinities of polytheism as well as of the one God:

> (Verse 3) Thou shalt have no other gods… . (Verse 4) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image (*pesel*), or any likeness (*temuna*) of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath… .

1. See the representative opinion of Origen, *On Prayer*, 23.3, as well as the study of Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "L'incorporéité de Dieu: Contexte et implications de la doctrine d'Origène," in *Savoir et Salut: Gnoses de l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris: Éditions du CERF, 1992), 183-197. There are two notable exceptions: the position of Tertullian, of stoic inspiration, and those of the *Audians*and the monks in the Egyptian desert, as noted by Stroumsa in "Forme(s) de Dieu: Métatron et le Christ," in *Savoir et Salut*, 66n6.

2. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 7.1072a-b, as well as book 9, and also Plotinus, *Enneads*, 6 and 7.37. It is not certain that Plato's demiurge is an entirely spiritual being (*Timaeus*, 29a-31b).

3. The Greek text translated is that of Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 248. Certain versions omit the second mention of God and speak simply of the "only child." Unless expressly indicated, all the texts cited were translated by the author.

4. The situation is in fact more complex, because the Church Fathers also support, after the first chapter of John, the idea of the preexistence of the Son. On this point see Harry Austryn Wolfson, "Extradeical and Intradeical Interpretation of Platonic Ideas," in *Religious Philosophy: A Group of Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 27-68.

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(Verse 5) Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them… (Ex 20:3-5)

A minimalist reading of Verse 4 tells us that only idols are forbidden,[5] but according to a more radical interpretation, all representations are problematic, even if they are totally unconnected to idolatrous worship:

> Rabban Gamliel had a representation of the "forms" (*demut ṣurot*) of the moon in his upper chamber, on a shelf and on the wall… . One of the *barayta* teaches that: "that is in heaven above" (Ex 20:4) brings the sun, the moon, and the stars (under the rule).[6]

The representation that the Mishna refers to here consists of diagrams showing the different phases of the moon. The Halakhic utility of these diagrams is obvious and it is unreasonable a priori to view Rabban Gamliel as a secret idolater. Nevertheless, the Talmud, which is based on a *barayta*, that is to say a Tannaitic tradition, not recorded in the Mishna, holds that Ex 20:4 forbids any visual representation of the stars, whatever the purpose of this representation.

The Church Fathers, however, have a completely different view of Judaism. According to Justin Martyr, Jewish doctors conceived of God as having hands, feet, and fingers.[7] Origen declares that the Jews imagine God as being similar to a human being, that their belief is founded on Is 66:1, and that some Christians share these beliefs.[8] Basil the Great asks Christians to dispel any notion of a corporeal God: it is the Jews who attribute a "form" (*morphên*)[9] to him. Arnobius of Sicca agrees with Basil. It is the Jews and the Sadducees who attribute forms (*formas*) to God.[10] How should we interpret these statements by the Church Fathers? Some people

5. See Moshe Weinfeld, "The Uniqueness of the Decalogue," in תורבדה תרשע [= *The Ten Commandments As Reflected in Tradition*], ed. Ben-Zion Segal, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1985), 4-6 (particularly note 20).

6. Mishna, *Rosh ha-shana*, 2, 8, Kaufmann manuscript (Budapest) and Talmud Babli, *Rosh ha-shana*, 24a-b, Munich manuscript. In line with increasingly common practice in current Talmudic studies, the author has translated the rabbinic text from the manuscript versions. Those used here are taken from the Academy of the Hebrew language website (http://hebrew-treasures.huji.ac.il).

7. *Dialogue with Trypho*, 114.

8. *Homilies on Genesis*, 1.13 and 3.1.

9. *On the Origin of Man*, 1.5.

10. *Against the Gentiles*, 3.12.

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disregard them, since the Christian theologians had a poor knowledge of Judaism and a negative vision of it. For the Church Fathers, a Jew who believed in divine corporeality must simply have taken Scripture too literally and been unable to understand its spiritual meaning. Gedaliahu Stroumsa has, however, demonstrated the historical interest of these accounts, and it would be unwise to consider them merely polemical.[11]

In fact, we too often confuse two distinct questions, that of the nature of God, visible or invisible, and that of the visual representation of God, permitted or forbidden. Of course it is possible to combine them: if representations of God are forbidden, it is because he is invisible. But we could also hold that *God cannot be represented because his body* is unlike any of the bodies that exist in our world. Within the context of Judaism, three questions must be asked: 1) Does God have a body? 2) If the answer to the first question is positive, can this body be seen? The word "can" must be understood in both ways: "can" in the sense of ability to do something and "can" in the sense of permission to do something. Seeing God may be technically possible but nonetheless unauthorized. It may also be possible, while carrying certain risks; 3) Can the body of God be represented? Ancient Judaism (biblical and rabbinic) would appear to have answered these three questions: 1) God has a body; 2) This body can be seen but not just by anyone, under any circumstances; 3) It is forbidden to represent God visually, unless the representation is indirect (for example in the form of cherubim of the ark). However, it is permitted to represent him in verbal, oral, or written form.[12]

The demonstration by Maimonides of divine incorporeality is not exactly in harmony with ancient rabbinic Judaism which, on the question of the divine body, was succeeded by the Cabbalistic tradition. However, in the third principle of faith of Maimonides,

11. Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "Le couple de l'ange et de l'esprit. Traditions juives et chrétiennes," in *Savoir et Salut*, 30-33 and Stroumsa, "Forme(s) de Dieu," 67-68.

12. For these three answers, see Daniel Boyarin, "The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic," in *Sparks of the Logos: Essays in Rabbinic Hermeneutics* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 3-4, whose position is closer to ours. For the distinction between direct or indirect visual representation and verbal representation, see Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 37-66.

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integrated as such into later Judaism, divine incorporeality made some headway, including among Cabbalists.[13]

Despite the obstacles posed by the rabbinic tradition and perpetuated mainly in the academic world, the fact that God has a body in ancient rabbinic Judaism is increasingly recognized by recent research.[14] However, no study has ever brought together all the relevant materials, sources, and commentaries. A certain number of questions merit being made the focus of the researcher's attention. What authorizes an ancient or modern commentator to interpret a corporealist text metaphorically? Under what conditions would such a reading be legitimate? If the rabbis truly believe in a divine body, that would also oblige researchers to reconsider their relationship with "idolatrous" paganism and the Christian belief in incarnation.

1. The Bible

The fact that God has a body clearly arises in a large number of verses. It is a body which at first sight appears similar to that of man, whence the justifiable use of the term anthropomorphism, on condition that this term is used in its narrowest sense, in accordance with its etymology. The God of the Bible also has human emotions and in that sense, we can talk of anthropopathism.[15] In a recent work, Esther J. Hamori distinguishes five fundamental types of

13. See Yosef Kafih, ed., *Mishna 'im perush Rabbenu Moshe ben Maymon: Maqor we-targum*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Ḳooḳ, 1964), 211; *Guide for the Perplexed*, 2.1-2; 'EṣḤayyim, *ḥeleq rishon*, 14b, and the suggestive insight of Henri Atlan, *Les étincelles de hasard*, vol. 1 (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 89-96. For an overview of the Maimonidian conception of divine incorporeality and its main arguments, see Shamma Friedman, "Ṣelem demut we-tabnit," *Sidra* 22 (2007): 89-106 and for a comparison of the Maimonidian view with that of Saint Augustine, see id., "Anthropomorphism and its Eradication," in *Iconoclasm and Iconoclash, Struggle for Religious Identity*, ed. W. Van Asselt et al., (Leiden: Brill, 2007) 158-168.

14. This even considers Judaism in terms of incarnation. See Moshe Idel, *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 62. However, the tendency to underplay the corporeal dimension of God is still present in some research (Idel, *Ben*, 112).

15. There is a vast literature on the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic conception of God in the Bible. See mainly James Barr, "Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament," in *Congress Volume*, *Oxford 1959*, Vetus TestamentumSupplements 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 31-38; Aaron Schart, "Die 'Gestalt' YHWHs: Ein Beitrag zur Körpermetaphorik alttestamentlicher Rede von Gott," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 55 (1999): 26-43 and above all Esther J.

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anthropomorphism: concrete, envisioned, immanent, transcendent, and figurative.[16] Without going into too much detail, we will look at a small number of particularly significant verses.

Nb 12:8 states explicitly that God has a form (*temurat ha-shem*) and Ez 1:26 that he is similar to a man: "And upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it." Many verses attribute to God the organs of the human body.[17] God also allows himself to be seen, particularly by the patriarchs.[18] Certain verses evoke a vision of God without describing the appearance of what is seen, such as Ex 24:10-11. Dt 4:12 (and 15) immediately reject the idea of a divine body: "And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no form (*temuna*); only ye heard a voice." On this question we often speak of a Deuteronomist current of thought, close to that expressed in the Deutero-Isaiah (Is 40:18). However, this reading should not by any means be taken for granted.[19] Dt 4:12 and 15 state that the Hebrews did not see God at Sinai, but that does not in any way imply that God lacks a body: this body may simply have remained hidden, at least for most of the Hebrew masses. Gn 1:26 constitutes another example of an ambivalent verse:[20] "And God said: Let us make man in our image (*ṣalmenu*), after our likeness (*ki-demutenu*)." The terms *ṣelem* and *demut* have a very specific corporeal meaning. *Ṣelem* is even one of the terms used by the Bible to designate idols.[21] However, the context leads us not to disregard

Hamori, *When Gods were Men: The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature*," (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2008).

16. Hamori, *When Gods*, 29-33.

17. For a selection of commented verses, see *Guide for the Perplexed*, 1:28 (foot), 37 (face), 38 (back), and 44 (eye).

18. See Gn 12:7; 17:1; 18:1; 26:2; 26:24; and 35:9. For a more complete list, that includes other biblical characters, see Stephen D. Moore, "Gigantic God: Yahweh's Body," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 70 (1996): 95-96.

19. On the existence of an anti-anthropomorphic current in Deuteronomy, see Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 191-209. On the problematic nature of the anti-anthropomorphic reading of Deuteronomy and the Deutero-Isaiah, see Halbertal and Margalit, *Idolatry*, 46 and Friedman, "Ṣelem demut we-tabnit," 107-109.

20. On this ambivalence, see Moore, "Gigantic God," 93 and Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1994), 21.

21. See Nb 33:52; 1 S 6:5; 6:11; 2 R 11:18; Ez 7:20; 16:17; 23:14; Am 5:26; 2 Cr 23:17. The word *ṣelem* means "idol" in the majority of the verses where it appears.

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a more "spiritualist"[22] reading of the verse, because the writer of verse 26 juxtaposes the image and the likeness with the fact that man will dominate creation. Is it not in this notion of sovereignty that the common link between man and the divinity is to be found?[23] Furthermore, these two readings of Gn 1:26-27 are not necessarily mutually exclusive.[24]

With the exception, therefore, of a certain number of ambivalent verses, what is clearly revealed by reading the Bible is that God has a body. One could argue that all the anthropomorphic verses should not be read literally: they are in fact metaphors to inform us about the "spiritual" aspects of the divinity. This metaphorical reading of biblical anthropomorphism, which seems so natural on the part of our contemporaries, and which can be found among Judaism's most eminent thinkers, faces a number of difficulties. The first of these difficulties lies in the assumption underlying this metaphorical reading that is not always stated explicitly: it is clear, *by definition*, that God does not have a body, and therefore it goes without saying that any verses attributing a body to him should be understood metaphorically. The following question remains: Why must God be incorporeal by definition? On the basis of what knowledge is this opinion based? Some people would answer this question starting from the Bible itself. Because the Bible states explicitly that God is incorporeal, any verses which appear to state the opposite should be reinterpreted in the light of this. This response, however, faces an important difficulty: *there is no biblical verse that states explicitly that God is incorporeal.*[25] The verses Dt 4:12 and 15 may of course suggest that God is

22. We must use this term judiciously, as biblical anthropology is not dualist. It is even a strong argument for not disregarding the corporeal component of human beings, in the interpretation of the word *ṣelem* (Moore, "Gigantic God," 95).

23. See the commentary of Sa'adya Ga'on on Gn 1:26-27 (Yosef Kafih, ed., *Perushe Rabbenu Sa'adya Ga'on 'al ha-tora*, (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1963), 12-13). This reading is, however, completely absent from ancient rabbinic Judaism, as emphasized by A. G. Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 185. In the Christian corpus, it goes back at least to Chrysostom and it fits well with certain Egyptian and Mesopotamian interpretations (Moore, "Gigantic God," 93n18).

24. See Moore, "Gigantic God," 93-94.

25. Philo considers that the notion of incorporeality is expressed in the Bible as "dissimilarity": nothing is like God or resembles him (H. A. Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 2 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962], 96).

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incorporeal but they do not emphasize this in any way. Some may then argue: if the Bible does not give any explicit indication that God is incorporeal, we must look for a reliable source outside of the Bible. In the light of this knowledge, the true meaning of the verses would be revealed. To say that God has a body would be an affirmation of the same nature as that which attributes a wing to the earth (Is 24:16). Nobody thinks of taking the expression "wing of the earth" literally, because we can study the earth using science, which assures us that the earth does not have a wing. It is knowledge beyond the Bible, of a scientific nature, that allows us to clarify the meaning of the biblical expression "wing of the earth." The same reasoning can be applied to the divine body, as Maimonides does in the *Guide for the Perplexed.* The excellent scholarship of Aristotelian philosophy demonstrates the incorporeality of God, and it is the existence of this scientific certainty that allows the corporealist verses to be interpreted metaphorically.[26] The application of knowledge external to the Bible has, however, been justly criticized, by theologians as well as rationalists and scholars. Certain Jewish thinkers believe that the application of Greek philosophy to the reading of the Bible is a betrayal of the original meaning of the revelation.[27] Scholars, on the other hand, start from the principle that a text should first of all be understood on its own terms, according to its own categories.[28]

A final factor comes into the question of how to interpret the corporealist texts of the Bible, that of the Talmudic tradition. The rabbis of antiquity claim to have traditions contained in the oral Torah that give insight into a certain number of problematic verses. Based on their traditions, as well as the indications provided by Dt 4:12 and 15, did they interpret the corporealist verses metaphorically?

26. See *Guide for the Perplexed*, 2:25.

27. The allegorical and rationalist reading of a certain number of verses is one of the causes of the two Maimonidian controversies of 1230-1233 and 1303-1306, as demonstrated by Charles Touati, "La controverse de 1303-1306 autour des études philosophiques et scientifiques," in *Prophètes, talmudistes et philosophes* (Paris: Éditions du CERF, 1990), 203-205.

28. Spinoza's case is fairly representative (*A Theologico-Political Treatise*, VII).

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2. The Rabbis' Interpretation of the Corporealist Verses

A comprehensive study of the rabbis' relationship to biblical anthropomorphism has been published by Arthur Marmorstein.[29] This covers not only the question of the divine body (anthropomorphism) but also that of human emotions projected onto God (anthropopathism). According to Marmorstein, the rabbis can be divided into two currents of thought. Some of them interpret the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic verses literally, while others attribute metaphorical meanings to them. For the first group, God has a body, while for the others, he does not. This debate was particularly marked in the era of the *Tanna'im*, between the schools of Rabbi 'Aqiba (literal reading/anthropomorphism) and Rabbi Yishma'el (metaphorical reading/anti-anthropomorphism). In the later period of the *Amora'im*, the literal reading/anthropomorphic current of thought carried the day.[30] These conclusions of Marmorstein have been partially called into question by recent research. According to Alon Goshen Gottstein, the debate between these two currents of thought is only about anthropopathism. The rabbis are, however, all agreed on their conception of a corporeal God, as shown by their systematically corporealist reading of verses Gn 1:26-27, Gn 5:3, and Gn 9:6.[31] It is therefore instructive to take a moment to look at the rabbinic interpretation of these verses.

The verses of Gn 1:26-27 received relatively little commentary in the ancient rabbinic corpus. There was more commentary on verse Gn 9:6. In the commentary on Gn 1:26-27, the rabbis almost systematically avoid giving a precise definition of the words "image" and "likeness," preferring to turn his attention to other aspects of these two verses. For example, the second person plural used in "let us"[32] is frequently commented on. According to Goshen Gottstein, Gn 9:6 receives more commentary because it contains more practical

29. Arthur Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God, II: Essays in Anthropomorphism*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).

30. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine*, 2:50-56.

31. Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God," 172. On the need to distinguish between anthropomorphism and anthropopathism and on Marmorstein's errors of interpretation, see also Friedman, "Ṣelem demut we-tabnit," 91 and 111-112.

32. See *Bereshit Rabba*, 8:3 and 4, and Talmud Babli, *Sanhedrin*, 38b.

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content, which Gn 1:26-27 lacks,[33] and the rabbis, always anxious to respect the *Halakha*, emphasized this verse because it is more amenable to concrete interpretations. We saw earlier that Gn 1:26-27 is ambivalent. In the terms used ("image" and "likeness") it refers to the body, but the immediate context (the question of the domination of man over nature) refers rather to the "spirit." Gn 5:3 and Gn 9:6 indirectly exhibit the same ambivalence. These verses are therefore an excellent opportunity to test the validity of Marmorstein's hypothesis. If there are indeed, as Marmorstein says, two currents of thought and two schools on the question of the body of God, then there should be two possible readings of these verses, whose very ambivalence should be particularly conducive to this duality.

Here are some examples of implicit or explicit commentaries on the verses of Gn 1:26-27, Gn 5:3, and Gn 9:6, where the question of image and likeness is addressed:

> Hillel the Elder, while walking with his disciples, began to take his leave of them. His disciples asked him: Where are you going? He replied: To observe a commandment. (They said:) And what commandment will you observe? He replied: That of bathing myself. They said: And this is a commandment! He replied: Yes! If the caretakers who wash and clean the statues of kings (*iqonin shel melakhim*) in theaters and other public places are not only honored with turbans, but esteemed like one of the great leaders of the kingdom, then I who was created in the image and likeness of God, how much more, as it is written: "For in the image of God made he man" (Gn 9:6).[34]
> Rab Huna, son of Rab Yehoshua', said: In the study session at Abbaye, I heard that (the verse) "Ye shall not make with me (*itti*) (gods of silver or gods of gold)" (Ex 20:23) (means in fact) "Ye shall not make from me (*oti*)."[35]
> Scripture says: "I am the Lord thy God" (Ex 20:2) and opposite this (commandment), it is written: "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex 20:13). Scripture reports that any (person) who spills blood will be considered to have diminished the likeness (*demut*) of the king. In the parable of a king of flesh and blood who enters a town, there are statues (*iqonot*) and images (*ṣelamim*) made of him and coins designed (with his effigy). Later, they topple the statues, tear down the images, throw away the coins, and the likeness of the king is diminished.[36]
> If this is true, what is the significance (*ma talmud lo-mar*) of "that man was perfect and upright" (Jb 1:1)? In fact, (the verse) teaches us that Job was born circumcised. The first man also came out circumcised, as it is said: "So God created man in his own image" (Gn 1:27). Seth also

33. Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God," 189n57.
34. *Wa-yiqra Rabba*, 34:3, London manuscript 340:2.
35. Talmud Babli, *'Aboda Zara*, 43b, Paris manuscript 1337.
36. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma'el, *Yitro, Ba-ḥodesh*, 8, Oxford manuscript 151.

> came out circumcised, as it is said: "And begat a son in his own likeness, after his image" (Gn 5:3).[37]

In the first text, Hillel the Elder presents his ablutions to his disciples as a commandment. In fact, in the parable, the person who washes the statues of the king is similar to a man who washes his own body. The creation of man "in the image and likeness" therefore means that he has a body that resembles that of God. In the second text, Rab Huna holds that verse Ex 20:23 should not be read literally: "Ye shall not make with me (*itti*) (gods of silver and gods of gold)." Reading the verse literally would suggest that the prohibition applies only to syncretism: an idol of God may not be worshipped alongside statues of other divinities, but it would be authorized to worship an idol of God if it was the only one! Rab Huna therefore proposes the reading: "Ye shall not make of me (*oti*)." But this reading also poses a problem: why the emphasis on "of me?" It would have been sufficient to say: "Ye shall not make gods of silver or gold" and it would have been clear that both representing God and representing other gods was prohibited. That is why the "of me" does not refer directly to God himself but to that which resembles God: man. The verse therefore forbids representations of man, because he is made in the image of God, or to be more precise, it forbids the representation of man's body because it is made in the image of the body of God. In the third text, the parable describes a well-known historical phenomenon, that of *damnatio memoriae*.[38] When we wish to tarnish the memory of a king, we destroy any representations of him. The king relates to God; the statue of the king is none other than man, and therefore destroying the statue of the king is equivalent to killing man. The image of God within man ("the likeness of the king") must necessarily include the body in this context, because the murder affects first and foremost the corporeal covering of the human being. In the fourth text, the likeness between God and man is a specific corporeal feature: circumcision. God therefore not only has a body, but it is conceived of as being circumcised.

37. *Abot de-rabbi Natan*, A:2. The author has translated the Venice version of the *editio princeps* as it is transcribed in Hans-Jürgen Becker, ed., *Avot de-Rabbi Natan: Synoptische Edition beider Versionen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 46. See also the Vatican manuscript, version 44, *Synoptische Edition*, 296.

38. Yaron Eliav, "Viewing the Sculptural Environment: Shaping the Second Commandment," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, ed. Peter Schäfer, vol. 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 416.

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3. The Luminous Body

In a certain number of texts, which are not necessarily linked to the exegesis of verses Gn 1:26-27, Gn 5:3, and Gn 9:6, the divine body takes on another unique characteristic: it is luminous. Goshen Gottstein places particular emphasis on this point in his article, although he is far from having exhausted all aspects of the question. In the rabbinic corpus, we find three direct formulations of the notion of the luminous divine body and one indirect formulation. The three direct formulations are: glory, the *Shekhina*, and the cloak. The term “glory” designates a perceptible manifestation of God.[39] It is already used in this sense in the Bible. In 1 R 8:10-11, glory is presented as an impenetrable cloud. In other verses, by contrast, it is luminous (Ex 24:17, Ez 43:2). The rabbis talk about the “measure of the glory” or the “form of the glory.”[40] The second formulation is typically rabbinic: it refers to the *Shekhina*, even if it is sometimes associated with the biblical term “glory.”[41] Fundamentally, there is nothing luminous in the term *Shekhina*, because it comes from the verb *shakhan*, meaning to reside, and can be found in the word *mishkan*, the tabernacle.[42] The rabbis often talk about the brightness of the *Shekhina*, in the context of Sinai or a future world. The following text brings these two contexts together:

> (Here is) a saying from the mouth of Rab: It will not (be) like this world, the future world! The future world will not have food or drink or sexuality or jealousy or hatred or conflict, but the just (will be) seated, with crowns on their heads and they will be nourished by the brightness of the *Shekhina*, as it is spoken: “also they saw God, and did eat and drink.” (Ex 24:11)[43]

The doctrine of the cloak is derived directly from a biblical verse, Ps 104:2: “Who coverest thyself with light as with a cloak: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain.” The second part of the verse, on stretching out the heavens, is a reference to the beginning

39. On the notion of glory in the Bible and the rabbinic sources, see Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 22 and 45-48.

40. See *Sifre Debarim*, § 355, *Midrash Mishle*, 10(Buber, p. 34a), and the additions of the *Pesiqta Rabbati*, 1(Friedmann, 194a).

41. See, for example, the interpretation of Ez 43:2 in *Abot de-rabbi Natan*, A, 11.

42. See Ephraïm Urbach, *Les Sages d’Israël: Conceptions and croyances des maîtres du Talmud* (Paris: Éditions du CERF, 1996), 47-49.

43. Talmud Babli, *Berakhot*, 17a, Oxford manuscript 366.

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of creation. The creation of the heavens (and the earth) must therefore have taken place based on the light of a mysterious cloak, which the first part of the verse talks about:

> Rabbi Shim'on ben Yehoṣadaq asked Rabbi Shemu'el bar Naḥmani, saying to him: As I have heard about you that you are a master of the *aggada*, (tell me) how was light created? He replied: (It) teaches (us) that the Holy One, blessed may he be, covered himself in it like a cloak and made the brightness of his splendor (*hibhiq ziw hadaro*) shine from one end of the world to the other. He spoke of this (the tradition) in a whisper. He (then) said: There is an explicit verse (on this subject): 'Who coverest thyself with light as with a cloak' (Ps 104, 2) but you tell me of it in a whisper, how extraordinary! He replied: Just as it was told to me in a whisper, so I shall tell it to you in a whisper.[44]

The text seems to describe a dual process of emanation. God (*ha-maqom*) begins by clothing himself in a preexisting light ("the Holy One, blessed may he be, covered himself in it like a cloak"), which then allowed him to emanate another light ("and made the brightness of his splendor shine from one end of the world to the other"). It is possible that there is a connection between this dual emanation and the light of the *Shekhina*.

There is also an indirect formulation of the notion of a divine luminous body, to which Goshen Gottstein gives considerable importance, that of a luminous Adam.[45] According to Rabbi Shim'on ben Menasya, "The 'apple' of the heel of the first man outshone the sphere of the sun; how much more so the brightness of his face?"[46] For Rabbi Me'ir, the coats of skins (*kotnot 'or*) that Gn 3:21 speaks of are in fact coats of light (*kotnot or*).[47] If the image and the likeness shared by God and Adam are indeed corporeal and Adam possesses a luminous body, it follows from this that God also has a body of this nature.

The most explicit confirmation of the divine luminous body is not in the rabbinic literature but in a Judeo-Christian text, the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*: "For he has a form … he has all the limbs but

44. *Bereshit Rabba*, 3:4, Vatican manuscript 60. See the studies of Victor Aptowitzer, "Zur Kosmologie der Aggada: Licht als Urstoff," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, n.s., 36 (1928): 363-370 and Alexander Altmann, "A Note on the Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation," *Journal for Jewish Studies* 7 (1956): 195-206.

45. Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God," 178f.

46. *Wa-yiqra Rabba*, 20:2, London manuscript 340:2.

47. *Bereshit Rabba*, 20:12, Vatican manuscript 60.

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not in order to use them … as his body is incomparably more luminous than the spirit with which we see."[48] This text constitutes the second basis for Goshen Gottstein's argument.[49] It is interesting to note that the Judeo Christians express more directly what the rabbis often prefer to say by implication. Is rabbinic Judaism more esoteric and formal than its Judeo-Christian rival?[50]

4.The Vision of God

The doctrine of the divine body and the vision of God are inevitably linked. God can only be seen if God has a visible appearance. The vision of God arises in two different contexts, that of the exodus and that of the future world, as in the case of the *Shekhina*, mentioned above. With regard to the vision at the time of the exodus, that is to say on the edge of the Red Sea and at Mount Sinai, the rabbis diverge in many ways. According to some of them, only Moses saw God.[51] According to others, this vision was seen by all the people of Israel.[52] Even the story of Moses divides opinion. Some would say his vision was not full and complete (*mar'e shekhina*) but a lesser degree of vision (*mar'e dibbur*).[53] Others assert that Moses never saw the face of God in this world.[54] These divergences correspond partly to those already manifest in the text of the Torah.[55] It is, however, remarkable that even the traditions that deny that Israel, or

48. *Homélies Pseudo-clémentines*, 17:7 (trans. André Siouville, 322).

49. Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God," 172-173.

50. On the relationship between esotericism and early Christianity, see Gedaliahu Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

51. See *Sifre Debarim*, § 355, which is the focus of the study by Michael Fishbane, "The Measures of God's Glory in the Ancient Midrash," in *Messiah and Christos: Studies in the Jewish Origins of Christianity, Presented to David Flusser on the Occasion of this Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. I. Gruenwald, S. Shaked, and G. Stroumsa, (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 53-74. Also associated with Talmud Babli, *Sukka*, 45b: Moses saw God through a "shining mirror" (transparent) and the other prophets through "a dull mirror" (tinted).

52. See Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma'el, *Be-shallaḥ, Ha-shira*, 3 and *Yitro, Ba-ḥodesh*, 2, as well as all the texts cited at the end of Fishbane, "The Measures of God's Glory," 73-74.

53. Midrash Tanḥuma, *Ṣaw*, 13. See also *Sifre Ba-Midbar*, § 103.

54. *Sifre Debarim*, § 357.

55. For example, between Ex 24:10-11 and 33:20 or between Ex 19:11; 24:10-11 and Dt 4:11.

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even Moses, saw God, do not deny that God has a body. The following text of the *Mekhilta* presents us with a conception of the vision of God, which is at once very direct and democratic:

> "This is my God … and I will exalt him" (Ex 15:2). Rabbi Eliezer says: Whence can you say that a maidservant saw at the (Red) sea what Isaiah and Ezekiel never saw? For it is said: "And by the ministry of the prophets, I have revealed my form (*adamme*)" (Ho 12:10) and it is written: "the heavens were opened and I saw (visions of God)" (Ez 1:1).[56]

In verse Ex 15:2, Rabbi Eliezer comments on the demonstrative "this": it proves that God really was before the Hebrews, to the extent that they could actually point to him.[57] However, the two other verses cited recount a more indirect vision. Os 12:11 uses the verb *adamme*, from the same root DMH as the noun *demut*, "likeness." It therefore means very specifically: "I have revealed something which resembles my form." As for verse Ez 1:1, it says that Ezekiel "had divine visions," suggesting that he did not actually see God himself. The term "vision" (*mar'e*) also means "appearance" and we know that the appearance of something does not always correspond to the thing itself.

The vision is sometimes presented as an object of desire, on the part of the people of Israel. The corporeal, even erotic, dimension of this vision comes out even more clearly:

> Another interpretation of "that the people may hear when I speak with thee" (Ex 19:9). They said: We want to see the king (because) he who hears is not the same (*lo dome*) as he who sees. God (*ha-maqom*) said: Give them what they want, "And be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down (in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai)" (Ex 19:11)[58]

5. The Jewish Mystical Corpus of Antiquity

The mystical corpus is comprised of the literature of the chariot (*merkaba*), the literature of the palaces (*hekhalot*), and that of *Shi'ur Qoma*, "measure of size," which belongs partly to the *Hekhalot*

56. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma'el, *Be-shallaḥ, Ha-shira*, 3, Oxford manuscript 151.

57. An explicit link between Ex 15:2 and "pointing" is made in *Shir ha-shirim Rabba*, 2, 14, 3.

58. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma'el, *Yitro, Ba-ḥodesh*, 2, Oxford manuscript 151.

corpus. The texts of the *Shi'ur Qoma* are the most explicit in the attribution of a body to God. They describe its exact dimensions, which are gigantic.[59] It is possible that the *Shi'ur Qoma* may constitute, in essence, a commentary on the Canticle of Canticles,[60] containing the physical description of the divine lover that Israel met in Sinai. In the literature of the *merkaba*, the mystic must ascend the different heavens or celestial palaces, with the aim of seeing the divine chariot, the *merkaba*, as well as the human form to be found on the throne (Ez 1:26). Certain texts of the *merkaba* corpus contain materials that are part of the *Shi'ur Qoma*.[61] Others evoke the appearance of God without being as precise as the *Shi'ur Qoma*.[62] They mention, for example, the cloak of God, which implies that he has a body.[63] Only the compilation of the *Ma'ase Merkaba* says absolutely nothing about the appearance of God.[64] The texts of the *merkaba* often reveal a tension between the aspiration of the mystic to see God and the danger associated with the realization of this aspiration.[65]

The mystical corpus gives considerable importance to the name of God, and on several occasions, it establishes a link between the body of God and his name.[66] God can therefore be described

59. See Martin Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qoma: Texts and Recensions* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985).

60. Saul Lieberman, "Mishnat Shir ha-Shirim," in *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, ed. Gershom Scholem (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960), 123. Martin Cohen rejects this point of view in *The Shi'ur Qoma: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983).

61. These texts are cited in *Merkaba Rabba* (Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1981), § 688-692, 694, 696-699, 704; Peter Schäfer, *Le Dieu caché et révélé: Introduction à la mystique juive ancienne* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1993), 101-104).

62. The *Hekhalot Rabbati* give very few indications on the concrete appearance of God (Schäfer, *Synopse*, § 102, 159, and 198, *Le Dieu caché et révélé*, 21-26). The *Hekhalot Zuṭarti* are more loquacious on this matter (*Synopse*, § 352 and 356, *Le Dieu caché et révélé*, 61-64).

63. *Hekhalot Rabbati,* Schäfer *Synopse* § 102, where it is a question of the clothing (*ḥaluq*) of "ZHRRY'L, the Lord, God of Israel."

64. Schäfer, *Le Dieu caché et révélé*, 81-84 (with the exception of the identification of God and fire taken from Dt 4:24). The compilation of *III Enoch* grants a central position to the notion of *Shekhina*, without giving it a very strong corporeal dimension: "as for the concrete manifestation of God, it is relegated to second place …" (142).

65. See Schäfer, *Le Dieu caché et révélé*, 25.

66. Schäfer, *Synopse*, § 102, 350, 551-552, 549, 689, 692, 694-704 and Schäfer, *Le Dieu caché et révélé*, 62 and 100.

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corporeally, either in the form of an anthropomorphic body, or in the form of a linguistic body, made up of letters. This dual conception of divine corporeality is very close to what Moshe Idel calls morphonominalism.[67] The likeness between God and his Son occurs on two different levels that are, however, often linked: an external level (expressed by the terms "face," "image," "stamp," "luminosity," "beauty," and "Son") and an internal level (with the terms "breath," "spirit," "word," "name"). At first sight, it appears that the name is considered by Idel as a spiritual dimension, distinct from the body, but in reality the situation is more complex. The term morphonominalism assumes a close affinity between the form and the name, which leads us to consider whether the name also has a corporeal dimension. Moreover, Idel mentions linguistic iconism on several occasions.[68] The origin of morphonominalism probably goes back to the commentary of Ex 23:20-24 and the angelic figure described by these verses. It is found in apocalyptic, Qumranian, and gnostic (Valentinian) literature as well as in the Talmudic literature and that of the *Hekhalot*. It is a recurring theme of the Jewish conception of mystical sonship, in the medieval and modern eras.[69]

The dual revelation of the body of God (the *Anthropos* whose dimensions and name are described) characterizes the traditions of the *Sh'iur Qoma* and the gnostic gospel of Mark.[70] Without talking about morphonominalism, as Idel does, Moses Gaster[71] and Gershom Scholem[72] had already noted the similarity between these two corpora. The link between the divine body and the name is also present in Judeo-Christian sources.[73]

67. Idel, *Ben*, 18-19.
68. Idel, *Ben*, 222 and 293.
69. Idel, *Ben*, 20-22, 27-28, 114-123, 222, 226, 293, and 380.
70. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.128-134 (Harvey).
71. Moses Gaster, "Das Schiur Komah," in *Studies and Texts*, vol. 2 (London: Maggs Bros., 1923-1928), 1330-1353.
72. Gershom Scholem, *La mystique juive: Les thèmes fondamentaux* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985), 46-49.
73. See Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "Un Dieu sans nom. 'Théologies du Nom' judéo-chrétiennes and gnostiques," in *Le Rire du Christ: Essais sur le christianisme antique* (Paris: Bayard, 2006), 55-62.

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6. Debates on the Rabbinic Sources

The texts cited here have given rise to considerable debate.[74] For the mystical corpus, we must ask to what extent it is representative of the thinking of the rabbis. Does it not contain very isolated, even heterodox ideas? In fact, the work of G. Scholem or that of Saul Lieberman emphasizes the ancient origins of a significant part of the mystical corpus and its concordance with certain rabbinic traditions. There is concordance, for example, on the interpretation of the Canticle of Canticles describing the vision of God by Israel at Sinai, and the theme of the cloak or the name as a corporeal manifestation of God.[75] The idea of a God of gigantic dimensions may be associated with the Aggadic tradition, according to which Adam's height reached from the earth to the sky, or from one end of the world to the other.[76] The fundamental problem remains the question of how to interpret the texts, as we have already seen for the Bible. Should they all be interpreted literally, or is it possible to attribute metaphorical or allegorical significance to some of them? Some texts are immediately resistant to allegorical readings, for example, Rabbi Eliezer's interpretation of verse Ex 15:2: "This (*ze*) is my God." It is the use of the demonstrative (*ze*) that causes him to say that a maidservant "saw, at the (Red) sea, what Isaiah and Ezekiel never saw." The Hebrews did indeed see God in concrete form, to the extent that they could even point to him! It remains to be seen whether all of the texts will be quite so robust. Since medieval times, the strong tendency of Jewish hermeneutics has been to interpret these Midrashic texts allegorically. Maimonides is the most famous example of this. This strong tendency is equally notable in academic

74. A good insight into these debates can be found in the work of Yair Lorberbaum, *Ṣelem Elohim: Halakha we-aggada* (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv: Shocken,2004), 27-82 and in Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 23.

75. See Scholem, *La mystique juive*, 37-72 and *Jewish Gnosticism*, 58-64; Lieberman, "Mishnat Shir ha-Shirim," 118-126. See also *Midrash Hallel*, in *Bet ha-Midrash*, vol. 5, ed. Adolf Jellinek (Vienna: Brüder Winter, 1853-1878), 88 comparing the name of God and the image or the statue of a king.

76. Talmud Babli, *Ḥagiga*, 12a. On the close relationship between the gigantic bodies of God and Adam, see Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God," 191-193 and Moore, "Gigantic God," 100. The two attributes of the divine body (luminous and gigantic) emphasized by Goshen Gottstein, A. G., are indeed those which many Jews who were contemporaries of Maimonides attributed to God (*Guide for the Perplexed*, 1:1).

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literature. Alexander Altmann appears to believe that the theology of the rabbis is fundamentally hostile to anthropomorphism.[77] This conviction is also shared by other commentators.[78] The corporealism of the rabbis is only partial, according to Morton Smith and Marmorstein.[79]

David H. Aaron has conducted a detailed review of Goshen Gottstein's article.[80] He feels that Gottstein takes a number of texts literally when they could be read metaphorically. This is the case, for example, of the text on Adam's heel, where the figurative expression *qelasṭor panaw* signifies the beauty of his face and does not in any way imply that his face is a real source of light. The text is, moreover, deeply interwoven with semantic relations: the apple, the sphere of the sun, or the disks referred to in the comparison which follows the text, all allude to the idea of roundness. The coherence of the text can therefore be identified through a certain number of literary effects, rather than in any reference to a luminous Adam.[81]

Mystical literature, by definition, is more frequently suspected of being "allegorical." Did the mystics not have a well-known tendency to use images to hide their teachings or to try to express something which, by definition, is beyond common understanding? As noted by Stroumsa, early Christian mysticism cultivated the notion of corporealism, before moving towards a much less concrete understanding of divinity, in terms of light.[82] That leads to the question of whether light was also used in a metaphorical sense by the rabbis of antiquity. The texts of the *merkaba* often promise a physical description of the divinity before subsequently revealing … his

77. Alexander Altmann, "'Homo Imago Dei' in Jewish and Christian Theology," *Journal of Religion* 48 (1968): 235-259.

78. See Lorberbaum, *Ṣelem Elohim*, 17, 33, and 44. Unlike Joshua Abelson, *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1912), 82-97, Urbach, *Les Sages d'Israël*, 47 and 50-53 rejects the identification of the *Shekhina* with a physical light.

79. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine ofGod*, 1-157; Morton Smith, "On the Shape of God and the Humanity of Gentiles," in *Religions in Antiquity*, Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 315-326.

80. David H. Aaron, "Shedding Light on God's Body in Rabbinic Midrashim: Reflections on the Theory of a Luminous Adam," *Harvard Theological Review* 90 (1997): 299-314.

81. Aaron, "Shedding Light on God's Body," 303-305.

82. Gedaliahu Stroumsa, "To See or Not to See: On the Early History of the *Visio Beatifica*," in *Wege mystischer Gotteserfahrung: Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, ed. Peter Schäfer (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2006), 69.

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names. That could be interpreted to mean, as we saw previously, that the name is also a corporeal manifestation of the divinity. It could also imply that God has no physical form, to the extent that mystics must "content themselves" with his names.[83] Peter Schäfer seems to prefer the second reading.[84] Even the *Sh'iur Qoma* does not escape the hermeneutics of suspicion. With all its excesses, it is perhaps the most likely candidate for allegorical interpretation. The extreme nature of its numerical indications could express the infinity of God and the elusive nature of his essence.[85]

Despite these considerations, the prevailing trend in current research is to read the texts literally and to accept that the rabbis of antiquity did truly believe in a corporeal God. It is difficult to separate a text from its literal meaning if there is no very convincing reason to interpret it in this way. It is even the fundamental principle underlying the Midrashic exegesis by the rabbis of antiquity: a verse must show a certain number of anomalies or formal indications that make its literal interpretation unsatisfactory, to receive another, Midrashic, reading.[86] When these anomalies or indications are absent, the Midrash sticks decisively to the letter of the verse. For example, in Dt 34:5: "And Moses died by the mouth of the Lord (*'al pi ha-shem*)." As there is no doubt, in this verse, that it definitely refers to a mouth, the Midrash makes a literal interpretation and affirms that Moses died from a kiss by the Lord.[87] Moreover, the allegorical interpretation lacks a truly solid foundation. No text states explicitly that God lacks a body, and the allegorical reading is not really codified in the literature of the Midrash. In several texts, God's corporeality is the basis for concrete practices, which is hardly conceivable if it is reduced to a mere

83. See § 699 of the *Synopse*: we possess no measure but the names are revealed to us.

84. Schäfer, *Le Dieu caché et révélé*, 100.

85. For a non-literal reading of the *Sh'iur Qoma*, see Joseph Dan, "The Concept of Knowledge in the *Shi'ur Qoma*," in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to A. Altmann*, eds. S. Stein, S and R. Loew (University of Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979), 67-73.

86. See José Costa, *La Bible racontée par le Midrash* (Paris: Bayard, 2004), 6-7.

87. The literal reading of the word "mouth" in Dt 34:5 is very widespread without being unique: on this point, see P. Schäfer and K. Haacker, "Nachbiblische Traditionen vom Tod des Moses," in *Josephus Studien: Untersuchungen zu Josephus, dem antiken Judentum und dem Neuen Testament, Festschrift für O. Michel*, eds. O. Betz, K. Haacker, and M. Hengel (Göttingen:Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1974), 166-170.

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allegory.[88] The coherence of the corpus, despite frequent differences of opinion among the rabbis, is another fact to be taken into consideration. If the same motif is used in an apparently literal way in a large number of texts, it is difficult to attribute metaphorical significance to it *everywhere*, just because certain indications would justify this interpretation in one instance. We must also take into account the very specific mode of thought of the rabbis. As noted by Yair Lorberbaum, in his central thesis, to understand corporealist texts allegorically is a total misinterpretation, because they are derived from a mythical or theurgical way of thinking. Shamma Friedman concurs: these texts must be read according to their own conceptual categories, and as far as possible we must avoid attributing notions to them that were alien to the mental worlds of their authors.[89] However, it is probably true that the reaction of the corporealist researchers is overstated: it is always a delicate task to reduce a corpus as diverse as that of the rabbis to one single opinion, as Goshen Gottstein does, for example. The corporeal conception of God is predominant, but not exclusive, particularly if we consider the Targumic literature and its reductive tendencies with regard to anthropomorphism and anthropopathism[90]. Recent work has continued to relativize this tendency, although it does not completely deny it.[91]

The following text, taken from the *Talmud Babli*, also raises a serious objection to those who state that the rabbis of antiquity are not familiar with the notion of an incorporeal God: "The Holy One, blessed may he be, sees and is not seen/visible, just as the soul sees and is not seen/visible."[92] The text compares God to the soul and emphasizes the fact that neither is visible: these two points support the argument for divine incorporeality. One could also argue that the soul is not necessarily an incorporeal entity for the rabbis,[93] or

88. See Friedman, "Ṣelem demut we-tabnit," 115.
89. Friedman, "Ṣelem demut we-tabnit," 91 and 94.
90. For reasons of space, it was not possible to include the texts of the Targum here. However, see Moses Ginsburger, *Die Anthropomorphismen in den Targumim* (Braunschweig: Appelhans & Pfenningstorff, 1891).
91. See Michael L. Klein, *Anthropomorphisms and Anthropopathisms in the Targumim of the Pentateuch*, (Jerusalem: Makor, 1982) (in Hebrew).
92. Talmud Babli, *Berakhot*, 10a, Oxford manuscript 366.
93. On the possible "materiality" of the soul, see the texts cited in José Costa, *L'au-delà et la résurrection dans la littérature rabbinique ancienne* (Paris: Peeters, 2004), 480-487 and 482n18.

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follow the other possible interpretation: "And (God) is not seen." In other words, most of the time, God is not seen, but it is possible that he may be seen by a few privileged people, under certain specific circumstances.

Adherents of an allegorical reading may find support for their argument in a particular group of texts on the subject of divine polymorphism. The following Midrash is a good example of this:

"I am the Lord thy God" (Ex 20:2), because the Holy One, blessed may he be, appeared to them in the Sea like a warrior conducting a war (allusion to Ex 15:3); he[94] revealed himself to them at Sinai, like a scribe who teaches the Torah, and he appeared to them in the time of Daniel like an old man who teaches the Torah (allusion to Dn 7:9); he appeared to them in the time of Solomon, (like) a young man (Ct 5:15). The Holy One, blessed may he be, said to them: It is not that you deserved to (see) me in different forms (*demuyot harbe*), but it is I who was in the Sea, it is I who was at Sinai, "I am the Lord thy God." (Ex 20:2)[95]

If God can change his form at will, this means that none of the forms are truly his, and that essentially he does not have his own body and therefore does not have a body.[96] This argument, which can seem valid at first sight, raises the following question: What is the exact nature of the divine body that the rabbinic literature talks about?

7. Nature of the Divine Body

Is the divine body that of divinity itself or solely a corporeal manifestation of it, distinct from its essence, a kind of hypostasis? At first sight, these distinctions seem very abstract, but they provide insight into the nature of a very particular character in rabbinic literature, the angel Metatron, whose name "is like the name of his

94. In the Oxford manuscript 151, used here, it says in fact: "As he revealed himself to them at Sinai."

95. *Pesiqta de-rab Kahana*, 12:24, Oxford manuscript 151. See also *Mekhilta de-rabbi Shim'on ben Yoḥay*, ed. Epstein-Melamed, 81.

96. This reasoning is closer to the observation of Friedman, "Ṣelem demut we-tabnit," 91 that the Bible and the Talmudic literature speak of the form (*demut*) of God and not of his body (*guf*).

master."[97] The similarity of the name, particularly in relation to the Tetragram, is never simply a linguistic question. Metatron could be the corporeal manifestation of God, an archangelic hypostasis, to use the expression of Stroumsa.[98] Thus defined, he could easily be likened to Jesus, with whom he has several features in common. Metatron and Jesus both, for example, have two names: an esoteric name of six letters and a hidden name of twenty-four letters.[99] They also have the capacity to change form and present themselves with the appearance of either a young or an old man.[100] Idel also makes a contribution to the argument, when he states that Metatron is, in many respects, a true son of God.[101] The notion of archangelic hypostasis already existed in the Judaism of the first century, and in all likelihood it paved the way for the Christian doctrine of incarnation.[102] It is possible that the rabbinic literature evokes hypostases of the divinity other than Metatron, such as the cosmic Adam[103] or even that of the *Shekhina*.[104] The status of the *Shekhina* is not clearly defined by the rabbis of antiquity, and the rabbis of the Middle Ages are very divided on this question: Sa‘adya Ga’on and Maimonides state that it is a creature of God while for Naḥmanide, the *Shekhina* is God Himself.[105] Certain traditions suggest that the intradivine/extradivine distinction is too pronounced and that the nature of the *Shekhina* is more complex: it is a hypostasis of the divinity, through which he perceptibly manifests himself, in the form of light.[106]

97. Talmud Babli, *Sanhedrin*, 38b.
98. Stroumsa, "Forme(s) de Dieu," 75.
99. Stroumsa, "Polymorphie divine and transformations d'un mythologème: L'*Apocryphon de Jean* et ses sources," in *Savoir et Salut*, 59.
100. Stroumsa, "Polymorphie divine," 46 and 57-58.
101. Idel, *Ben*, 119-148.
102. On this point, see Stroumsa, "Polymorphie divine," 75, 79, and 81. In this study, however, the question of incarnation is only mentioned peripherally.
103. See (among others) Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God," 192.
104. The close relationship between Metatron and the *Shekhina* was ancient knowledge among the erudite, as shown in the study by G. F. Moore, "Intermediaries in Jewish Theology – Memra, Shekhinah, Metatron," *Harvard Theological Review* 15 (1922): 41-85.
105. See Urbach, *Les Sages d'Israël*, 46-47.
106. See the argument on the *Shekhina* in section 3 of this article. For E. Urbach, on the other hand, the *Shekhina* is not a hypostasis (*Les Sages d'Israël*, 69).

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The idea that God has a body is essential for the rabbis of antiquity, even if the exact nature of this body is subject to debate.[107] Once this idea is taken into account, it should lead to a profound reconsideration of the relationship of rabbinic Judaism with paganism as well as with Judeo Christianity and Christianity.

8. Judaism and Paganism

We are used to contrasting paganism and its visible and anthropomorphic gods with Judaism and its invisible and transcendent God. This contrast is, to begin with, a gross oversimplification of pagan religions. Their divinities can also be zoomorphic.[108] They can also be the object of aniconic worship, for example in the Persian religion of the Sassanids. Richard Kalmin has shown that the perception of idolatry by the Babylonian rabbis evolved over the course of time, with the image-based paganism of Parthians giving way to the aniconic cult of the Sassanids.[109] The increasing scarcity of idols seems to lead to growing anxiety towards them.[110] As for rabbinic Judaism, as we have seen, it believes in a corporeal God, even if he cannot be visually represented. His material representation par excellence is a living man. *The pagans and the rabbis therefore have a shared belief in a corporeal God.* The accusation of paganism brandished by certain Church Fathers with regard to Judaism

107. The rabbis' lack of precision on this point is most certainly due to a number of factors together (the esoteric nature of the divine body, a theology lacking conceptual rigor, etc.).

108. On the trouble caused by this zoomorphic paganism for Greek and Roman observers, see Gideon Bohak, "The Ibis and the Jewish Question: Ancient 'Anti-Semitism' in Historical Context," in *Jews and Gentiles in the Holy Land in the Days of the Second Temple, the Mishnah and the Talmud*, eds. Menachem Mor et al. (Jerusalem:Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2003), 36-37.

109. Richard Kalmin, "Idolatry in Late Antique Babylonia," in *Jewish Babylonia between Persia and Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 103-120.

110. Kalmin, "Idolatry," 109f. Kalmin is against the idea defended by Urbach and Lieberman, according to which idolatry had lost all attraction for the Jews. For a position closer to that of Kalmin, see Mireille Hadas-Lebel, "Le paganisme à travers les sources rabbiniques," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2:19:2 (1979): 398 and Emmanuel Friedheim, *Rabbinisme et paganisme en Palestine romaine. Étude historique des* Realia *talmudiques (*i^er^-ive *siècles)* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

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is therefore far from being mere polemic.[111] It also derives from an objective convergence between Judaism and paganism on the subject of the divine body. If this convergence was noticed by certain Church Fathers, it is unlikely to have escaped the notice of the rabbis themselves. The use in the Bible of the same terms (*ṣelem, temuna*) to designate human beings, and their resemblance to God or the idol is a fact that they must have been aware of.

Certain rabbinic texts explicitly compare the idol with the representation of God that is man. The comparison sometimes emphasizes the likeness or the analogy between these two things, for example in the story of Hillel, cited earlier, that compares the statue of the king ("the statues of the kings"), a representation of divinity for the pagans, to man ("I who am created in the image and likeness of God"), a*corporeal*representation of God.[112] Another text already cited compares the destruction of the images and the statues of the kings with a diminished likeness of God, that is to say the destruction of a human body through murder.[113] The rabbis do not hesitate to have the angels say to Jacob: "'Israel, in whom I will be glorified' (Is 49:3). You are he whose image (*iqonin*) is carved on high."[114] According to Friedman, engraved "on high" means "on the very face of God." The subsequent versions of this *aggada*, that talk of an image carved on the throne of glory, weaken the strength of the message, most probably polemical with regard to the status attributed to Jesus in Jn 1:51-52.[115] The text expresses above all a curious reversal: it is God who is the visual representation of Jacob and in the comparison between the king and his statue, it is Jacob who

111. See Arnobius of Sicca, *Against the Gentiles*, 3.12: the pagans criticize the Christians for also having idolatrous beliefs. Arnobius retorts that it is the Jews who believe, *like the pagans*, in a corporeal God. See also Lorberbaum, *Ṣelem Elohim*, 20: the pagans use images for theurgical purposes and in rabbinic theurgy, it is man, the image of God, who plays a similar role.

112. *Wa-yiqra Rabba*, 34:3, London manuscript 340:2. On the anthropomorphic understanding of the term *ṣelem* and the worship of the Emperor, see Morton Smith, "The Image of God: Notes on the Hellenization of Judaism with Especial Reference to Goodenough's Work on Jewish Symbols," *Bulletin of the John Ryland Library* 40 (1958): 473-512.

113. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma'el, *Yitro, Ba-ḥodesh*, 8, Oxford manuscript 151.

114. *Bereshit Rabba*, 68:12, Vatican manuscript 30.

115. See S. Friedman, "Graven Image," *Graven Images: A Journal of Culture, Law and the Sacred* 1 (1994): 233-238; Friedman, "Ṣelem demut we-tabnit," 118-133; Friedman, "Anthropomorphism and its Eradication," 168-178.

corresponds to the king and God to the statue. The term *iqonin*, used elsewhere in the sense of "statue" of the king, designates, in our text, the reproduction of the features of Jacob on the face of God.

Despite it being forbidden to represent human faces on coins, the rabbis mention four exceptions: Abraham, Joshua, David, and Mordecai.[116] The following tradition compares the statues of the king with the divine body, this time represented by his name:

Another interpretation of "Praise the name of the Lord" (Ps 113:1). Parable. What can this be compared to? To a king who sent his escort to war, with statue(s) (*iqonin*) of the king. He said to him: Each time you achieve a victory, worship the statues of me, and it will be as if you worshipped me. That is why it is said: "Praise the name of the Lord."[117]

Certain more economical traditions compare God directly to the idol, without going through the mediation of man. God is, for example, compared to a statue with a face on each side, which leads to an identification with Janus *Quadrifrons*.[118]

Other comparisons between man, (corporeal) image of God, and the statue, image of the pagan god, place more emphasis on the distinctions between them, for example in the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*: "You are the image of the invisible God. May those who desire to live piously not say, therefore, that idols are images of God … because the image of God is man … because the body of man bears the image of God."[119] The idol is a false image of the divinity, while the body of man is a true one. Despite this critical aspect, the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* certainly provide the most explicit comparison of the two types of image represented by the idol and the human body, just as they give the clearest affirmation of the luminous nature of the divine body.

Finally, the Midrash gives the example of a comparison that articulates both the likeness and the difference: "'They have ears but they hear not' (Ps 115:6). Let deafness strike the ears of those who

116. *Bereshit Rabba*, 39:11.
117. *Midrash Hallel*, 88.
118. Midrash Tanḥuma, *Yitro*, 11 and Ephraïm Urbach, "The Rabbinical Laws of Idolatry in the Second and Third Centuries in the Light of Archaeological and Historical Facts," in *Collected Writings in Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1999), 176-177.
119. *Homélies Pseudo-clémentines*, 11:4 (trans. Siouville, 244).

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hear but worship ears that cannot hear, and ignore the ears that can hear, as it is said: 'the Lord hearkened, and did hear' (Ml 3:16)."[120] Idols, like the one God, have ears (likeness), but the ears of the idols do not hear while the ears ofGod can hear (difference).

Some traditions are not content simply to draw a comparison between the statue and the body of God but go even further, establishing a causal link between the two. It is therefore forbidden to represent God (as an idol) not because he lacks a body but because his body is incomparable with any other existing bodies:

> And the day of the gift of the Torah, the Holy One, blessed may he be, tore down the skies and allowed Israel to see what is on high. Rabbi Pinḥas and Rabbi Levi (said) in the name of Rabbi Shim'on ben Laqish: The Holy One, blessed may he be, tore down (the) seven firmaments for them, and just as he tore down the on-high (*ha-'elyonim*), so he tore down what is below (*ha-taḥtonim*), as it is said "that is in the heaven above or that is in the earth beneath" (Ex 20:4). *See that there is no other with me,* as it is said: "Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know (that the Lord he is God; there is none else beside him)" (Dt 4:35) (and) "Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else" (Dt 4:39).[121]

It is also forbidden to represent man because his body is in the image of God.[122] One could argue that if the body of God resembles that of man, then it must not be so incomparable and atypical as the first tradition cited maintains. This divergence can perhaps be explained by two different conceptions of the divine body, one which is anthropomorphic and one which is not. One could also imagine that the corporeal likeness between God and man concerned the first man above all, before the fall. The current body of man is no more than a distant reflection of that of God, which is nonetheless close enough to justify the prohibition on representing man.[123] But the first tradition mentions only the creatures of the heavens and the depths, none of which are comparable to God. *The text does not explicitly refer to the case of man.* The two traditions we are concerned with are therefore not contradictory. They are agreed on a fundamental point: it is because God has a body that it is forbidden

120. *Midrash Hallel*, 99.
121. *Debarim Rabba*, (ed. Lieberman, 65).
122. Talmud Babli, *'Aboda Zara*, 43b.
123. On the theory of the reflection, see Goshen Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God," 188.

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to represent it. Each one then follows a different argument. The first one addresses the case of creatures whose bodies do not resemble God's in any way. Representing God with their features would give a false image of divinity. The second tradition, on the other hand, looks at the particular case of man: *it is not the dissimilarity between God and man that causes a problem, but on the contrary, their likeness*.[124] Man cannot be represented because he resembles God and the converse is probably true: God cannot be represented because he resembles man. The likeness between the body of God and man therefore entails a major risk, that of erasing the fundamental difference, in the eyes of the rabbis, between the Creator and the most important of his creatures.[125] The fact remains that in the first tradition, God addresses himself directly to *men* (the Hebrews), saying to them: "See that there is no other with me." How can we be certain that the case of man is not taken into account here? In fact, God probably has a more precise objective: to show the Hebrews that, in the hidden places of the heavens and the depths, there is no entity with a body identical to that of God, which would therefore be divine itself. The text has an anti-gnostic orientation and is therefore perfectly compatible with the idea that man is the creature whose body most closely resembles God's *without being identical to it.*

A causal link may also exist between the statue and the bodies of the angels. Thus, the Hebrews, when making the golden calf, wanted to reproduce the face of the bull of the *Ḥayyot* who draws the divine chariot (*merkaba*). Moses asks for divine mercy for this reason. The idol of the golden calf is in fact the direct reproduction of a feature belonging to the body of an angel.[126]

The rabbis therefore establish parallels between the corporeal representation of God that is man and that of the pagan divinity that is a sculpted image. With the exception of the text of the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*, which is slightly peripheral to the rabbis' corpus, on the whole the parallels do not show a negative or

124. A text of the *Mekhilta* (Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishma'el, *Yitro, Ba-ḥodesh*, 6) mentions all the forbidden idolatrous representations. Man is strikingly absent from the list.

125. Man is regularly considered to be a more important creature than the angels by the rabbis. On this theme, see: Peter Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen. Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorstellung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter,1975).

126. *Shemot Rabba*, 43:8.

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polemical aspect. Are we seeing a particularly incontestable case of the Hellenization of the rabbis? Other examples strengthen the idea the mental world of the rabbis is partly permeated by pagan representations, such as the identification of Isis with Eve or Poseidon/ Neptune with the Prince of the Sea.[127] The presence of Helios in the mosaics of the synagogues or in a prayer of *Sefer ha-razim* is perhaps not so distant from ancient rabbinic Judaism.[128]

The fact that the rabbis do not hesitate to draw parallels between man and the sculpted image, in a context which is clearly not polemical, shows at least that the sculpted image is not systematically viewed in a negative light. This evolution in the perception of images, which separates rabbinic Judaism from what preceded it, can be seen in a great number of traditions.[129] In the Mishna, Rabbi Me'ir forbids all images or statues, as they are considered by him to be objects of worship on principle. The Sages, on the other hand, only forbid statues that have a stick, a bird, or a globe in their hand.[130] Yaron Eliav has clearly shown that these objects are the attributes that allow a distinction to be made between the statues of gods and those that are simply of men.[131] The Sages therefore only forbid the statues that explicitly represent gods. Other traditions further contribute to weakening this position. A statue of a goddess who is not the object of worship but the ornament for a bath is not problematic, as shown by the dialog between Proclus, son of

127. See Saul Lieberman, *Yewanit wi-Ywanut* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1962), 250-251.

128. On Helios, see Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 251-253.

129. On this point, see: Eliav, "Viewing the Sculptural Environment," 411-433; Hadas-Lebel "Le paganisme à travers les sources rabbiniques," 397-489; Pierre Prigent, *Le Judaïsme et l'Image*, (Tübingen: Mohr, 1990); Seth Schwartz, "Gamaliel in Aphrodite's Bath: Palestinian Judaism and Urban Culture in the Third and Forth Centuries," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 1: 203-217; Urbach "The Rabbinical Laws of Idolatry," 151-193. Curiously, the magicians are sometimes stricter than the rabbis and more faithful to the era of the second Temple, with regard to iconophobia (Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*, 347).

130. Mishna, *'Aboda Zara*, 3-1.

131. Eliav, "Viewing the Sculptural Environment," 423. Numerous commentators see in this Mishna an allusion to the statues of the emperor, that would therefore be more stigmatized than other kinds of statue; see Urbach "The Rabbinical Laws of Idolatry," 177; Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Jérusalem contre Rome* (Paris: Éditions du CERF, 1990), 328-329.

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Philosophos, and Rabban Gamliel, both of whom were present at Acre "in the bath of Aphrodite."[132] Even if certain individuals come to venerate a statue of this kind, it is not an official object of worship and therefore it does not count.[133]

Certain rabbis are equally conscious that paganism is not only the worship of, but also belief in these divinities, which are not mistaken for their statues.[134] This definition of paganism as a belief (or absence of belief) further contributes to the diminishing importance of the question of images.

9. Judaism and Christianity

Turning to Christianity, the situation is more complex: does the existence of a corporeal Jewish God contribute to an (intellectual) rapprochement between Judaism and Christianity or, on the contrary, does it distance them from one another? Scholarly research is quite divided on the answer to this question. For Daniel Boyarin, rabbinic Judaism and early Christianity are in radical disagreement on the question of the divine body. Rabbinic Judaism starts from the idea that God is immediately corporeal. Christianity, on the other hand, has a dualist perspective: God is first of all invisible before being incarnated, making himself visible.[135] These two different conceptions of divinity in its relation to the body can be found within anthropology and hermeneutics.[136] Rabbinic Judaism conceives of man as a whole. Even when man is presented in dualist terms, this dualism is not strongly emphasized. The Christian concept of the body, on the other hand, emphasizes the duality of the two substances (soul and body) and the tension that exists between them. In hermeneutics, early Christianity emphasizes the allegorical reading of Scripture. The most important thing is not the

132. Mishna, *'Aboda Zara*, 3:4.

133. Talmud Yerushalmi, *Shebi'it*, 8:8.

134. See Urbach, "The Rabbinical Laws of Idolatry," 164-166 and particularly the text of *Shemot Rabba*, 15:17.

135. Jesus is God made visible as a body and as a name. See also the position of Idel, *Ben*, 57-69, on the question of the incarnation.

136. D. Boyarin "De/Re/constructing Midrash," in *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*, ed. Carol Bakhos (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 314. In note 47, he refers positively to Goshen Gottstein's article.

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corporeal aspect of Scripture, but what is beyond the text, that is to say the spirit and the spiritual meaning of the text. The Christian allegorical approach has often been compared to and even identified with the Jewish Midrash. They both effectively set the text aside to go beyond it, towards what is not explicitly mentioned in the text and what is the most important thing. Boyarin, on the other hand, highlights the profound differences that separate Christian allegory from the Midrash. The Midrash values the text, because it is the specific nature and profound examination (*talmud*) of it that gives access to the hidden meanings of Scripture. The Midrash is not the quest for an idea behind the letter of the verse. It is first and foremost an attempt to relive a concrete, empirical experience, that of the vision of God,[137] particularly the vision at Sinai. That is why the rabbis' reading of the Canticle of Canticles cannot be described as allegorical, because this biblical text is indeed, for them, the tale of a concrete physical experience, that of the meeting of God with Israel, at the Red Sea and at Mount Sinai. This desire to see God, expressed through the practice of the Midrash, even the essence of it, has an erotic nature. It is therefore not surprising that the rabbis have established a strong link between Exodus and the Canticle of Canticles.[138] The conception that Boyarin has of the link between the Midrash and the divine body has certain affinities with the reflections of Elliot R. Wolfson on the same question. Wolfson relies particularly on the tradition that praises the "imaginative faculty" (*koaḥ le-dammot*) of the prophets:[139] these forms of God, which the visionary (individual or collective) perceives, are of course mental constructions, but they are not only in the spirit of the visionary; they are real. The imaginative faculty (*koaḥ le-dammot*) is truly the medium for the meeting with God.[140] In a recent study, Wolfson restates his previous positions. Rabbinic Judaism combines both the rejection of the Christian incarnation and an emphatically anthropomorphic conception of God, which does not have merely metaphorical significance. In fact, the rabbis

137. See Boyarin, "The Eye in the Torah," 12 and 18.

138. See Boyarin, "The Eye in the Torah," 13-14. On this point, see also Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 42.

139. *Pesiqta de-rab Kahana*, 4:4 and *Pesiqta Rabbati*, 14. See also *Bereshit Rabba*, 27:1.

140. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 36-40.

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maintain that one can have a concrete experience of God in prayer and in study, that of the "imagined body of God." The body of God is real insofar as it is imagined and imagined insofar as it is real. The body is not an object, it is something constructed by the imagination, in a complex way.[141]

Stroumsa takes the opposite position to Boyarin, and believes that ancient conceptions of the divine body, both Jewish and Christian, are quite close to one another. The distinction between an invisible God and his visible hypostasis is not particular to Christianity; it is rooted in Jewish conceptions, of which there was already evidence in the first century. The dual corporeal manifestation of this hypostasis, anthropomorphic or nominal, is also common to both Judaism and Christianity, the latter being directly influenced by its predecessor in this instance as well. Moreover, the early mysticism of the Christians is hard to distinguish from that of Judaism: they have the same corporealist orientation. After this, physical descriptions of God tend to disappear from the Christian mystical texts. The role of visual representation in early Christianity evolved in the opposite direction to that of discursive representation, as we have just mentioned. Christianity, originally aniconic, became an iconic religion in the fourth century of our era. This evolution has not always been satisfactorily explained. Stroumsa proposes to shed some light on this, based on the situation for ancient Judaism, which forbids the visual representation of God. However, it is much more open when it comes to discursive representations. Is there not a link between these two phenomena? It is the prohibition on visual representation that, through a kind of compensation for repression, may have stimulated the development of the anthropomorphic visions of God. It is probable that the destruction of the Second Temple, a concrete seat of divinity, helped to stimulate the imagination of the rabbis and the mystics even further. The anthropomorphism of the Bible, far from being understood allegorically by the rabbis, is reinforced, and they do not hesitate, as in the *Shi'ur Qoma*, to describe the limbs of the divine body in detail. A similar explanation would be helpful for Christianity, but in the opposite direction. The further Christian

141. Elliot R. Wolfson, "Judaism and Incarnation: The Imaginal Body of God," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. Tivka Frymer-Kensky et al. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 239-254.

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mysticism gets from corporealism, the more it feels the need to rely on visual and concrete images.[142]

The positions of Boyarin and Stroumsa are therefore difficult to reconcile, because they do not agree on the exact status of the divine body. Is it the body of the divinity himself, as Boyarin thinks, or is it only a manifestation of this, in the form of hypostasis, as Stroumsa argues? The corporeality of God would appear to be the majority view in the rabbinic vision of antiquity. However, it is not so easy to determine, based on the texts, the precise nature of this divine body. There is little evidence of this strongly conceptual, even philosophical distinction between the essence of the divinity and its manifestation in an ancient Jewish literature that, with the exception of Philo, does not take much apparent interest in the philosophical logos.

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142. Stroumsa, "Polymorphie divine," 68-70. We may ask, however, whether the process is not more "simple": is it not to be expected that a Christianity gradually distancing itself from its Jewish origins should move closer to the "idolatrous" practices of the pagans?