

## IRIDESCENCE IN EZEKIEL

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### *Introduction*

Explicit references to the rainbow in the OT occur only in Gen 9:13, 14, 16, and Ezek 1:28. While rainbow imagery (i.e., iridescence) is explicit in Ezek 1, one also finds it implicit not only in chapter 1 but also elsewhere in Ezekiel, shimmering beneath the surface of the text in all of its multicolored splendor. In this article, I will review the explicit iridescent imagery in Ezekiel and investigate such implicit imagery elsewhere in Ezekiel.<sup>1</sup> Further, I will explore the broader context of Ezekiel's iridescent imagery elsewhere in order to help explain why such imagery is relatively rare in the OT and NT.

### *Ezekiel's Explicit Iridescent Imagery*

The explicit use of iridescent imagery occurs in only one place in Ezekiel. In Ezek 1, the prophet has an extraordinary, scintillating visionary experience of the glory<sup>2</sup> of the LORD by the Chebar River (1:1; cf. 8:4 and 43:3). Ezekiel begins his visionary description this way: "As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it [וַיִּנְהַל לוֹ קָדִיבִים], and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire" (1:4).<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel's description subsequently moves inward as he describes, first, the four living creatures (vv. 5-12, 14, 23-24), then the burning coals of fire that flash forth lightning within the living creatures (v. 13), the mysterious wheels filled with eyes (vv. 14-20), the firmament above the living creatures (v. 22), the throne above the firmament (v. 26), and, finally, the being on the throne (vv. 26-27).

Ezekiel, consequently, sees a brightness or radiance surrounding the being upon the throne (1:27: וַיִּנְהַל לוֹ קָדִיבִים).<sup>4</sup> He then describes further how this radiance appeared: "Like the bow [הַקֶּשֶׁת] in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendor [הַנְּהַל] all around" (1:28a). The Hebrew word for

<sup>1</sup>I am unaware of any published research that specifically analyzes in detail the topic of iridescence in Ezekiel.

<sup>2</sup>For the purposes of this article, I have decided *not* to capitalize "glory" unless a quoted source has done so.

<sup>3</sup>The text is taken from the NASB. Unless otherwise indicated, however, all English translations of the Hebrew OT and Greek NT are taken from the NRSV.

<sup>4</sup>Moshe Greenberg argues that this radiance surrounds the entire figure on the throne, instead of just the lower description of this being (*Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 22 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983], 50-51).

“bow” in this text (קשקש) occurs numerous times in the OT and normally refers to the bow of an archer.<sup>5</sup> The meaning of “rainbow,” however, occurs in Ezekiel only here (cf. 39:3, 9); elsewhere in the OT it occurs only in Gen 9:13, 14, and 16.<sup>6</sup> Thus this passage is the only explicit place where the prophet Ezekiel compares the radiance (קנ) surrounding the being on the throne to a rainbow (קשקש).<sup>7</sup>

It is important to note what the rest of Ezek 1:28 says. The whole verse reads: “Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendor all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of someone speaking.” But what precisely does the “likeness of the glory of the LORD” encompass? Though it may appear so at first glance, the reference to “the likeness of the glory of the LORD” does not refer solely to rainbow imagery. Rather, it refers to the entire description in Ezek 1:26b-28a, where the vision zeroes in on the being on the throne and the surrounding radiance.<sup>8</sup> One finds confirmation for this when one notices that in other texts in Ezekiel the glory is more than a radiance and would appear to include the celestial being that Ezekiel saw on the throne in chapter 1.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Cf., e.g., Gen 27:3; 48:22; 49:24; Josh 24:12; 1 Sam 2:4; 18:4; 2 Sam 1:22; 22:35; 1 Kgs 22:34; 2 Kgs 6:22.

<sup>6</sup>Aron Pinkas is clearly wrong when he states that the reference to the bow (קשקש) in Ezek 39:9 is “in the context of the rainbow” (“The Lord’s Bow in Habakkuk 3,9a,” *Bib* 84 [2003]: 417); there is *no* rainbow in that context.

<sup>7</sup>To Ezekiel, the radiance is not a rainbow; rather, it is *like* the appearance (קמרא) of a rainbow (1:28). Cf. the Akkadian concepts of *melammu* and *pul(u)b(t)u* in their association with sparkling and even iridescent imagery. The classic article on this is by A. L. Oppenheim, “Akkadian *pul(u)b(t)u* and *melammu*,” *JAOs* 63 (1943): 31-34. More recently, see Nahum M. Waldman, “A Note on Ezekiel 1:18,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 614-618. For the relationship of *melammu* to the (rain)bow, see Elena Cassin, *La splendeur divine: Introduction à l'étude de la mentalité mésopotamienne*, Civilisations et Sociétés 8 (Paris: Mouton, 1968), 118; and George E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 32-66. See also Moshe Weinfeld, “Divine Intervention in War in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East,” in *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures*, ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 121-147.

<sup>8</sup>Greenberg, 51, asserts that the glory is the human figure “with the elements of *bašmal*, fire and radiance.” For the uncertainty expressed over the extent of this phrase, see Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, Hermeneia, trans. by Ronald E. Clements, ed. by Frank Moore Cross and Klaus Baltzer with the assistance of Leonard Jay Greenspoon (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 124.

<sup>9</sup>Cf., e.g., Ezek 1:28-2:1; 8:1-4; 43:2-3. Later some Jews believed that the rainbow-like radiance itself was the full physical manifestation of the glory of the LORD, and thus they felt that one should fall prostrate whenever one saw a rainbow, just as Ezekiel had fallen prostrate before the glory. See *b. Ber.* 59a and the discussion in David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel’s Vision*, TSAJ 16 (Tübingen: Mohr

*Ezekiel's Implicit Iridescent Imagery*

The iridescent imagery explicitly found in Ezek 1:28 is implicit elsewhere in Ezekiel. In Ezek 1:4, quoted above, the prophet describes the bright light or radiance surrounding the great cloud (וַיִּנְהַל לִי כְבוֹד). The language is similar to Ezekiel's description of the radiance surrounding the being on the throne in 1:28. Notice the parallels in the following table:

Ezek 1:4		Ezek 1:27-28	
cloud	עָנָן	cloud (v. 28)	בְּעָנָן
brightness	וַיִּנְהַל	splendor (vv. 27, 28)	וַיִּנְהַל
around it	כְּבוֹד	all around (vv. 27, 28)	כְּבוֹד
fire	וַאֲש	fire (v. 27)	אֵשׁ
gleaming amber	הַחֲשָׁמַל	gleaming amber (v. 27)	חֲשָׁמַל

The terms do not occur in the same order, and there is not an exact one-to-one correspondence with some of the terms. Nevertheless, the clustering of these terms in close affinity to each other within their respective contexts leads one to conclude that since Ezekiel has compared the brightness (וַיִּנְהַל) to iridescent imagery (כְּשֶׁמֶשׁ) in 1:27-28, this brightness is the same brightness (וַיִּנְהַל) that occurs for the first time in 1:4.<sup>10</sup> In other words, I would suggest that the rainbow imagery in 1:27-28 is implicit in 1:4.<sup>11</sup>

[Siebeck], 1988), 252-257.

<sup>10</sup>Greenberg states that the radiance in v. 4 is "spoken [of] in terms identical to those of our passage [vs. 27]" (*Ezekiel 1-20*, 50). William H. Brownlee suggests that 1:4b is "anticipatory of vv. 26-28" (*Ezekiel 1-19*, WBC 28 [Waco: Word, 1986], 11).

<sup>11</sup>F. Field cites the enigmatic "Hebrew" (ὁ Ἑβραῖος) in Origen's Hexapla on Ezek 1:4: φῶς γὰρ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτοῦ, ὡς ὄρασις ἱριδος ("For there was a light in the middle of it, as the appearance of a rainbow" [my translation]; text in F. Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt; sive veterum interpretum graecorum in totum vetus testamentum fragmenta* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1875; reprint ed., Hildesheim, Germany: Georg Olms, 1964], 2:769). Here the וַיִּנְהַל has become the φῶς, and the latter assumes the appearance of the ἱρις (rainbow), showing that the interpretation advanced here is not new, but ancient. Cf. also Halperin, *Faces*, 526.

The word  $\text{הַנִּזְרָה}$  occurs in only one place in Ezekiel outside of chapter 1.<sup>12</sup> In Ezek 10:4, the prophet observes the movement of the glory of the LORD: “Then the glory of the LORD rose up from the cherub to the threshold of the house; the house was filled with the cloud, and the court [ $\text{הַיְהוּדָה}$ ] was full of the brightness [ $\text{הַנִּזְרָה}$ ] of the glory of the LORD.” The court filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD in 10:4 is the *inner* court, since Ezekiel explicitly refers to the inner court in the previous verse and the outer court in the next verse. A distinction appears to be made between the cloud and the brightness: if, as in 1:4, the brightness ( $\text{הַנִּזְרָה}$ ) surrounds the cloud,<sup>13</sup> this would provide a parallel to 10:4 and help to explain why the brightness is in the inner court, while the cloud fills the house. Another observation is that the cloud is not identical with the glory of the LORD, for while the cloud fills the house/temple, the glory remains at the threshold (cf. 10:18). It appears that while the glory is at the threshold of the temple, the surrounding cloud fills the temple and the brightness of the glory fills the inner court.<sup>14</sup>

It may be that in 10:4 Ezekiel is describing two related aspects of the same enveloping phenomena around the glory of the LORD, i.e., the cloud on the one hand (on one side of the threshold) and the brightness of the glory on the other hand (on the other side of the threshold).<sup>15</sup> In any case, this brightness or

For a brief discussion of “the Hebrew translator,” see Karen H. Jobs and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 42. See also Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: An Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Boston: Brill, 2001), 161-163; and cf. Bas ter Haar Romeny, “‘Quis Sit ó Σύπος’ Revisited,” in *Origen’s Hexapla and Fragments: Papers Presented at the Rich Seminar on the Hexapla, Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, 25th July–3rd August 1994*, ed. Alison Salvesen, *Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum*, no. 58 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 374-375 and 397-398.

<sup>12</sup>In Ezekiel, it occurs in 1:4, 13, 27-28, and 10:4. I will discuss 1:13 later in this article.

<sup>13</sup>The cloud here is *not* the same as the storm cloud in 1:4. The relation of the brightness to the cloud in both texts, however, may be parallel. See Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 320.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. the description in Sir 50:5-7 of the exit of the High Priest Simon II from the “house of the curtain” ( $\text{οἴκου καταπατάσματος}$ ) into the court, where he is described as a “rainbow gleaming in splendid clouds [ $\text{τόξον φωτίζον ἐν νεφέλαις δόξης}$ ] (NRSV).” On the use of Greek as a starting point for the exegesis of Sirach, see the recent analysis by Jan Liesen, *Full of Praise: An Exegetical Study of Sir 39, 12-35*, JSJSup 64 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 19-20.

<sup>15</sup>The glory of the LORD fills the tabernacle/temple/house in Exod 40:34-35, 2 Chr 7:1-2, and Ezek 43:5 and 44:4 (cf. Isa 6:1 [LXX]; Rev 15:8). On the other hand, the cloud fills the temple/house in 1 Kgs 8:10-11 and 2 Chr 5:13-14. It is in these latter texts, however, that the cloud is explicitly equated with the glory of the LORD (see, e.g., 1 Kgs 8:10-11: “And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD”). See also reference to the glory of the LORD appearing in the

radiance of the glory of the LORD can be none other than that which Ezekiel saw by the Chebar River (1:27-28), for the language is virtually the same; the rainbow-like radiance filled the inner court.<sup>16</sup>

Another implicit reference to the iridescent, rainbow-like radiance of the glory of the LORD occurs in Ezek 43:2, even though the term *נֹהַר* is absent. There Ezekiel describes the glory of the LORD shining or illuminating the earth: “And there, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east; the sound was like the sound of mighty waters; and the earth shone with his glory [וְהָאָרֶץ הָאֵיךָ מִכְבָּדוֹ].” Despite the lack of the term *נֹהַר*, Ezekiel describes the return of the glory in terms of light imagery. Additionally, Ezekiel identifies what he sees here with what he had seen earlier by the River Chebar (43:3). Further, his response of prostration to this vision of glory mirrors his visionary experience by the Chebar (43:3; cf. 1:28).<sup>17</sup> While the glory that enlightens the earth in 43:2 is not narrowly focused on iridescence (cf. 1:26-28), it does include that imagery.

The results of this initial survey of Ezekiel are rather narrow,<sup>18</sup> yet they are significant. Within the overall context of Ezekiel, the radiance of the glory of the God of Israel includes not only the explicit rainbow-like brightness he saw in 1:27-28, but also the implicit, iridescent radiance that he saw in 1:4 and 10:4 and that he included in 43:2.<sup>19</sup> Several other texts that refer to the glory of the

(pillar of) cloud in Exod 16:10 (cf. Exod 24:16; Num 16:42; 2 Macc 2:8). It seems that Ezekiel is not making the same kind of exact identification between the cloud and the glory.

One should also note the presence of the LORD in the pillar of cloud and fire (cf. Exod 13:21; 14:24; 34:5; Num 11:25; 12:5; 14:14; Lev 16:2; Deut 31:15; Ps 99:7). According to Sir 24:4, it was Wisdom that had its throne in the pillar of cloud. The pillar of cloud was sometimes called simply “the cloud” (Exod 14:20; 34:5; 40:34-38; Num 9:15-22; 10:11-12; 10:34; 12:10; 14:14; 16:42; Ps 78:14; 105:39; 1 Cor 10:1-2; Wis 19:7), and it was from this cloud that the glory of the LORD sometimes appeared (Exod 16:10). Exod 40:38 describes the pillar of fire as the (pillar of) cloud with fire in it by night, while Num 9:15 (cf. v. 21) describes the (pillar of) cloud having the appearance of fire during the night. Is it possible that the juxtaposition of the cloud and the glory of the LORD in these texts implies an iridescent radiance as in Ezekiel?

<sup>16</sup>Since Ezekiel ties the rainbow-like radiance to the glory of the LORD in 1:27-28, the radiance of the glory of the LORD in 10:4 can be none other than what 1:28 refers to. See Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 321, n. 33.

<sup>17</sup>Block compares the intense glory of 43:2 to the light and fire motif in 1:4 and 13 (*The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 579).

<sup>18</sup>See below for the discussion of the *נֹהַר* in Ezek 1:13.

<sup>19</sup>Richard M. Davidson suggests that the overall structure of the book of Ezekiel is important for understanding God’s glory returning to the temple (“The Chiastic Literary Structure of the Book of Ezekiel,” in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*, ed. David Merling [Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Archaeology, Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum, Andrews University, 1997], 71-94). I wish to thank Jiří Moskala for drawing my attention to this article.

LORD as seen initially in Ezekiel's Chebar vision—but without mentioning its splendor or radiant quality—would also *implicitly* include the rainbow-like radiance, unless otherwise qualified as in 10:4.<sup>20</sup> Despite the paucity of texts, particularly explicit ones, the significance of the iridescent glory in Ezek 1 and its reverberations throughout the work cannot be dismissed.

*Possible Iridescent Imagery Behind  
the Text of Ezek 9?*

It is possible that iridescence in Ezekiel may not be limited to the texts we have thus far explored. Margaret Barker has provocatively suggested that another reference to iridescent imagery occurs in the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX version of Ezek 9:2.<sup>21</sup> There the prophet sees six men approach and stand beside the bronze altar. Among these men, however, is one who is “clothed in linen, with a writing case [קִטְסַת הַסֵּפֶר]; literally, ‘a scribe’s writing case/palette’] at his side.” But the LXX of this text is radically different: the “Man in Linen” is instead a man clothed in a long robe (ἐνδεδυκὼς ποδήρη). Further, the LXX says he has a lapis lazuli<sup>22</sup> ceremonial belt/sash<sup>23</sup> at his waist (ζώνη σαφείρου

<sup>20</sup>See 3:12, 23 (notice Ezekiel falls prostrate again); 8:4; 9:3; 10:18-19; 11:22-23; 43:2-5; and 44:4.

<sup>21</sup>Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Soon Take Place (Revelation 1.1)* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 268-269.

<sup>22</sup>σαφείρος does not refer to our modern “sapphire” (blue corundum), as found in many modern translations (cf. the NASB, NIV, and NRSV on Exod 24:10). Walter Schumann observes that from antiquity until as late as the Middle Ages “the name sapphire was understood to mean what is today described as lapis lazuli” (*Gemstones of the World*, trans. Evelyne Stern [New York: Sterling, 1977], 86); cf. DBAG, s.v. “σαφείρος”; LSJ, s.v. “σαφείρος”; John S. Harris, “An Introduction to the Study of Personal Ornaments of Precious, Semi-Precious and Imitation Stones Used Throughout Biblical History,” *ALUOS* 4 (1962-1963), 69-70; idem, “The Stones of the High Priest’s Breastplate,” *ALUOS* 52 (1963-1965), 52, where he states: “So strong are the arguments concerning the relation of the ancient name Sapphire to the mineral Lapis-Lazuli that little more need be added”; Mohsen Manutchehr-Danai, *Dictionary of Gems and Gemnology* [Berlin: Springer, 2000], s.v. “lapis lazuli”; H. Quiring, “Die Edelsteine im Amtsschild des jüdischen Hohenpriesters und die Herkunft ihrer Namen,” *Sudhoffs Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften* 38 (1954): 200-202; and Nahum N. Sarna, who agrees and states that the modern sapphire “was unknown in the ancient Near East, . . .” (*Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPSTC [Philadelphia: JPS, 1991], 153). See, e.g., Pliny the Elder in it, as one finds in lapis lazuli; and Theophrastus *Lap.* 1.8; 4.23; and 6.37. Lapis lazuli is “an attractive, massive, complex aggregate of several blue minerals” and “it consists chiefly of lazurite, haüynite, which gives it color, also sodalite, noselite, and flecks of pyrites in a matrix of calcite” (Manutchehr-Danai, *Dictionary*, s.v. “lapis lazuli”). Its primary blue color ranges from azure to green to purple-blue (*ibid.*).

<sup>23</sup>“Girdle” has the wrong connotation today. Since commentators typically refer

ἐπὶ τῆς ὀσφύος αὐτοῦ) instead of having a writing case/palette, as in the MT.<sup>24</sup>

Why are the MT and the LXX so divergent here?<sup>25</sup> Two broad possibilities immediately come to mind. First, the LXX could have misunderstood the Hebrew.<sup>26</sup> A. M. Honeyman's derisive comment that the LXX "succeeds in making nonsense of the [Hebrew] phrase" is an example of taking this approach.<sup>27</sup> Alternatively, the LXX could have read different Hebrew words.<sup>28</sup> In this case, the LXX would not be guessing but rather translating.<sup>29</sup>

According to Barker, in the phrase וַיִּתְּנָהּ בַּרְבֵּהּ חֶסֶדְךָ ("and a scribe's writing

to either the belt or sash, or to both of them as alternative translations, I have kept both terms in use.

<sup>24</sup>I take the "Man in Linen" or "Man with a Lapis Lazuli Belt/Sash" as the seventh person, not one of the six. See, e.g., Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 304; Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 143; and Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 246.

<sup>25</sup>In Ezek 10:2, the LXX translates the MT's "Man in Linen" with τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν ἐνδεδυκότα τὴν στολήν ("the man clothed with the [long] robe"). In 10:6 and 7, however, the reference is τῷ ἐνδεδυκότῃ τὴν στολήν τὴν ἁγίαν ("to the one clothed with the sacred [long] robe") and τοῦ ἐνδεδυκότος τὴν στολήν τὴν ἁγίαν ("of the one clothed with the sacred [long] robe"). The terminology for this sacred dress (τὴν στολήν τὴν ἁγίαν) is the same as that found in LXX Exod 28:3—but there it is with regard to Aaron, the (high) priest (cf. LXX Exod 28:4: στολάς ἁγίας). But since I am exploring Barker's suggestion with regard to Ezek 9:2, I will not deal with those texts in this article. On the Greek in relation to the MT, see Field, *Origenis*, 2:792; Halperin, *Faces*, 525, n. f; Joseph Ziegler, ed., *Ezechiel*, 2nd ed., with an appendix by Detlef Fraenkel, *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum 16.1* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 124-125; and Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 226.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Johan Lust, "A Lexicon of the Three and the Transliterations in Ezekiel," in *Origen's Hexapla and Fragments: Papers Presented at the Rich Seminar on the Hexapla, Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, 25th July–3rd August 1994*, ed. Alison Salveson, TSAJ 58 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 300; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 224.

<sup>27</sup>A. M. Honeyman, "The Pottery Vessels of the Old Testament," *PEQ* (1939): 90.

<sup>28</sup>Lust, "Lexicon," 300.

<sup>29</sup>For example, Robert Eisler took this route and suggested that the LXX read סר instead of סס ("gštj = Κάστου τοῦ γραμματέως = סַסְרַהּ im Danielkommentar des Hippolytos von Rom," *OLZ* 33 [1930]: col. 586). But Eisler's סר appears incorrect and should instead be סש, "alliance, conspiracy" ("סש", *HALOT* 3:1154); the latter term would be understood to be in line with a related word, such as סש, "ribbons, breast-sashes [of women]" ("סש", *HALOT* 3:1154). The related verb is סש, which, among its meanings, can mean "to tie or tie up," as in Job 38:31, and "to tie on or wear as a belt," as in Isa 49:18 (see "סש", *HALOT* 3:1153-1154). In any case, סש would not seem too distant from סש. Despite his use of סר, this is where Eisler ended up in his retroversion ("gštj," col. 586; cf. W. Max Müller, "Zwei ägyptische Wörter im Hebräischen," *OLZ* 3 [1900]: cols. 49-50). Cf. Lust, "Lexicon," 300; and Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 224. If the Greek translator had seen סס, as Eisler suggests, he would have had to guess at a cognate of this word (e.g., סש) in order to arrive at סש. But this seems overly complex and unlikely.

case/palette at his side” [my translation]), ספר was read as ספיר (“lapis lazuli”<sup>30</sup>) and no scribe was seen. The first term, חסק, a rare term (it occurs only in Ezek 9:2, 3, and 11 in the OT),<sup>31</sup> was read instead as the more common word חשק (“bow” or “rainbow”). Thus the concept was understood to mean a rainbow of lapis lazuli on his waist and became written as ζώνη σαπφείρου ἐπὶ τῆς ὀσφύος αὐτοῦ.<sup>32</sup>

Though Barker never explains how a rainbow could turn into a belt/sash, her hypothesis remains intriguing. With regard to the first Hebrew term in this enigmatically translated phrase, Maximilian Ellenbogen notes that חסק “has no cognate in any Semitic language and the Hebrew itself does not offer any etymological connections.”<sup>33</sup> The consensus of scholars is that חסק is a loanword from the Egyptian ḡstj,<sup>34</sup> yet this is problematic in that the Egyptian ḡ is frequently represented by the Hebrew ש instead of ס.<sup>35</sup> It is thus possible that the Egyptian word could have been transliterated into Hebrew as חשק<sup>36</sup>—but that is also the same series of consonants as the “bow” or “rainbow.” In any

<sup>30</sup>Barker translates it, however, as “sapphire” throughout (*Revelation*, 268, 269).

<sup>31</sup>Barker appears to be wrong when she states that the term “does not occur anywhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures,” for the only text she has referred to in that paragraph is Ezek 9:2 (*ibid.*, 268).

<sup>32</sup>Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>Maximilian Ellenbogen, *Foreign Words in the Old Testament: Their Origin and Etymology* (London: Luzac & Co., 1962), 150. Though some have related the term to קשרה, “jar” (cf. Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English*, foreword by Haim Rabin [New York: Macmillan, 1987], s.v. “קשר”), Joshua Blau states that this is doubtful (*On Pseudo-Corrections in Some Semitic Languages* [Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1970], 117).

<sup>34</sup>See, e.g., Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 305; and G. R. Driver, *Semitic Writing from Pictograph to Alphabet: The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy, 1944*, newly rev. ed., ed. S. A. Hopkins (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 86, n. 10. For more detailed studies, see Müller, “Zwei ägyptische Wörter,” cols. 49-51; *idem*, “Ägyptologisch-Biblisches,” *OLZ* 3 (1900): col. 328; H. Grimme, “Zu hebräischem חסק,” *OLZ* 3 (1900): cols. 149-150; and Eisler, “ḡstj,” cols. 585-587. Thomas O. Lambdin rejects Grimm’s assignation of חסק to the root חשק as “baseless” (“Egyptian Loan Words in the Old Testament,” *JAOS* 73 [1953]: 154).

<sup>35</sup>Lambdin, “Egyptian Loan Words,” 154. He concludes that “this would tend to show a late borrowing,” i.e., after c. 1200 B.C.E. (*ibid.*).

<sup>36</sup>Here I follow D. M. Stec, who complained about “the all too frequent practice of pointing *śin* and *šīn* in an otherwise unpointed Hebrew text. I cannot see the reason for this” (review of *Translation Technique in the Peshitta to Job: A Model for Evaluating a Text with Documentation from the Peshitta to Job*, by Heidi M. Szpek, *JSS* 40 [1995]: 156). Cf. “ש, שׁ, שׂ,” *HALOT* 3:1301, which also notes that originally there were no diacritical marks. Consequently, I do not print the diacritical marks in order to more faithfully reproduce what the Greek translator would probably have seen. They are printed, however, when I refer to what other authors have said about this problem in order to be clear about their discussion.



case,  $\rho\sigma\pi$  was a difficult—if not impossible—word for some Greek translators; Walther Zimmerli notes in both Aquila and Theodotian's translations of  $\kappa\acute{\alpha}\sigma\tau\upsilon$   $\gamma\rho\alpha\mu\mu\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\omega\varsigma$ , the first word is basically their attempt to transliterate “the unintelligible  $\rho\sigma\pi$ .”<sup>37</sup>

But there is another witness with regard to this textual conundrum that deserves attention. The Peshitta Syriac version of Ezek 9:2 *also* speaks of a man clothed in linen wearing a “sapphire” belt:

. , ⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲗⲉ ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲗⲉ ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲗⲉ

(“and he bound his loins with a girdle of sapphire”).<sup>38</sup> The relationship between the Peshitta and the LXX is an incredibly complex one.<sup>39</sup> In 1999, in his highly acclaimed introduction to the Peshitta, M. P. Weitzman implicitly accepted the conclusion of C. H. Cornill, from more than a hundred years earlier, that LXX influence on the Peshitta was frequent in Ezekiel.<sup>40</sup> But does this mean that agreements between the Peshitta and the LXX are not noteworthy? There has not been unanimity with regard to the relationship between the Peshitta and the MT in general, not to mention in Ezekiel. For example, at the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, M. J. Mulder, the preparer of the critical edition of the Peshitta in Ezekiel, stated: “So, when P agrees with LXX, P proves to be of importance in judging MT. In such cases, we must proceed on the assumption that P and LXX are independent translations, and that they present a certain reading as independent witnesses. This does not imply that agreement of P and LXX automatically points to an older text.”<sup>41</sup> Further, he concluded: “Every translation ought to be taken as a textual witness in its own right.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 1, 224. Symmachus has  $\pi\iota\nu\alpha\kappa\iota\delta\iota\omicron\nu$   $\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\epsilon\omega\varsigma$  (“writing tablet of a writer/scribe”), while the 2d edition of Aquila has  $\mu\epsilon\lambda\alpha\nu\omicron\delta\omicron\chi\epsilon\iota\omicron\nu$   $\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\epsilon\omega\varsigma$  (“inkstand of a writer/scribe”) and  $\acute{\omicron}$   $\text{Ἐβραῖος}$  has  $\mu\epsilon\lambda\alpha\nu$  και  $\kappa\alpha\lambda\alpha\mu\omicron\varsigma$   $\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\epsilon\omega\varsigma$  (“ink and reed of a writer/scribe”); see Ziegler, *Ezekiel*, 122.

<sup>38</sup>The text is taken from a critical edition of the Peshitta of Ezekiel: M. J. Mulder, *Ezekiel* (part III, fascicle 3 of *The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version*, ed. The Peshitta Institute, Leiden [Leiden: Brill, 1985]. The translation is taken from Joaquim Azevedo, “The Textual Relation of the Peshitta of Ezekiel 1-12 to MT and to the Ancient Versions (Tg<sup>l</sup> and LXX),” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1999), 207.

<sup>39</sup>Heidi M. Szpek, “On the Influence of the Septuagint on the Peshitta,” *CBQ* 60 (1998): 265. Cf. also Azevedo, “Textual Relation,” 227 and 232-235.

<sup>40</sup>M. P. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction*, University of Cambridge Oriental Studies 56 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 68. Cornill's work on the Peshitta is found in his *Das Buch des Propheten Ezechiel* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1886), 137-156.

<sup>41</sup>M. J. Mulder, “The Use of the Peshitta in Textual Criticism,” in *La Septuaginta en la Investigacion Contemporanea (V Congreso de la IOSCS)*, ed. N. F. Marcos, Textos y Estudios “Cardenal Cisneros” (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1985), 53.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

Attempts to recognize the value of the Peshitta have continued.<sup>43</sup> In his 1988 dissertation on the influence of the LXX on the Peshitta in Genesis and Psalms, Jerome A. Lund concluded:

Since the caricature of S [Peshitta] found in secondary literature is wrong, students ought to be encouraged to study S as a primary source for research on the Bible. First, S reflects ancient understanding of the Hebrew Bible and so functions as a tool of exegesis. Second, a study of the techniques of translation used by S could prove fruitful for modern Bible translators, who face the same problems, linguistically and exegetically. Third, S sheds light on the text of the Hebrew Bible in a primary sense. In conclusion, S needs to be studied by itself, as an independent and primary version of the Hebrew Scriptures. The ghost of the direct influence of G [LXX] on S has vanished.<sup>44</sup>

Recently, Joaquim Azevedo, in his dissertation on the relationship of the Peshitta Syriac of Ezek 1–12 to the MT and the versions, states with regard to the similar readings between the Peshitta and the LXX at Ezek 9:2 that “it is not strong evidence to support a direct relationship. They may reflect two independent translations based on a similar Hebrew text.”<sup>45</sup> Azevedo, in fact, denies any possibility of a direct relationship between the Peshitta and the LXX because the Peshitta of the next verse, Ezek 9:3, is the same as 9:2

(ܐܘܢ ܘܢܘܢܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ ܘܢܘܢܐ), while the LXX of 9:3 contains only

<sup>43</sup>Cf. Mulder, who stated that with regards to Ezekiel the value of the Peshitta outweighs all other versions except for the LXX (“Some Remarks on the Peshitta Translation of the Book of Ezekiel,” in *The Peshitta: Its Early Text and History: Papers Read at the Peshitta Symposium held at Leiden 30-31 August 1985*, ed. P. B. Dirksen and M. J. Mulder, Monographs of the Peshitta Institute Leiden, 4 [Leiden: Brill, 1988], 180).

<sup>44</sup>Jerome A. Lund, “The Influence of the Septuagint on the Peshitta: A Re-evaluation of Criteria in Light of Comparative Study of the Versions in Genesis and Psalms” (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1988), 418–419. Weitzman apparently does not refer to this work (the index to his work is defective [cf. on “Lund, J.,” where there is only one reference—one that does not refer to a work by Lund on p. 68, n. 11]).

<sup>45</sup>Azevedo, “Textual Relation,” 208. For instance, Ellenbogen concluded that in Ezek 9:2 “the Peshitta is evidently based on the LXX and does not offer any independent evidence” (*Foreign Words*, 150). But one cannot assume dependence based simply on agreement. Cf. Mulder, “Einige Beobachtungen zum Peschittatext von Ezechiel in seinen Beziehungen zum masoretischen Text, zur Septuaginta und zum Targum,” in *Salvación en la Palabra: Targum—Derash—Berith (En memoria del profesor Alejandro Díez Macho)*, ed. D. Muñoz Leon (Madrid: Consejo de Investigaciones Científicas, 1986), 463–470. Lund concludes: “In the past, the direct influence of the LXX on the P [Peshitta] has been grossly exaggerated” (“Grecisms in the Peshitta Psalms,” in *The Peshitta as a Translation: Papers Read at the II Peshitta Symposium Held at Leiden 19-21 August 1993*, ed. P. B. Dirksen and A. van der Kooij, Monographs of the Peshitta Institute Leiden, 8 [Leiden: Brill, 1995], 102). Cf. Szpek, who concludes that congruent readings between the Peshitta and the LXX can no longer be simply attributed to direct dependence of the former on the latter (“Influence,” 265).

ζώνην—with no reference to the lapis lazuli.<sup>46</sup> Azevedo concludes that this is “strong evidence for an independence of translation” between the Peshitta and the LXX in Ezekiel.<sup>47</sup> The fact that the Peshitta of 9:2, 3, and 11 mirrors the MT in referring to the linen clothing of this being (MT = בָּרָדִים [9:2]; הַבְּרָדִים [9:3, 11]; Peshitta = כְּסוּתוֹ [9:2, 3, 11]), while in all three verses the LXX refers instead to his long robe (ποδήρη),<sup>48</sup> might further support such a conclusion. But even this conclusion—that apparent, nonconsistent use of the LXX by the Peshitta shows independence—has been countered by Weitzman. He concluded that “it is wrong to argue that, because P’s translator has not followed LXX consistently, he was not influenced by LXX at all,” for “this is in fact typical of the way that P’s translators used LXX.”<sup>49</sup> Again, on the other hand, if the Peshitta did indeed consult and utilize the LXX here in its translation, it may have been because the LXX translation simply made sense.<sup>50</sup>

Azevedo ultimately concludes with the following points about the relation of the Peshitta of Ezek 1–12 to the MT and the versions that impact this study: its *Vorlage* was a Hebrew text similar to the MT<sup>51</sup>; it smooths the text, and while doing so, it adds words to clarify (not modify), rarely omitting any portion of the text (here he mentions one example of omission being וקסה הספר במחניו in 9:2, 3, and 11<sup>52</sup>); it has “no direct relationship” with the LXX “except when they share the same translation techniques and when coincidence is in play”<sup>53</sup>; despite any similarities to other versions of Ezek 1–12, it is an independent translation<sup>54</sup>; and it is “useful as a tool in textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible, for it is a valuable witness of a Hebrew consonantal text very similar to [MT].”<sup>55</sup>

I would disagree with Azevedo that the Peshitta of Ezek 9:2, 3, and 11 omits the phrase וקסה הספר במחניו found in the MT. For one thing, that Hebrew

<sup>46</sup>Azevedo, “Textual Relation,” 209.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid. Azevedo also believes that there is strong evidence that there was a single translator for Ezek 9 (ibid., 205, 220).

<sup>48</sup>In Ezek 9:2, Aquila has ἐξαίρετα, Symmachus has λίνα, and Theodotion has βαδδίν, while in 9:11 the same translations occur, but with the articles (i.e., τὰ ἐξαίρετα, τὰ λίνα, and τὸ βαδδίν); cf. Ziegler, *Ezekiel*, 122 and 124; and Field, *Origenis*, 2:790 and 792.

<sup>49</sup>Weitzman, *Syriac*, 79.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. ibid., 36-43, 61-62.

<sup>51</sup>Azevedo, “Textual Relation,” 323.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 324.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 325. Cf. Emanuel Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*, 2d ed., rev. and enlarged (Jerusalem: Simor, 1997), 188.

<sup>54</sup>Azevedo, “Textual Relation,” 326.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid. Cf., however, Tov, who states that the close relationship between the Peshitta and the LXX was often the result of common exegetical traditions, and “by definition, these common traditions have no bearing on the issue of the Hebrew text presupposed by the versions” (*Text-Critical Use*, 188).

phrase does not occur in 9:11; there it is only *הַקֶּסֶת בְּמַחְתָּיו*.<sup>56</sup> But I would further suggest that the Peshitta has not omitted what its Hebrew text has. When the Peshitta and LXX of Ezek 9:2 speak of a “belt of sapphire /lapis lazuli,” one could reasonably hypothesize that they both read the Hebrew words as *סֹפֵר* and *קֶסֶת* without the Peshitta necessarily depending on the LXX for its translation.<sup>57</sup>

In any case, both the Peshitta and the LXX are translated in a similar manner with regard to the clothing of the man in Ezek 9:2. The relationship between the Peshitta and the LXX is full of intriguing possibilities. Nevertheless, while it might be possible that a different Hebrew *Vorlage* than the MT was behind the Peshitta’s translation,<sup>58</sup> it appears nevertheless difficult to prove such a hypothesis in this case, since there are so many complex factors and text-critical possibilities involved. Thus, while the Peshitta provides a fascinating comparison to the LXX in Ezek 9, one cannot be certain that the Peshitta evidence is the result of a different Hebrew *Vorlage* than one finds in the MT.

Consequently, it is most prudent to rest any possibility of an iridescent background in Ezek 9 primarily on the realities of the Greek text. With regard to the LXX translation of the Hebrew into ζώνη (“belt,” “sash”), one should start with the possibility of actual translation, if a case can be made for that, rather than jump to the conclusion that the result is nonsense. Now the ποδήρης (“long robe”) clothing the key figure in 9:2 is what appears in the LXX instead of the *בְּרִים* (“white linen”) in the MT. As an article or type of clothing, *בְּרַ* refers to priestly attire (Exod 28:42; 39:28; Lev 6:10; 16:4, 23, 32; 1 Sam 2:18; 22:18; 2 Sam 6:14 [despite its being on David; see the next verse]; and 1 Chr 15:27); the other texts in which this Hebrew term occurs, refer to visionary beings or heavenly messengers (Ezek 9:2, 3, 11; 10:2, 6, 7; Dan 10:5; and 12:6, 7).<sup>59</sup> ποδήρης typically suggests high-priestly imagery,<sup>60</sup> and we can conclude that the translator saw the *בְּרִים* as a high-priestly clothing image (cf. Lev 16:4,

<sup>56</sup>Azevedo says that the relative clause *אשר הספר במחתי* in the MT of 9:11 is the “same phrase” as in 9:2 and 3, but this is not correct. The phrase that occurs in those two verses is *וקסת הספר במחתי*, a fact which even he acknowledges (“Textual Relation,” 220).

<sup>57</sup>With regard to Genesis and Psalms (but not Ezekiel), this is also the conclusion of Lund, “The Influence of the Septuagint on the Peshitta: A Re-evaluation of Criteria in Light of Comparative Study of the Versions in Genesis and Psalms” (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1988), 46, 416.

<sup>58</sup>See Weitzman, *Syriac*, 83-84.

<sup>59</sup>Cf. “III *בְּרַ*,” *HALOT* 1:109.

<sup>60</sup>It refers to the attire of the high priest in Exod 25:7; 28:4, 31; 29:5; 35:9; Zech 3:4; Wis 18:24; and Sir 45:8. The only place where priestly imagery is not explicitly present is in Sir 27:8. Cf. *Let. Aris* 96; Josephus *Ant.* 3.153-154, 159; *J. W.* 5.231; and Philo *Alleg. Interp.* 2.56. David E. Aune states that the term in all of its twelve occurrences “always refers to a garment worn by the high priest” (including Sir 27:8) but denies that it can be understood in a technical sense, because it translates five different Hebrew words (*Revelation 1-5*, WBC 52A [Dallas: Word, 1997], 93). The only place it translates *בְּרַ* is in Ezekiel.

23, 32)<sup>61</sup> and utilized another high-priestly clothing image.

But why would ζώνη show up in the text? The ζώνη, the common belt (cf., e.g., 1 Kgs 2:5; Ps 108:19 [MT 109:19]; Isa 5:27), frequently appears as another piece of priestly clothing, the priestly belt or ceremonial sash (Exod 28:4, 39-40; 29:9; 36:36 [MT 39:39]; Lev 8:7, 13; 16:4).<sup>62</sup> As such, it was multicolored (Exod 36:36 [MT 39:29]; cf. 28:39) and woven like the multicolored screens (רָפָף) at the entrance to the court and the tabernacle.<sup>63</sup> Could it be that the polychromatic<sup>64</sup> nature of the ζώνη was the reason for using the term in Ezek 9:2, 3, and 11? If the translator saw רַבָּב, one could reasonably assume he would have had to be guessing to arrive at ζώνη. If, on the other hand, the translator saw רַבָּב, understanding it as a rainbow would provide a link to the polychromatic ζώνη.<sup>65</sup> This latter possibility would provide the basis for the assumption that the translator was *not* translating what appeared to be unintelligible, but was rather attempting to translate the visual concept of the רַבָּב into a context that was understood to refer to high-priestly clothing.<sup>66</sup> In other words, the LXX translator was attempting to make sense

<sup>61</sup>On the basis of this term, Ka Leung Wong describes the Man in Linen as a “priestly figure” (*The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel*, VTSup 87 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 175, and the literature he cites there in support).

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Josephus *Ant.* 3.154, 159, 171, 185; *J. W.* 5.232.

<sup>63</sup>רָפָף מְעֵשֶׂה (“the work of a weaver,” NASB) occurs in Exod 26:36 (screen of tabernacle); 27:16 (screen of the court); 28:39 (priestly belt/sash); 36:37 [LXX 37:5] (screen of tabernacle); 38:18 [LXX 37:16] (screen of court); and 39:29 [LXX 36:36] (priestly belt/sash). Cf. Josephus *J. W.* 5.232.

<sup>64</sup>Here I differentiate polychromatism from iridescence in that the former refers simply to a variety or change of colors (i.e., something that is multicolored), while the latter also includes the glowing and often brilliant play of light, or the subtle shifts in shades and hues, that one finds in a prism or a rainbow.

<sup>65</sup>In his commentary on Daniel, Hippolytus of Rome (died c. 235) alluded to both Ezek 9:2 (by using τὸ κάστου τοῦ γραμματέως; cf. κάστου γραμματέως in both Aquila’s and Theodotian’s versions) and Dan 10:5 (by using βαδδιν and ἐνδεδυμένος; cf. Theodotian’s version) and understood them to refer to Jesus Christ (cf. Hippolytus *Comm.* Dan. 4.36.11-13 and 56.11-12, text quoted from *Hippolyt: Kommentar zu Daniel*, ed. Georg Nathanael Bonwetsch, 2d rev. ed. by Marcel Richard, in *Hippolyt Werke: Erster Band: Erster Teil*, GCS 7 [Berlin: Akademie, 2000], 280, 326). Cf. Joseph Ziegler, “Der Bibeltext im Daniel-Kommentar des Hippolyt von Rom,” *NAWG* 8 (1952): 190. In the commentary of Hippolytus, the garment referred to (χιτώναι) is multicolored (ποικίλου); cf. Gen 37:3, 23, and 32. Eisler had compared κάστου to the Assyrian *qasū*, “bow” (related to the Hebrew רַבָּב [“bow, rainbow”]), but he did not conclude any derivation (“gštj,” col. 587).

<sup>66</sup>Outside of Ezek 9:2, 3, and 11, the terms ποδήρης and ζώνη occur together in only one verse (Exod 28:4), part of a larger passage (28:4-39) mostly describing the clothing of the high priest (cf. also 28:31 [ποδήρης] and 39 [ζώνη]; and 29:5 [ποδήρης] and 9 [ζώνη]). There may have been a tradition of interpreting the executioners of Ezek 9 in high-priestly terms; see, e.g., the remarks of James R. Davila, who suggests that the

of the  $\eta\psi\kappa$  in a context that already included  $\pi\omicron\delta\eta\rho\eta\varsigma$ , and thus utilized the  $\zeta\acute{\omega}\nu\eta$ , which could easily work in a high-priestly context that included polychromatic imagery.

This leaves us with  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\pi\phi\epsilon\iota\rho\varsigma$ . Outside of our text and the problematic Ezek 28:13,  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\pi\phi\epsilon\iota\rho\varsigma$  translates  $\text{ספיר}$  (Exod 24:10; 28:18; 36:18 [MT 39:11]; Job 28:6, 16; Sol 5:14; Isa 54:11; Lam 4:7; Ezek 1:26; 10:1; Tob 13:16).<sup>67</sup> Commentators typically suggest that the LXX misread or confused the Hebrew.<sup>68</sup> Azevedo, however, suggests the possibility of the opposite: “the Hebrew word  $\text{ספיר}$ , ‘writing, writer,’ could well be a misunderstanding of an unvocalized text containing the word  $\text{לפיר}$ , ‘lapis [sic] lazuli’ (see Exod 24:10).”<sup>69</sup> This is a possibility, but again it remains conjectural. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to see how  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\pi\phi\epsilon\iota\rho\varsigma$  might have been derived from something approximating  $\text{ספר}$ .<sup>70</sup>

What about the phrase  $\zeta\acute{\omega}\nu\eta \sigma\alpha\pi\phi\epsilon\iota\rho\upsilon$ ?<sup>71</sup> While the words can be explained, can the phrase be explained? What is a “belt/sash of lapis lazuli”? Two possibilities suggest themselves. One would be to take the reference to lapis lazuli to be a synecdoche for all the actual *colors* embroidered in the priestly

reference to the seven chief angelic princes (or, angelic high priests) in the Qumran liturgical work *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* (e.g., 4Q403 1 i 1-29) was inspired by “the seven angels in Ezek 9:1-2” (*Liturgical Works*, ECDSS 6 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 120).

<sup>67</sup>Although there is no precise, sequential, one-to-one correlation between the stones of the MT and the LXX adorning the Tyrian king in Ezek 28:13,  $\text{ספיר}$  occurs in the MT and  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\pi\phi\epsilon\iota\rho\varsigma$  occurs in the LXX. In Tobit,  $\text{ספיר}$  appears in 4QpapTob<sup>a</sup> ar frg. 18 and correlates to  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\pi\phi\epsilon\iota\rho\varsigma$  in Tob 13:16 as found in the critical edition by Robert Hanhart, *Tobit*, Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum 8 part 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 173.

<sup>68</sup>E.g., Ellenbogen, *Foreign Words*, 150; Honeyman, “Pottery Vessels,” 90; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 224.

<sup>69</sup>Azevedo, “Textual Relation,” 208. Cf. Richard A. Taylor, review of *Translation Technique in the Peshitta to Job: A Model for Evaluating a Text with Documentation from the Peshitta to Job*, by Heidi M. Szpek, *JETS* 39 (1996): 343.

<sup>70</sup>If  $\zeta\acute{\omega}\nu\eta$  derived from  $\eta\psi\kappa$ , what we have in the LXX is possibly even more noteworthy. In Ezek 1:26-28, one finds reference in both the LXX and the MT to lapis lazuli (v. 26), the waist of the being on the throne (v. 27:  $\delta\sigma\phi\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma$  [cf. 8:2; 9:2, 3, and 11]), and a rainbow (v. 28). The terms do not have the same reference, since the lapis lazuli describes the throne, the waist refers to the being on the throne, and the rainbow describes the brightness surrounding the being. Nevertheless, it suggests that the LXX translator may have seen the man in 9:2 in light of the being on the throne in 1:26-28 (so Barker, *Revelation*, 269). Martha Himmelfarb suggests that the description of the glory of God in Ezek 1 drew on an understanding of “the high priest as rainbowlike” (*Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 20).

<sup>71</sup>If this had indeed derived from  $\text{ספר קשת}$  (“rainbow of lapis lazuli”), cf. Rev 4:3:  $\acute{\iota}\rho\iota\varsigma \kappa\upsilon\kappa\lambda\acute{\omicron}\theta\epsilon\nu \tau\omicron\upsilon \theta\rho\acute{\omicron}\nu\omicron\upsilon \delta\mu\omicron\iota\omicron\varsigma \delta\rho\acute{\alpha}\sigma\epsilon\iota \sigma\mu\alpha\rho\alpha\gamma\delta\acute{\iota}\lambda\omega$  (“around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald”).

ζώνη: ὑακίνθου καὶ πορφύρας καὶ κοκκίνου (Exod 36:36 [MT 39:29]: “blue, purple, and crimson”<sup>72</sup>).<sup>73</sup> Here ὑακίνθος translates the MT תְּכֵלֶת (as it also does in Ezek 27:7 and 24; cf. 16:10), which was associated with lapis lazuli in later Jewish interpretation.<sup>74</sup> The LXX’s maintenance of σάπφειρος, instead of the actual ὑακίνθος of the ζώνη, would have been not only because of the Hebrew סַפֵּר, but because it would have also provided an allusion to the color of God’s throne, as found in 1:26 and 10:1.

Alternatively, the reference to lapis lazuli in 9:2 might allude more to *substance* than color. Again, two possibilities suggest themselves: *garments* of (lapis lazuli) stone or *bodies* of (lapis lazuli) stone. In Cant 5:14 the Beloved is described as having an ivory body (or, abdomen) encrusted with lapis lazuli (מְעִיר עֲטָה שֵׁן מְעִלְפָה סַפִּירִים). Lapis lazuli (סַפִּיר / σάπφειρος) was one of the gems worn by the Israelite high priest (e.g., Exod 28:18), as well as the king of Tyre (Ezek 28:13). While these are stones on a person, they do not appear to refer to stone *garments*.

That a stone *garment* is not impossible to visualize can be seen from the Jewish *Hekhalot* (from הֵיכָלוֹת, “palaces”) corpus, written between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.<sup>75</sup> A *Hekhalot* fragment from the Cairo Geniza (T.-S. K 21.95.C) speaks of the angelic figure known as the “Youth,” who has “a garment of stone” “girded on his loins.”<sup>76</sup> This would appear to be an allusion to something similar to the LXX translation of Ezek 9:2, with its “belt/sash of lapis lazuli.”<sup>77</sup> In another reference to the “Youth,” found in a recension of

<sup>72</sup>LSJ, s.v. “ὑακίνθος”; “πορφύρα”; and “κόκκινος.”

<sup>73</sup>Cf. Himmelfarb, 62, who suggests that the purple garment of the principal angel Yaoel/Iaol in *Apoc. Ab.* 11:3 is priestly in that it is “one of the colors of the high-priestly garments of Exodus 28.” On the work’s possible first-century-C.E. date, see *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 1:683, nn. 15 and 16.

<sup>74</sup>See *b. Sofah* 17a, *b. Menah* 43b, *b. Hul.* 89a, *p. Ber.* 1:2 (3c) and the discussion in Halperin, *Faces*, 217–220. *Midr.* Ps 24:12 (= *Rab. Num* 14:3) and *Midr.* Ps 90:18 associate the blue with—among several items in nature—the rainbow, but not with lapis lazuli (cf. *ibid.*, 218)! Matthew Black associates ὑακίνθος with the lapis lazuli (סַפִּיר) in Ezek 28:13 (*The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch: A New English Edition*, SVTP 7 [Leiden: Brill, 1985] 251, n. 2).

<sup>75</sup>James R. Davila, *Descenders to the Chariot: The People behind the Hekhalot Literature*, JSJSup 70 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 2.

<sup>76</sup>Quoted from James R. Davila, “Melchizedek, the ‘Youth,’ and Jesus,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Postbiblical Judaism and Early Christianity: Papers from an International Conference at St. Andrews in 2001*, ed. James R. Davila, STDJ 46 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 255. The same translation is found in *idem*, *Descenders*, 186.

<sup>77</sup>See §398b (cf. §389b) of Peter Schäfer’s synopsis of the mystical *Hekhalot* corpus (Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, TSAJ 2 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981]), where the “Youth” has six men in an apparent allusion to Ezek 9:2 (Halperin, *Faces*, 494). That the “Youth” enters beneath the throne of glory in §385 and §398a indicates an allusion to Ezek 10:1–2 (cf. *ibid.*, 492; Barker, *Revelation* 264, 269).

*Siddur Rabbah* 36 in the pre-kabbalistic Jewish *Shi'ur Qomah* (“The Measurement of the Body”) traditions, the “Youth” is not girded in stone; rather, his “body is like the rainbow”!<sup>78</sup> This latter statement is all the more intriguing since *Shi'ur Qomah* speculation was related to interpretation of the *Song of Songs*,<sup>79</sup> and it is in Cant 5:14 that we have already seen lapis lazuli—with a rainbow nowhere in sight there. This causes one to wonder about the exegetical traditions of Jewish mysticism that could alternate between describing the “Youth” with a body of lapis lazuli or with one that looked like a rainbow—especially since these alternating descriptions remind us of the question of the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX’s translation of Ezek 9.

Such “stone” clothing is possibly found much earlier than the aforementioned Jewish mystical traditions. In Rev 15:6, some variants (A C 2053 2062), whose combined attestation G. K. Beale reminds us is usually superior to any other combination of texts for Revelation,<sup>80</sup> state that the seven-plague angels exiting the heavenly temple are clothed (ἐνδεδυμένοι) in λίθον (“stone”), instead of the accepted text, λίνον (“flax”<sup>81</sup> or “lamp wick”<sup>82</sup>).<sup>83</sup> While this *lectio difficilior* itself may go back to Ezek 28:13 (πᾶν λίθον χρηστὸν ἐνδεδεσθαι [“you have bound upon yourself every stone”<sup>84</sup>]), it may more likely reflect the LXX of Ezek 9:2, which refers to lapis lazuli, and Dan 10:6, which refers to another “Man in Linen,” seen by Daniel by the bank of the Tigris, having a body like “tarshish”<sup>85</sup>—presumably a precious stone (שִׁרְשִׁיִּים וְגִבְרֵתוֹ).<sup>86</sup>

<sup>78</sup>Quoted from Martin Samuel Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions*, TSAJ 9 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1985), 41. See also the following text found in Schäfer, §398: “His body resembles the rainbow, . . .” (quoted from Halperin, *Faces*, 405).

<sup>79</sup>So Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, AGJU 14, (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 213. In Cant 7:7 (LXX 7:8), one finds the term קִמָּה (“height/stature”), from which *Qomah* derives.

<sup>80</sup>G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 804. R. H. Charles states that the textual evidence “is strongly in favor of λίθον.” But he then rejects it on the basis that it simply cannot be right (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, ICC [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1920], 2.38). In a similar vein, Henry Barclay Swete rejects λίθον as comprising an “intolerable” metaphor—“even in the Apocalypse” (*The Apocalypse of St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices*, 3d ed. [London: Macmillan, 1917], 198). While accepting that λίθον is the *lectio difficilior*, Aune rejects it because it “makes no sense in the context” (*Revelation 6-16*, WBC 52B [Nashville: Nelson, 1998], 854).

<sup>81</sup>See Exod 9:31; Prov 31:13; Isa 19:9; by metonymy, the term means “linen” (Deut 22:11; *Pss. Sol.* 8:5 [?]).

<sup>82</sup>See Isa 42:3; 43:17; *Pss. Sol.* 8:5 (?); Matt 12:20.

<sup>83</sup>Beale, 804-805, mounts a defense of this *lectio difficilior* in *Revelation*, 804-805.

<sup>84</sup>My translation.

<sup>85</sup>I have left the Hebrew untranslated. Both the LXX and Theodotion left it that way as well and simply transliterated it (θαρσις). English translations vary: e.g., the NASV and the NRSV translate it here as “beryl,” while the NIV translates it as



Another text like Dan 10:6 that describes a being with a stone *body* is the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which refers to the principal angel Yael having a body of “sapphire” (11:2).<sup>87</sup> In this latter text, the reference might be a reflection of Exod 24:10 and Ezek 1:26 and 10:1 (alluding to the material nature of God’s throne).<sup>88</sup> But the lapis lazuli clothing of the Man in Linen in the LXX of Ezek

“chrysolite.” שִׁשְׁבִּי as a stone appears in Exod 28:20; 39:13; Cant 5:14; Ezek 1:16; 10:9; and 28:13. The LXX translates it as χρυσόλιθος (“chrysolite” or “beryl”) in Exod 28:20 and 36:20 [MT 39:13], θαρσις in Cant 5:14 and Ezek 1:16, and ἄνθραξ (“turquoise” [?]) in Ezek 10:9 (the translation of this latter term, which typically means “coal” [cf. Isa 6:6; Ezek 1:13] is unsure; cf. Exod 28:18; 36:18 [MT 39:11]; Isa 54:11; Sir 32:5; Tob 13:17); the MT and the LXX in Ezek 28:13 do not agree.

Not all LXX mss. translated the term alike. Pap. 967 translates it as θαλάσσης (“sea”), which Christopher Rowland notes (“A Man Clothed in Linen: Daniel 10.6ff and Jewish Angelology,” *JNT* 24 [1985]: 109, n. 11). Rowland, *ibid.*, demonstrates that this may have been motivated by discussions concerning the color of the divine throne—blue.

Later Jewish interpreters saw the שִׁשְׁבִּי in terms of sapphire/lapis lazuli, fire, and brightness (נִגְוָה). See Schäfer, §371a, as quoted and discussed in C. R. A. Morray-Jones, *A Transparent Illusion: The Dangerous Vision of Water in Hekhalot Mysticism: A Source-Critical and Tradition-Historical Inquiry*, *JSJSup* 59 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 213.

<sup>86</sup>Cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 805. Another possibility, less likely in my opinion, is that what occurs in Revelation was mistranslated or misunderstood from the unpointed Hebrew שֵׁשׁ. This word means “linen” (Gen 41:42; Exod 25:4; 26:1, 31, 36; 27:9, 16, 18; etc.), but the Aramaic form means “alabaster/marble” (שֵׁשׁ: 1 Chr 29:2 [LXX: πάριος]; שֵׁשׁ: Esth 1:6 [LXX: παρίνοις καὶ λιθίνοις]; Cant 5:15 [LXX: μαρμάρινος]). Ep Jer 71 apparently mistranslated שֵׁשׁ into marble instead of linen, and thus one finds a reading that refers to the rotting (σηπομένης) of purple and marble (τῆς πορφύρας καὶ τῆς μαρμάρου), the latter being simply impossible; see the discussion in Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 854. Assuming something similar happened in Revelation would possibly mean that Revelation was written in Aramaic, with the Aramaic author utilizing the Hebrew word, while the Greek translator translated the Aramaic word. See the discussion in Charles C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 141-142. In the *Hekhalot* literature, marble was often associated with variegated colors (cf. Morray-Jones, *Transparent Illusion*, 36-44 and 89-100).

<sup>87</sup>Several of the Old Slavonic mss. may refer to “his body (and) legs,” and thus R. Rubinkiewicz, the author of the critical edition, states that “perhaps sapphire refers only to the legs or feet and a separate description of the body has been lost” (“Apocalypse of Abraham,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:694, n. 11a). Cf. *idem*, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham en vieux slave: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et commentaire* (Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego 129; Lublin, Poland: Société des Lettres et des Sciences de l’Université Catholique de Lublin, 1987), 135.

<sup>88</sup>Cf. Himmelfarb, *Ascent*, 62. On the possibility that the lapis lazuli in Ezek 1:26 refers to the firmament and not the throne, see Morray-Jones, *Transparent Illusion*, 98-100. Note that in its interpretation of Ezek 1, the Qumran document *Second Ezekiel* (4Q385 6 6) speaks of “a radiance of a chariot” (נִגְוָה מִרִכְבָּה), referring to the throne of God. For text, translation, and discussion, see Devorah Dimant, *Parabiblical Texts, Part 4: Pseudo-Prophetic Texts*, vol. 21, *Qumran Cave 4*, DJD 30 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 43-46.

9 must also be seriously entertained as a possible influence.

It is also possible that the concept of stone bodies may be related to the Jewish tradition of angelic beings being engraved on the pedestal of the divine throne. In the Qumran *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, one reads of such beings (4Q405 19 5-7a):

Line 5 luminous spirits. A[ ] their [workmanship] (is of) h[oly] wondrous mosaic, [spirits] of mingled [רִיקְמָה] colours, [fi]gures of the shapes of god-like beings, engraved  
 Line 6 round about their [g]lorious brickwork [לִּבְנֵי בָנִי], glorious images of the b[ric]kwork [לִּבְנֵי בָנִי] of splendour and majes[ty.] Living god-like beings (are) all their construction  
 Line 7 and the images of their figures (are) holy angels.<sup>89</sup>

The figures engraved around about the glorious brickwork (lines 5-6) most likely refer to the lapis lazuli platform upon which the throne of God rests (Exod 24:10: לִבְנֵי הַסַּפִּיר).<sup>90</sup> Thus these angelic figures have, in essence, “bodies” of lapis lazuli. At the same time, these (implied) lapis-lazuli bodies are situated in a context describing a polychromatic mosaic or plating<sup>91</sup> of mingled (רִיקְמָה) colors (line 5)—the term רִיקְמָה later being used in another *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* text (4Q405 20 ii-21-22 11) as a circumlocution for the rainbow of Ezek 1:28!<sup>92</sup>

The concept of celestial beings “engraved” or “attached” to the throne may also appear in Rev 4:6.<sup>93</sup> This verse, in part, describes the four living creatures: Καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου τέσσαρα ζῶα (“Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures”). How can these four living creatures be “in the midst” of the throne

<sup>89</sup>The translation is taken from the critical edition by Carol Newsom, “Shirot ‘Olat HaShabbat,” in *Poetical and Liturgical Texts, Part I*, ed. Emanuel Tov, vol. 6, *Qumran Cave 4*, DJD 11 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 341. The Hebrew is taken from *ibid.*, 339.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 340; cf. Joseph M. Baumgarten, “The Qumran Sabbath Shirot and Rabbinic Merkabah Traditions,” *RQ* 13 (1988): 203; Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *All The Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, STDSS 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 385; Bilhah Nitzan, “The Textual, Literary and Religious Character of 4QBerakhot (4Q286-290),” in *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Technological Innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Eugene Ulrich, STDJ 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 644.

<sup>91</sup>The reading here is uncertain; cf. Newsom, “Shirot,” 343 on l. 5, and Davila, *Liturgical Works*, 142-143.

<sup>92</sup>Fletcher-Louis, *Glory of Adam*, 372; cf. Newsom, “Shirot,” 352 on l. 10-11; and Christopher Rowland, “The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature,” *JSJ* 10 (1979): 143, n. 14. On this latter text, see also Saul M. Olyan, who sees a reference to angelic creatures interpreted in terms of this rainbow imagery (*A Thousand Thousands Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism*, TSA) 36 [Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1993], 46).

<sup>93</sup>So Baumgarten, “Qumran Sabbath Shirot,” 204.

and “around” the throne? Robert G. Hall, suggesting that the text assumes that the throne is patterned on the OT tabernacle ark, concluded that one should take the text just as it reads (i.e., the creatures are both in the midst of the throne *and* around it), with the living creatures in the midst of the throne *as components of it*.<sup>94</sup> Such an interpretation would be in line with the Jewish tradition of God sitting on a cherub throne.<sup>95</sup> In relation to the ark in the tabernacle, Josephus reports that Moses saw the two cherubim (πρόστυποι δύο) sculpted on the throne of God.<sup>96</sup> Some later Jewish interpreters understood that the four living creatures were components of the throne.<sup>97</sup> If such a view were correct in Rev 4:6, Rev 5:6a (Καὶ εἶδον ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσαρῶν ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἀρνίου ἑστηκός ὡς ἔσφαγμένον) would make sense as the NASB translates it: “And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain.”<sup>98</sup> Thus, with Hall’s interpretation, the four living creatures would be parts or components of the (lapis lazuli?) throne, yet able to move and even worship the occupants of the throne (Rev 5:8; 19:4).<sup>99</sup> In this sense, they would

<sup>94</sup>Robert G. Hall, “Living Creatures in the Midst of the Throne: Another Look at Revelation 4.6,” *NTS* 36 (1990): 608-613.

<sup>95</sup>God rode or moved on a cherub (Ps 18:10 = 2 Sam 22:11). Texts that describe God as one who sits on (or, is enthroned on) the cherubim (e.g., יוֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִים) would be related (cf. 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Chr 13:6; Ps 80:1; 99:1; Isa 37:16). See the discussion in Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 10 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 244. Some translations (e.g., NIV, NKJV), however, translate these passages to refer to God sitting “between” the cherubim.

<sup>96</sup>Josephus *Ant.* 3.137. Greek text taken from *Jewish Antiquities, Books I-IV*, vol. 4 of *Josephus*, trans. by H. St. J. Thackeray, LCL (London: Heinemann, 1930), 380. See also the discussion in *Judean Antiquities 1-4*, trans. and commentary by Louis H. Feldman, vol. 3, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, ed. Steve Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 267; Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, “Le Couple de l’Ange et de l’Esprit: Traditions juives et chrétiennes,” *RB* 88 (1981): 54.

<sup>97</sup>*Pirqe R. El.* 4 and *Rab. Cant.* 3.10.4. See the discussion in Hall, “Living Creatures,” 610-611; and Beale, *Revelation*, 329.

<sup>98</sup>For ἐν μέσῳ . . . ἐν μέσῳ being translated as “between,” see *DBAG*, s.v. “μέσος, η, ον.” See also the discussion of this verse in Halperin, *Faces*, 89-90. He sees the “self-contradictory” statement here (*ibid.*, 91) as reflecting a tension between the identification of the living creatures and the cherubim in Ezek 10, on the one hand, and the hymnic tradition of angels surrounding the throne, on the other: “as cherubim, the *hayyot* ought to be part of God’s seat (Exodus 25:18-19); as angels in the hymnic tradition, they ought to surround it, singing praises” (*ibid.*, 92).

<sup>99</sup>Hall, “Living Creatures,” 612-613. Cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 329. John never describes the material substance of the divine throne in Revelation. Yet if John is drawing on the understanding of the throne from Ezekiel, it would implicitly be lapis lazuli. Beale suggests that John’s description in Rev 4:2-3 combines references to several OT texts that speak of lapis lazuli, including the LXX of Ezek 9:2 (*Revelation*, 320)! The word σάφειρος occurs in the NT only in Rev 21:19 as the second foundation stone of the

implicitly be understood to have “stone” bodies.

Hall’s interpretation is intriguing. Nevertheless, this interpretation of Rev 4:6 has yet to win wide support. David E. Aune, for example, has countered this interpretation largely on the basis that it still seems difficult (despite what Hall says) to understand how component parts of the throne could prostrate themselves before the throne.<sup>100</sup> But in a context in which an altar speaks (Rev 16:7) and people become pillars in God’s temple (Rev 3:12)—the temple which John later denies exists in the New Jerusalem except in terms of the Lord God and the Lamb (Rev 21:22)—it may not be as difficult to accept, even if one cannot understand it completely.

The preceding discussion regarding the meaning of Ezek 9:2 (cf. vv. 3, 11) has had its share of complex possibilities and dead ends. Yet it has provided a possible rationale for why the LXX (cf. the Peshitta) refers to ζώνη σαπφείρου in comparison to the קֶסֶת הַיָּסָפֵר one finds in the MT. It is possible, as Barker suggested, that the LXX translator saw קָשָׁת (i.e., קָשָׁת) instead of קָסָת. The iridescence of the rainbow, however, has been replaced by the polychromatic nature of the ζώνη. As such, any iridescence in Ezek 9 can only be *hypothesized*, not proven, particularly since extant versions, such as the LXX, at best implicitly portray simple *polychromatism* rather than the shimmering, radiant nature of *iridescence*. Iridescence in Ezekiel, consequently, is best focused at this point on the explicit reference in 1:27-28 and the implicit, polychromatic radiance in 1:4, 10:4, and 43:2.

### *The Broader Context of Ezekiel’s Iridescent Imagery*

Ezekiel’s rainbow imagery in association with a theophanic vision is unique in the OT, and in the NT only the book of Revelation can compare. John’s iridescent references themselves in 4:3 (ἰρις) and 10:1 (ἡ ἰρις) are unique in that he is the only biblical author to use this particular Greek term for the concept of the rainbow. The term is absent from the rest of the NT, and when one turns to the OT, the only word used for the rainbow in the LXX is τόξον,<sup>101</sup> a word that

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walls of the New Jerusalem. On the meaning of this term here as lapis lazuli, see Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 2d ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 394. Not all are as certain about this identification, however. Cf., e.g., Robert L. Thomas, who states that some references refer to sapphire, while others might refer to lapis lazuli (*Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* [Chicago: Moody, 1995], 471).

<sup>100</sup>Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 272. On the other hand, Beale is more open to this possibility while recognizing that it has at least one problem that is not, in his opinion, fatal (*Revelation*, 329).

<sup>101</sup>It is used with this definition only in Gen 9:13, 14, 16; and Ezek 1:28. This term (τόξον) is also used in Sir 43:11 and 50:7 in reference to the rainbow. It is used once in Revelation (6:2), where it takes on its typical meaning of an archer’s “bow.”

normally refers to an archer's bow (cf. the Hebrew *רֶשֶׁת*).<sup>102</sup> But one can easily restrict the field of vision regarding iridescent imagery if one does not understand the broader context of theophanic light imagery in Jewish and Christian literature.

1 Timothy 6:16 begins by saying of God: "It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light [φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόσιτον], whom no one has ever seen or can see [ὄν εἶδεν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ ἰδεῖν δύναται]." The latter part of this portion of the verse clarifies the earlier part—i.e., no one has ever seen or can see God *because* he dwells in unapproachable light. This reminds one of the imagery in Ps 104:2, where the psalmist describes God as "wrapped in light as with a garment [הַאֵלֹהִים יָרֵךְ אֶת־עַמּוּתָא]." Such references to God's dwelling in light (implicit or explicit) are more numerous than the few in Ezekiel and Revelation that describe him surrounded by a rainbow or rainbow-like brightness.<sup>103</sup>

One could, however, describe the rainbow imagery as a subset of theophanic light imagery, which encompasses such phenomena as the sun, fire, snow, and the rainbow, as well as such abstract terms as brilliance, radiance, and glory. Thus, for example, the Synoptic Gospel evangelists, when describing Jesus' transfiguration, described the *same* event but with *different* light imagery: "and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white" (Matt 17:2: καὶ ἔλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος, τὰ δὲ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο λευκὰ ὡς τὸ φῶς); "and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them" (Mark 9:3: καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο στίλβοντα λευκὰ λίαν, οἷα γναφεὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐ δύναται οὕτως λευκᾶναι); and "his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning" (Luke 9:29 [NIV]: ὁ ἱματισμὸς αὐτοῦ λευκὸς ἐξαστράπτων).<sup>104</sup>

The possibility thus exists that there is a certain amount of overlap between various forms of such theophanic light imagery. For example, while Ezek 1:27-28 describes the rainbow-like brightness surrounding the One on the throne, one looks in vain for a parallel description in *1 En.* 14, a passage that

<sup>102</sup>Perhaps John used the term ἶρις as an accommodation to his audience; this term was the pagan term for the rainbow, and Josephus equates it with τόζον in his discussion of the Flood (*Ant.* 1.103). Cf. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 285-286; and Peter R. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John*, SNSMS 95 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 133-134. Carrell reminds of the possibility that ἶρις was used because it was found in a version of Ezek 1:4 (that of ὁ Ἑβραῖος) attested in Origen's Hexapla (*ibid.*, 134). Another intriguing possibility is that, while the term τόζον referred to the bow-shaped half-circle of the rainbow that was visible to human eyes, the term ἶρις referred to a complete, fiery-like circle of light. On this, see Louis A. Brighton, "The Rainbow: A Sign of God's Covenant with His Creation," in Dean O. Wenthe, Paul L. Schrieber, and Lee A. Maxwell, eds., *Hear the Word of Yahweh: Essays on Scripture and Archaeology in Honor of Horace D. Hummel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2002), 188.

<sup>103</sup>Cf., e.g., Isa 60:19-20; Dan 2:22; Acts 22:6-11; 1 John 1:5, 7; and Rev 21:23; 22:5.

<sup>104</sup>Notice how Luke also describes the overall scene in terms of the disciples seeing Jesus' glory (9:32: εἶδον τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ).

contains another finely detailed vision of the throne of God. But it might be misleading to simply look in *1 En.* 14 for rainbow-imagery. *1 Enoch* 14:21-22 states: "And no angel was able to enter this house, or to look on his face, by reason of its splendour and glory; and no flesh was able to look on him. A blazing fire encircled him, and a great fire stood in front of him."<sup>105</sup> What surrounds the One on the throne is a blazing fire—not a rainbow-like radiance.

One can see, however, how this blazing fire in *1 Enoch* could be understood to be iridescent or rainbow-like in appearance. In *1 En.* 71:2, part of the *Similitudes of Enoch*, the seer sees "two streams of fire, and the light of that fire shone like hyacinth."<sup>106</sup> The color "hyacinth" in Ethiopic is *yākenet*, and this term translates the Greek ὑάκινθος, itself a term we have already seen and one that typically translates<sup>107</sup> the Hebrew חכלה (generally, blueish- or violet-colored purple,<sup>108</sup> but spanning heliotrope to green as well<sup>109</sup>) in the OT.<sup>110</sup> Thus, in *1 Enoch*, the fire the seer sees looks like a shade of purple.<sup>111</sup>

All of this suggests that the "fire" that one runs across several times as surrounding or associated with the divine throne may well have been viewed or interpreted, at times, in terms of many colors—thus like the rainbow.<sup>112</sup> This makes sense from a phenomenological standpoint, since fire *does* appear at times

<sup>105</sup>Text quoted from Black, *Book of Enoch*, 33.

<sup>106</sup>Text quoted from *ibid.*, 67.

<sup>107</sup>Black (*ibid.*, 251, n. 2) associates ὑάκινθος with the term ספיר ("lapis lazuli") in Ezek 28:13.

<sup>108</sup>"חכלה," HALOT 4:1733.

<sup>109</sup>Athalya Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, JSOTSup 21 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 148.

<sup>110</sup>Cf. Exod 25:4; 26:1, 31, 36; 27:16; 28: 5, 8, 15, 33, 37; Ezek 23:6; 27:7, 24; etc. Note, however, that *LSJ* states that ὑάκινθος is a blue color (s.v. "ὑάκινθος").

<sup>111</sup>In the NT, ὑάκινθος occurs only in Rev 21:20, where it is a name of one of the precious or semiprecious foundation stones of the New Jerusalem. It is typically translated as "jacinth" (cf. NASB, NIV, NRSV), but the NJB is one that translates it as "sapphire." The related word ὑάκινθιστος is found in the NT only in Rev 9:17 and describes a color ranging from dark blue to dark red that is associated with fire and brimstone (cf. in the OT Exod 25:5; 26:4, 14; 28:31; 35:7, 23; 36:29, 28 [MT 39:22, 31]; etc.). There John refers to fire and brimstone again almost immediately (9:17; 9:18), but he associates the latter references with smoke instead of hyacinth.

<sup>112</sup>Cf. also the *Apoc. Ab.* 18:13: "And above the wheels was the throne which I had seen. And it was covered with fire and the fire encircled it round about, and an indescribable light surrounded the fiery crowd" (trans. Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:698). Christopher Rowland states that this text reflects Ezek 1:27b in its description of the fire and the surrounding brightness ("The Influence of the First Chapter of Ezekiel on Jewish and Early Christian Literature," Ph.D. dissertation, Christ's College Cambridge, 1974, 46). Consequently, it appears the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* felt free to describe the Ezekielic rainbow-like radiance as fire.

to have flames of purple, blue, violet, red, yellow, green, and/or orange.<sup>113</sup>

It is possible to trace a trajectory of interpretation of Ezek 1 that implicitly or explicitly relates the iridescence of the rainbow with the glowing, multicolored nature of fire. First, it is at this point that we can pick up the second occurrence of  $\eta\eta$  in Ezekiel, found in 1:13, that we have delayed exploring until now. There Ezekiel describes the fire that exists within the living creatures: “In the middle of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; the fire was bright [ $\eta\eta$  לְאֵשׁ], and lightning issued from the fire.” Daniel I. Block sees the comparison of the  $\eta\eta$  to the rainbow in 1:28 as suggesting that this particular term describes “polychromatic splendor” not only in 1:28, but “throughout this account”—that is, throughout Ezek 1.<sup>114</sup> Block’s conclusion would confirm the iridescent nature of 1:4, as we have already seen. But it also points to the iridescent nature of the  $\eta\eta$  in 1:13 as well, and Block, in fact, describes the flames there as displaying a “mesmerizing variation in color.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, while the rainbow-like iridescence shows up explicitly at 1:27-28, it also shows up implicitly at 1:4 and 1:13.<sup>116</sup>

Second, 4QBerakhot (4Q286-290) is another liturgical text found at Qumran that draws its inspiration and language from Leviticus, Deuteronomy, the *Community Rule* (1QS), and the *Damascus Document* (CD), while sharing a similar approach to exegeting Ezek 1 as the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* and showing similarities to parts of Revelation.<sup>117</sup> In 4QBer<sup>b</sup> ii 1-3, the broken text describes the heavenly temple via a *merkabah* vision:<sup>118</sup>

<sup>113</sup>One interpretation of the fabrication of the tabernacle menorah was that it took place by a miracle: God took white, red, green, and black fire and fashioned the candlestick (see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. by Paul Radin [Philadelphia: JPS, 1947], 3:219, referring to *Tanh. B. III*, 28-29 [ed. Buber; Wilna, 1885]).

<sup>114</sup>Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 105. Here “polychromatic splendor” would better approximate the gleaming or glistening nature of iridescence than a less complex and more subdued “polychromatism.”

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

<sup>116</sup>Cf. Brownlee, who observes the use of  $\eta\eta$  in reference to the dawn in Isa 60:3 and concludes that the fire was “many hued” (*Ezekiel 1-19*, 12). Prov 4:18 also describes dawn in terms of the  $\eta\eta$ : “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn [ $\eta\eta$  לְאֵשׁ], which shines brighter and brighter until full day.” See also Isa 4:5, which describes the “brightness of a flaming fire [ $\eta\eta$  לְאֵשׁ]” (NASB).

Cf. the late Jewish mystical interpretation of Ezek 1 found in *Hekhalot Zutarti* (“The Lesser [Book of Celestial] Palaces”), §353 in Schäfer’s *Hekhalot* synopsis, where the living creatures are described as having an appearance “like the appearance of the rainbow in the cloud” (quoted from Halperin, *Faces*, 388). This is intriguing in light of the fact that the fire in the midst of the living creatures in 1:13 is described in terms of the  $\eta\eta$  that one also finds in 1:28 in comparison with the rainbow.

<sup>117</sup>Davila, *Liturgical Works*, 43-47.

<sup>118</sup>*Merkabah* material derives from the OT: “The merkabah appears to play the role

Line 1           ] their [    ] and [ m]b their engraved forms [  
 Line 2           ] their [    ] their splendid s[tr]uctures [  
 Line 3           [walls of] their glorious [hal]ls, their wondrous doors [  
 ]

Immediately following these lines is the following:<sup>119</sup>

Line 4           ] their. [    ], angels of fire and spirits of cloud . [  
 Line 5           br]ightness of the brocaded spirits of the holiest ho[li]ness

The author of the critical text, Bilhah Nitzan, suggests that the carved forms in lines 1 to 3 may be the angels in line 4 and the spirits in line 5.<sup>120</sup> And then she remarks: "It thus seems that the images carved in the heavenly temple are of classes of angels which create the impression of the 'brightness' of the 'mingled/brocaded colors'. . . , referring to the flamed [*sic*] and lightning surrounding of the heavenly throne and the appearance of God known from Ezekiel 1:4, 27-28; 8:2; 10:3-4; Psalm 97:2-3; 104:4; Daniel 7:9-10, and *1 Enoch* 14:17-22."<sup>121</sup> Though Nitzan does not state it, Ezek 1:27-28 contains the bright, iridescent imagery we have been exploring. Thus she implicitly hypothesizes that the multicolored, physical images in the heavenly temple were understood by the author of this text to provide the basis for the brightness of the rainbow imagery that Ezekiel saw. Thus here she associates the "angels of fire" with the iridescence similar to a rainbow.

Third, the *Hekhalot* corpus also provides enlightenment in regard to the visual relation of the rainbow to fire. Despite this literature's late date in relation to Ezekiel, it is important for its interest in Ezek 1.<sup>122</sup> One *Hekhalot* interpretation of Ezekiel's vision in chapter 1 attempts to unveil the multicolored, glowing nature of fire and compares flames of fire to "all kinds of colors mixed together."<sup>123</sup> Thus one can see why, in another *Hekhalot* passage, the rainbow is explicitly compared to fire: "The crown [of the 'youth'] resembles the rainbow, and the

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of the central 'cult object' of the heavenly temple, recalling the tradition of 1 Chr. 28:18, which identifies the central cult object of the Jerusalem temple as the 'chariot of the cherubim'" (Carol A. Newsom, "Merkabah Exegesis in the Qumran Sabbath Shiroh," *JJS* 38 [1987], 14). In this paper, I follow the custom of spelling the "chariot" as "merkabah" rather than "merkavah."

The text is from the critical edition: Bilhah Nitzan, "Berakhot," in *Poetical and Liturgical Texts, Part I*, ed. Emanuel Tov, vol. 6, *Qumran Cave 4*, DJD 11 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 52. I have attempted to replicate the spacing of the text as it is in the critical edition.

<sup>119</sup>Text from *ibid.*

<sup>120</sup>Nitzan, "4QBerakhot (4Q286-290)," 643.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, 643-644.

<sup>122</sup>Davila notes that it also shows a strong relationship to earlier apocalyptic and Gnostic works (*Liturgical Works*, 43-47).

<sup>123</sup>Schäfer, §371a (quoted from Morray-Jones, *A Transparent Illusion*, 176; cf. p. 213). Morray-Jones notes that the image of mixed colors reminds one of the multicolored temple veils described in Chronicles, Philo, and Josephus (*ibid.*, 213).



rainbow resembles all *the appearance of fire all around it*.<sup>124</sup>

And fourth, other Jewish texts comparing a rainbow to fire can be found in the *Shi'ur Qomah*, part of the mystical *merkabah* ("throne") corpus. *Siddur Rabbah* 36, referred to earlier, states that the body of the celestial being called the "Youth" is like a rainbow (רשף), "and the rainbow [to which his body is similar] would be one which is similar to anything with an image of fire surrounding it all around."<sup>125</sup> Here one immediately notices the allusions to Ezek 1, as well as the comparison of the rainbow with fire. *Sefer Haqqomah* 132 is similar: "His body resembles a bow [רשף], and the bow is (something) like the semblance of fire (forming) a house around it."<sup>126</sup>

Granted, the *Hekhalot* and *Shi'ur Qomah* are much later than Ezekiel, yet they provide further interpretive support for what we have already seen strongly hinted at in Ezek 1:13, namely, that the fiery flames there were understood in iridescent terms similar to the explicit rainbow imagery in 1:27-28 and the implicit iridescence in 1:4 and 10:4.<sup>127</sup> The term ננה provides the linkage between all three texts, and despite the absence of ננה in 43:2, the same iridescence undergirds that text because of its explicit linkage to chapter 1.

In the case of the throne-room visions, such as found in Ezekiel, the visionaries grasped at what was familiar to describe what was not familiar. Sometimes they saw a rainbow-like radiance, other times a blazing fire,<sup>128</sup> and at

<sup>124</sup>Schäfer, §487 (quoted from Halperin, *Faces*, 539). Here again the fiery flames have a glowing, multicolored nature.

<sup>125</sup>Text quoted from Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah*, 41.

<sup>126</sup>Text quoted from *ibid.*, 153. *Sefer Razi'el* 256-257 and *Sefer Haqqomah* 157 state that this Youth's name is "Metatron"; however, cf. Davila, "Melchizedek," 258-261. See also Schäfer, §398: "His body resembles the rainbow, and the rainbow resembles *the appearance of fire all around it* [Ezekiel 1:27]" (quoted from Halperin, *Faces*, 405).

<sup>127</sup>Even more, the interpretive comparison of Ezekiel's rainbow to fire is neither as late nor as narrowly restricted as might appear at first. Recently Robert Blust, in a fascinating and wide-ranging study, examined worldwide folkloric characterizations associated with the dragon and suggested that the concept of the dragon developed from rational and prescientific observations about the rainbow ("The Origin of the Dragon," *Anthropos* 95 [2000]: 519-536). In his analysis, "the clues are literally everywhere," and he concludes that "it is astonishing that the identity of the rainbow and the dragon has gone so long unrecognized" (*ibid.*, 534). From this perspective, stories of fire-breathing dragons reveal another intermingling of iridescent imagery deriving from rainbow and fire phenomena. While Blust shows from the standpoint of folklore how dragons who breathe fire are related to the meteorological phenomena of the rainbow, he does not explicitly make the comparison between the rainbow and fire (*ibid.*, 531-532).

<sup>128</sup>Did the gold, blue, purple, and scarlet colors that adorned the high priest's garments and the tabernacle veils suggest the blazing fires of heaven (or vice versa)? For instance, the inner veil prevented access to the Most Holy Place, while in *1 En.* 14:21-22 the blazing fire prevented access to the One on the throne. Cf. Meredith G. Kline, who indicates that such bright reds, blues, and gold colors gave a fiery effect: "Artist [sic] could

other times simply a brilliant light.<sup>129</sup> In other words, and with particular regard to this study, the rainbow-like radiance was *one* of several ways in which visionaries described the brilliant—and variegated—light of the heavenly throne room.

### Conclusion

Iridescent imagery is both explicit and implicit in Ezekiel. One finds explicit imagery only once, in reference to the rainbow around the throne (1:27-28). But it also appears implicitly in the description of the radiance elsewhere (cf. 1:4, 10:3-4, and included in 43:2). The question of whether iridescent imagery stands behind the LXX (and Peshitta?) text of Ezek 9, while intriguing and possible, is conjectural and cannot be compellingly demonstrated. The absence of explicit or implicit iridescent imagery in reference to descriptions of the throne room of God indicates nothing more than that the rainbow was but one of the several ways in which the visionaries saw and/or described the brilliant radiance that surrounded God. Moreover, references to fire in heaven or in the heavenly temple<sup>130</sup> could well be more or less equivalent to the rainbow imagery

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scarcely do more with an earthly palette in a cold medium to produce the effect of fiery light" (*Images of the Spirit*, Baker Biblical Monograph [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980], 43).

<sup>129</sup>See Kline's comprehensive summary of biblical light imagery in *ibid.*, 18. Kline implicitly ties the "beauty" aspect of the rainbow with the appearance of the high priest's garments (*ibid.*, 42-43), which were designed for "glory and for beauty [וְלִכְבוֹד וְלִיְפָאוֹתָאֲרִי]" (Exod 28:2, NASB).

Cf. the substitution of the rainbow-like radiance by "light" in Logion 83 of the *Gospel of Thomas*: "Jesus said, 'The images are manifest to man, but the light in them remains concealed in the image of the light of the Father. It [the light] will become manifest, but his [the Father's] image will remain concealed by his light'" (trans. April D. De Conick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* [VCSup 33; Leiden: Brill, 1996], 101). Quoting Ezek 1:27, De Conick states that "the Glory, God's 'body' or 'image', was believed to be surrounded by radiant light, and when the mystic looked at God, he saw this light-man seated on the Throne" (*ibid.*, 102; De Conick does not refer to the image of the rainbow, however, but only to the "brightness around him"). The concealment of the Father's image in the *Gospel of Thomas* means that "God's image is concealed by the light radiating around God. This must be grounded in the early idea that God's form was enshrouded with light" (*ibid.*, 103; cf. also 105). De Conick believes this tradition goes back to 1 *En.* 14:22-23, where God's form remains hidden behind his light—i.e., the flaming fire (*ibid.*, 104).

Cf. also the "cloud of light" in Gnostic works. For example, in *Ap. John* 10:10-19, Sophia creates a being whom she surrounds in a "cloud of light." Rowland affirms that this reference is, in general, similar to Ezek 1:4 ("Influence of Ezekiel," 81). But I have demonstrated above that Ezek 1:4 refers to the *same* rainbow-like radiance as 1:27b. See also the parallel between this and the passage in *Orig. World.* 106:1-6, in which one finds the throne of Jesus within the light of a great cloud (cf. *ibid.*, 85). References to these two Gnostic works are taken from James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3d rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990).

<sup>130</sup>See, e.g., Dan 7:9-11.

of Ezekiel, since fire could be understood in terms of bright, shifting colors as well (e.g., Ezek 1:13). Focusing on explicit iridescent imagery in contrast or distinction to other light imagery (e.g., fire imagery), however, makes one unable to adequately explain the apparent paucity of such iridescent imagery in both the OT and the NT.

Iridescent imagery in Ezekiel had a checkered history among interpreters. Notice David J. Halperin's careful observation: "Ezekiel 1:26-28 compares God both to a human being and to a rainbow. The first comparison, as far as we can tell, did not seriously disturb the rabbis. The second did."<sup>131</sup> As he further notes, God's "rainbow-like glory excited some of them and disturbed others."<sup>132</sup> One who was apparently not disturbed by Ezekiel's dazzling, iridescent imagery, as we have briefly seen, was the NT prophet John. He is the *only* NT author to explicitly refer to the rainbow (Rev 4:3; 10:1), but a fuller exploration of his explicit and implicit use of Ezekiel's iridescent imagery—whether resplendent in all of its glorious colors or shimmering beneath the surface of his text—is a topic for another time.

<sup>131</sup>Halperin, *Faces*, 250.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*