



Isaiah 6:1–3 and Angelomorphic Christology. An Approach to Understand Origen’s Isaiah Exegesis

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Abstract: This article deals with Origen’s interpretation of Isaiah’s vision in Isa 6. Origen refers to his Hebrew Master’s statement in *Orig. Princ.* 1.3.4 where two Seraphim are identified with Christ and the Holy Spirit. The main scope in the article is to put the Hebrew Master’s opinion in balance with Origen’s own Christology. The problem is approached from the method of biblical argumentation by using ancient reception historical ways to understand scripture. The Hebrew Master’s statement is related to three important themes: *First*, the angelomorphic theophanies in the Old Testament provide a general background for the idea that Christ (and the Holy Spirit) can be identified with Seraphim. *Second*, Origen relates Isaiah’s Seraphim to Cherubim in the Ark of Covenant and use Hab 3:2 to illustrate his Christology. *Third*, the Christology of the *Ascension of Isaiah* provides a good parallel to understand the Hebrew Master’s statement about Seraphim. The main result in the article is that Origen’s own Christology is well balanced with the statement of the Hebrew Master. Origen’s teachings about Christ can be characterized as high and subordinate Christology, and its roots are in early Jewish-Christian circles.

Keywords: angelomorphic Christology, *Ascension of Isaiah*, Cherubim, Hebrew Master, Isaiah, Origen, Seraphim, subordinationism

The starting-point of this article is Origen’s statement in *Orig. Princ.* 1.3.4:¹ “My Hebrew Master also used to say that those two seraphim in Isaiah, which are described as having each six wings, and calling to one another, and saying, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts,’ were to be understood of the only-begotten Son of God and of the Holy Spirit.” This same interpretation is also presented in Origen’s Isaiah

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¹ Origen’s text has been preserved mainly in the Latin translation of Rufinus. See Origenes, *De principiis*, SC 252, 148–53; OECT, 70–73. See also the English translations in Justinus, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, ANF 1. However, the essential part of this passage in *De Principiis* 1.3.4 has also been preserved in Greek. For this see Origenes, *De principiis*, GCS 22, 52–53; OECT, 70. This means that we have the Hebrew Master’s statement even in Greek. This shows that Rufinus’ translation is accurate.

homilies which were translated by Jerome, namely in the first and fourth homilies.² Origen refers to the opinion of a Jew, presumably a Jewish Christian,³ who was his teacher in Hebrew and who interpreted the two Seraphim as being “the only-begotten Son of God” and “the Holy Spirit.” Origen’s reference here has been the object of critical treatment since late antiquity and Origen has been accused of unorthodox (i.e. non-Nicene) Christology. Such critical treatment of Origen’s Christology is documented, for example, in Jerome’s writings.⁴ In modern scholarly literature Origen has been criticized as having accepted uncritically a Christological model related to the two Seraphim. Origen has also been blamed for clearing the path for Arius’ Christology,⁵ where Christ was associated with a created figure by the Father. For example, in Alois Grillmeier’s influential presentation of Christology, early Jewish-Christian angel Christology is regarded as an early step toward Arian Christology.⁶ While stating this Grillmeier does not claim that Arius would have identified Christ with an angel.⁷ His point was to emphasize that identifying Christ with an angel is parallel to Arian Christological claim where Christ did not receive the full divine status as Father. Arius’ own Christology was based on the biblical argumentation as noted also by Grillmeier.⁸ The most important biblical argument for Arius was Prov 8:22 in its Septuagint version and the expression of Col 1:15, “the firstborn of every creature”. While the Septuagint uses the verb ἐκτίσέν, “he (God) created (me),” in Prov 8:22 the Hebrew text has the verb *qānâ* which can mean “create” but in the context

2 See Origenes, *Homiliae in Isaiam*, GCS 33, 242–89. The English translation can be found in the appendix of Jerome’s Isaiah Commentary. See Hieronymus, *Commentariorum in Isaiam libri XVIII*, ACW 68, 881–928.

3 Origen refers to “the Hebrew (Master)” also elsewhere. Concerning these references see the useful and balanced discussion in Skarsaune 2007a, 325–78, esp. 362–73. Oskar Skarsaune emphasizes that we cannot be sure whether all references are to one and the same Hebrew (Master). Skarsaune is of the opinion that Origen may refer to a Jewish Christian. See the similar view also in Hannah 1999a, 80–101, esp. 91–93. For another view see De Lange 1976, 43.

4 The critical discussion of this saying of Origen has been presented in Jerome’s writings. Concerning this, see especially Fürst 2009, 141–52; see also Mantelli 2013 where Jerome’s interpretation of Hab 3:2 and its relation to Origen’s exegesis and to the statement of the Hebrew Master has been discussed.

5 In this article I cannot deal with the many and complicated details in Arian controversy. Concerning Arian Christology see its nutshell with Arius’ own letter to Eusebios presented in Andersson 2010, 44–47; more detailed analysis can be found in Simonetti 1975; Williams 1987; Ayres 2004. As far as the topic of this article concerned, Ayres deals with scholars who have argued that Arius developed his Christology from Origen, but he regards this influence as minimal (2004, 20–30).

6 Grillmeier 1975, 37–53, esp. 52–53. While Alois Grillmeier notes that Origen’s Christology is different he nevertheless insists that “this path, by way of the angel-christology, could lead to Arianism” (1975, 53). See also the similar statement in the English summary of Mantelli 2013, 202: “Afterwards, this kind of Biblical exegesis became unacceptable under the influence of the Arian controversy and led to the sharpest criticism of Origen’s ideas.”

7 See Grillmeier’s detailed analysis of the Arian Christology in Grillmeier 1975, 219–48.

8 Concerning the centrality of Prov 8:22 (especially its Septuagint version) and Col 1:15 in the Arian biblical argumentation, see especially Simonetti 1975, 46–55, 478–80.

of Proverbs its usual meaning is “possess” or “acquire” (wisdom).⁹ The Hebrew verb is open for different semantic interpretations. In addition, it is worth noting that the parallel verbs in Prov 8:23–25 means “I was installed” (v. 23) and “I was born” (vv. 24–25) which gives even more flexibility to understand the verb *qānâ*. The reception of history of Prov 8:22 in Christian writings was established in an early stage¹⁰ when the Hebrew text was still available for Christian argumentation and then verses 23–25 (with emphasis “I was born”) influenced the way how the verb *ἐκτισέν* in the Septuagint version was understood in Christian discourses, i.e. as a metaphoric expression for “be born.”¹¹ As far as Col 1:15 is concerned, Arius understood its expression “the firstborn of every creature” so that in the final analysis Christ is a part of creature. However, already Col 1:17 indicates how the genitive construction in the expression should be understood: not so that Christ is a part of creation, but that Christ has existed before anything was created. Justin understands the expression “the firstborn of every creature” in *Dial.* 85.2 in a similar way so that Christ has existed before anything was created (*Dial.* 100.2).¹²

The aim of this article is to deal with the exegesis of Isa 6:1–3 presented by the Hebrew Master in Origen’s writings and throw light on its background, both reception-historical as well as tradition-historical.¹³ Special attention is given to the presumable Jewish-Christian tradition on which Origen may be dependent.¹⁴

In the case of Origen, the reception history of Isa 6:1–3 cannot be separated from two other biblical texts and their reception history. In *Orig. Princ.* 1.3.4, Origen writes: “And we think that that expression also which occurs in the hymn of Habakkuk, ‘In the midst either of the two living things, or of the two lives, You will be known,’ ought to be understood of Christ and of the Holy Spirit.” Origen refers to Hab 3:2 (in its Septuagint version) which he regards as parallel to Isa 6:1–3. Finally, in his *Commentary on Romans* (3.8.2–8), Origen interprets Hab 3:2 by connecting

⁹ This meaning in Hebrew becomes even clearer when the word’s semantic value is seen in comparative Semitic perspective. For this see Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995, 1015–16.

¹⁰ The earliest Christian interpretation of Prov 8:22 can be detected already in 1 Cor 8:6; John 1; Heb 1:1–3; Col 1:15–20.

¹¹ I have dealt with the interpretation of Prov 8:22–31 earlier in Laato 1997, 252.

¹² I am thankful for my colleague and friend, adjunct professor Sven-Olav Back, who has noted to me these passages in Justin Martyr’s writing.

¹³ Concerning the early tradition history of Isa 6:1–3 note Williamson 2009. Cf. also Scoralick 1989. With regard to the reception history of Trishagion in Jewish and Christian writings and liturgies see Werner 1966, 19–32; Osten-Sacken 1995, 172–87; Spinks 2002. Worth noting, too, is the study Nitzan 1994, where he refers to the use of Isa 6:3 in Qumran writings. See especially Nitzan 1994, 276–82; 367–69.

¹⁴ Earlier, I have briefly referred to Origen’s Christological viewpoints related to Isa 6:1–3 in Laato 2010, 85–107. In this article I deepen the discussion to include the biblical reception history and the tradition-historical background of Isa 6:1–3 by considering how the Isaiah text has been understood in the Judeo-Christian borderlines.

it to Exod 25:22 and arguing that the two living ones in Hab 3:2 refer to the Cherubim on the Ark.¹⁵ This being the case, my primary focus is on the interpretation of Isa 6:1–3 in Origen's writings but I also discuss his way of understanding Hab 3:2 and Exod 25:17–22 (as far as the Cherubim depicted on the Ark are concerned) in conjunction with Isa 6.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that the Hebrew Master's interpretation of Isa 6:1–3 is not the oldest Christian interpretation of those Isaianic verses. Isa 6:1–3 is interpreted already in the New Testament, so that the Lord who revealed himself to Isaiah was Christ (John 12:41): "Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him." It is clear in this context that "his glory" refers to Christ. Another interpretation is documented in Rev 4:6–9 where the four living creatures (corresponding to the Cherubim in Ezek 1), each of them with six wings (like Seraphim in Isa 6) are singing Trishagion (Isa 6:3) to God (the Father). From the time of the New Testament onwards it is, therefore, possible to detect a reception historical tradition where the Lord in Isa 6:1–3 is identified with Christ.¹⁶ In the light of this interpretation of Isa 6 where the Lord is identified with Christ in Isa 6:1–3 it may be tempting to presuppose that Origen's teacher would have represented a Christology which decreased the divine status of Christ to the level of (created) angel. It is specifically this understanding of the Hebrew Master's Christology which I want to problematize in this article. My opinion is that it is possible to set the Hebrew Master's Christology in balance with Origen's high and subordinate Christology.

The content of this article is built up in such a way that I will demonstrate in which way the Hebrew Master's interpretation of Isa 6:1–3 parallels well to Origen's Christology, and in so way not to the Arian Christology. I shall demonstrate the tradition-historical outcome of the Hebrew Master's interpretation from the perspective of biblical argumentation as it was applied in the late antiquity. The argument in this article runs as follows. *First*, I discuss the difference between the angel Christology where Christ is identified with the created angel and the angelomorphic Christology where Christ is identified with those angelomorphic figures of the Hebrew Bible (or of the Septuagint) who appeared to humans in theophanies and who represent themselves as God. *Second*, I discuss the textual problems in Hab 3:2 and show that this text was intimately related to the symbolic figures of the Ark of Covenant. *Third*, I demonstrate that in early Christian theology, especially in Origen's writings, angelomorphic figures (Cherubim) of the Ark of Covenant (Exod 25:17–22) were intimately related to angelomorphic divine theophanies of the Hebrew Bible, and that the prophet's vision in Isa 6 was understood as having taken place in the Temple of Jerusalem, apparently in front of the Ark of Covenant and the two massive Cherubim

¹⁵ See the text of Origen in Origenes, *Commentarii in Romanos*, SC 539. The English translation is available in Origenes, *Commentarii in Romanos*, FC 103, 217–21. The useful discussion of Hab 3:2 and its interpretation in the writings of Jerome and Origen is in Mantelli 2013.

¹⁶ For this see, in particular, Bucur 2014, 309–30.

built by Solomon (1 Kgs 6:23–28). This explains why in early Christological tradition the Seraphim in Isa 6:1–3 were identified with the Cherubim. *Fourth*, I discuss the Christology of the *Ascension of Isaiah* which is related to Isa 6:1–3, and which clearly represents the high Christology of the Origenian style and identifies both the Beloved One (= Christ) and Holy Spirit as angelomorphic figures. And finally, *fifth*, I briefly explain in which ways the Christological viewpoint which Origen learned from his Hebrew Master corroborates well with Origen's high but subordinate Christology presented elsewhere in his writings.

1. Angelomorphic Christology

In recent years scholars have emphasized the importance of angelomorphic figures in the early development of Christology and Pneumatology (concerning the Holy Spirit).¹⁷ In this section I relate this scholarly discussion to the way early Christians used certain passages in the Hebrew Bible or in the Septuagint where God reveals himself through angelomorphic agents. What is significant in these biblical theophanies is that Christians argued that the angelomorphic figures could represent Christ because they speak or act in the name of Yahweh. Especially illustrative are the biblical theophanies to which Justin Martyr refers; he uses them as proofs that Christ has manifested his power in the divine revelations.¹⁸ Christ himself appeared to the patriarchs, Moses and Joshua, as an Angel¹⁹ who looked like a human figure.²⁰

¹⁷ Very instructive is the article of Hurtado 2012, 546–64. From 1990s onwards angelomorphic Christology and its Jewish background have been examined in varied ways. See e.g. Stuckenbruck 1995; Gieschen 1998; Hannah 1999b; Sullivan 2004; Orlov 2005; Bucur 2009; Poirier 2010. See also articles in Newman, Davila, and Lewis 1999. Worth noting is also the new printing of Segal 2002 where he deals with rabbinical reactions against Christian but also against different Gnostic systems concerning two powers in the heaven.

¹⁸ Concerning Justin's works, I have consulted the following editions and translations: Justinus, *Apologiae*, Goodspeed; PTS 38; PTS 47; Falls; Lehtipuu; Back. Recently, in a reading group at Åbo Akademi University, we have been discussing the Swedish translation of Justin's *Dialogue* made by Sven-Olav Back. This reading group is one part of our research project "Isaiah between Judeo-Christian Borderlines" funded by the Polin Institute and the Academy of Finland for 2022–2026. The English translation in the series Ante-Nicene Fathers is quite verbatim and has been useful for this article where I am particularly interested in analysing Justin's theology.

¹⁹ The Greek word *aggelos* can be translated also as "a messenger." In this article I write Angel with a capital letter when I refer to Christian argumentation that certain angelomorphic theophanies in the Old Testament should be related to the appearance of Christ.

²⁰ From the religious-historical perspective the outcome of the theophanic texts used by Justin Martyr for Christological proofs can be analysed in other ways. For this see especially Sommer 2009. In the reception history these theophanic texts are open in multiple ways which cannot be discussed in this article.

The following Old Testament texts concerning angelomorphic theophanies are discussed in Justin Martyr's writings:²¹

| OT passage | Who does see the Angel? | Justin's passage |
|---------------|-------------------------|--|
| Gen 18–19 | Abraham | <i>Dial.</i> 56–57 |
| Gen 28:10–19 | Jacob | <i>Dial.</i> 58 |
| Gen 31:10–13 | Jacob | <i>Dial.</i> 58 |
| Gen 32:23–31 | Jacob | <i>Dial.</i> 58; 125 |
| Gen 35:6–10 | Jacob | <i>Dial.</i> 58 |
| Exod 3 | Moses | <i>1 Apol.</i> 62–63; <i>Dial.</i> 59–60 |
| Exod 23:20–21 | Promise given to Israel | <i>Dial.</i> 75 |
| Josh 5:13–15 | Joshua | <i>Dial.</i> 61–62 |

Justin has chosen these biblical theophanies carefully so that the Angel who reveals himself to humans represents in the Old Testament writings God himself. Three men (Gen 18:2) visited Abraham, and Gen 19:1 indicates that these men were angels. The story continues that two of them went to Sodom (Gen 18:16; 19:1) while the third started up a dialogue with Abraham (Gen 18:17–33).²² This dialogue is described in Genesis as having taken place between Abraham and Yahweh. This being the case, the Angel who revealed himself to Abraham represented God. Especially important for Justin is Gen 19:24: “Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire from the Lord out of heaven.” This verse indicates that the Angel who appeared to Abraham and discussed with him was the second divine person, the Lord. It is clear that for Justin, the Angel was not a created figure. There is evidence that that Justin knew the Letter to Hebrews.²³ Therefore, he apparently followed its main theological emphasis that the Son of God is a fundamentally different angelomorphic person than the created angels – which is the main argument in Heb 1–2.

Before referring to the texts where the Angel or the Lord reveals himself to Jacob, Justin summarizes his theological argument in the following way (*Dial.* 58.3):²⁴ “It is

²¹ For this list see Trakatellis 1976; Skarsaune 1987, 409–24. See also Barbel 1941, 50–63; Gieschen 1998, 189–90. In Sullivan 2004, 37–59 there is an important discussion on how Gen 18–19, Gen 32 and Josh 5:13–15 were understood in early Jewish reception history.

²² The text has been understood in this way in the Septuagint, too. See further *Jub.* 16:1 (“we appeared to Abraham”) that clearly refers that the men must be angels. The Book of Jubilees indicates that “the angel of the Presence” revealed to Moses at Sinai (*Jub.* 1:27), and this same Angel associated with two other angels appeared to Abraham – something that explains the style of “we.” The angelic interpretations are also presented by Josephus (*Ant.* 1.196) and Philo (*Abr.* 107, 115).

²³ Concerning Justin's knowledge of the Letter to Hebrews, see Skarsaune 1987, 72–73, 107–8; 126–27, 168, 179–80, 296; 2007b, 53–76, 179–87, esp. 74–75, 187.

²⁴ Translations from *Dialogue* are from the series ANF if not indicated otherwise.

again written by Moses, my brethren, that He who is called God and appeared to the patriarchs is called both Angel and Lord, in order that from this you may understand Him to be minister to the Father of all things, as you have already admitted, and may remain firm, persuaded by additional arguments.” What is important for Justin’s argument is that, in theophany, a human meets an Angel who has a mandate to speak in the name of Lord/God so that he is even called Lord/God in the text. The text form which Justin quotes when giving a proof for the meeting between an Angel and Jacob is significant (*Dial.* 58.4–5):

Gen 31:10–13: “... and the Angel of God (ὁ ἄγγελος τοῦ θεοῦ) said to me in the dream, Jacob, Jacob. And I said, What is it, Lord? (τί ἐστὶ, κύριε) ... I am the God (ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ θεός) who appeared to you in Bethel... I shall be with you.”

This quotation indicates that the Angel who spoke to Jacob is called *Kyrios* by the patriarch. Justin’s text is not identical with the Septuagint text, however, because the vocative *Kyrie* is lacking in the Septuagint.²⁵ The additional element in the text which Justin quotes from some unknown source (*testimonia*!?) is not contrived, however, because the whole story of Jacob is based on the idea that the Lord appears to him in the form of an Angel.²⁶

In *Dial.* 58.6–7 Justin quotes Gen 32:23–31:

... but Jacob was left behind alone, and an angel (ἄγγελος)²⁷ wrestled with him until morning. And He saw that He is not prevailing against him, and He touched the broad part of his thigh; and the broad part of Jacob’s thigh grew stiff while he wrestled with Him. And He said, “Let Me go, for the day breaks.” But he said, “I will not let You go, except You bless me.” And He said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” And He said, “Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel shall be your name; for you have prevailed with God (μετὰ τοῦ θεοῦ), and with men shall be powerful.” And Jacob asked Him, and said, “Tell me Your name.” But he said, “Why do you ask after My name?” And He blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of that place Peniel, for I saw God face to face (θεὸν πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον), and my soul rejoiced.

Justin’s exegesis is based on the fact that Jacob wrestled with an Angel (as clearly attested in Hos 12:4) who is subsequently identified with God himself. The exegesis Justin represents is not without parallel in early Jewish reception history. For example,

²⁵ Concerning the textual evidence of Gen 31:10–13 see the John Wevers’s edition in Göttingen Septuagint as well as Wevers 1993, 500–503. It is worth noting that Wevers writes (1993, 502) that it is clear from the LXX text that “the angel of God” represents God as the verse Gen 31:13 makes clear.

²⁶ For this, see Susan Brayford (2007, 365): “As is often the case, God’s identity is interchangeable with that of his angels or messengers (e.g., 18:1–13). The one speaking to Jacob in his sleep now defines himself as the God whom Jacob saw earlier (28:12–13).”

²⁷ This is the reading in Goodspeed’s edition although Markovich has the reading *anthrōpos*. I follow the reading in Goodspeed’s edition because the early Christian exegesis on Gen 32 was apparently based on Hos 12:4 where the “human” mentioned in Gen 32 is identified with an angel.

Philo (*De mutatione nominum* 87; *De somniis* I.129) identifies the human who wrestled with Jacob as an angel and even Logos, presumably on the basis of Hos 12:4.²⁸

Gen 35:6–10: “... And there he built an altar and called the name of that place Bethel; for there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother Esau.”

In this passage reference is made to Gen 28 where the Lord, the God of Abraham and Isaac, appeared to Jacob when the patriarch saw his vision about many angels and the Lord himself.

Gen 28:10–19:

... behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, whose top reached to heaven; and the angels of God ascended and descended upon it. And the Lord stood above it, and He said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and of Isaac...” And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.” And he was afraid, and said, “How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven...” and Jacob called the name of the place The House of God...

It is significant that Justin quotes Gen 28 only after he has quoted other passages (Gen 31:10–13; 35:6–10) where the theophany of Gen 28 was related to the revelation of the Angel. This gives Justin the possibility to identify *Kyrios* (the God himself) who speaks with Jacob in Gen 28 with the Angel.

In *Dial.* 59 (a similar argument is put forward in *1 Apol.* 62–63 too) Justin continues the argument that the one who spoke to Moses from the burning bush was the Angel (as noted in Exod 3:2) who nevertheless identifies himself with God: “Have you perceived, sirs, that this very God whom Moses speaks of as an Angel that talked to him in the flame of fire, declares to Moses that He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob?” It seems obvious that for Justin the angelomorphic Lord who spoke to Moses could not have been a created angel because otherwise he could not have been said to be God himself.

In *Dial.* 75 Justin refers to Exod 23:20–21 where God appointed a certain Angel to lead Israel. It is *expressis verbis* stated that the name of the Lord will be in the Angel:

Moreover, in the book of Exodus we have also perceived that the name of God Himself which, He says, was not revealed to Abraham or to Jacob, was Jesus, and was declared mysteriously through Moses. Thus it is written: “And the Lord spoke to Moses, Say to this people, Behold, I send My angel before your face, to keep you in the way, to bring you into the land which I have prepared for you. Give heed to Him and obey Him; do not disobey Him. For He will not draw back from you; for My name is in Him.”

²⁸ Skarsaune (1987, 415) notes that “Justin’s identification of the man as Christ wrestling with Jacob creates confusion within a simple Jacob/Christ typology.” I will discuss Justin’s Jacob-exegesis in a forthcoming article “Jacob is Christ” (in the WUNT series).

In *Dial.* 61 Justin summarizes different forms of revelation of Christ in the Old Testament scriptures and refers to Josh 5:13–15 too:

I shall give you another testimony, my friends, from the Scriptures, that God begot before all creatures a Beginning, [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos; and on another occasion He calls Himself Captain (ἀρχιστράτηγος), when He appeared in human form to Joshua the son of Nave (Nun).

He then continues to quote Proverbs 8 and notes that Christ is also referred to as the personified Wisdom of God – a passage which had already played an important role in the New Testament Christology (John 1:1–3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15–20; Heb 1:1–3).²⁹

It is significant that all Old Testament passages to which Justin refers as proofs about the angelomorphic revelations of God indicate that the Angel in question cannot be regarded as a created figure. Instead, these passages refer to the Angel who represents himself as the Lord. This background to Justin's writings indicates that there is no *prima facie* reason to argue that Origen's Hebrew Master would have understood the reference to Seraphim in Isa 6:1–3 as them having to be created angels. The possibility that the Seraphim were interpreted as referring to divine Angels according to theophanies of the Old Testament is a good alternative which must be evaluated along with other remarks Origen gave us, as well as from the larger perspective of early Christian writings.

In *Orig. Princ.* 1.3.4 Origen relates the Seraphim of Isa 6:3 to the Cherubim in Hab 3:2. The Hebrew text of Hab 3:2 is extremely difficult, while the Septuagint version more clearly refers to the two living ones. Before proceeding, it is first necessary to discuss the textual transmission of Hab 3:2, as theologically speaking, this is clearly a potential text for Christological purposes.

2. Textual Problems in Hab 3:2

The text of Hab 3:2 is an old crux. The MT version is difficult to understand, while the Septuagint version of Hab 3:2 is clearer.³⁰ I have elsewhere dealt with Hab 3:2, its textual problems and interpretation.³¹ Here I discuss only those problems relat-

²⁹ Concerning the importance of Prov 8:22–31 see especially Hengel 1977.

³⁰ Concerning this, see Andersen 2001, 273–83. The reading of Hab 3:2 is identical in the so-called Barberini version (based on the manuscripts used for liturgical purposes in an Alexandrian synagogue) and the LXX. See Good 1959, 11–30; Gelston 2010, 122*.

³¹ Laato 2015, 55–64.

ing to the text which are relevant to understanding the topic of this article. At first sight the Septuagint version seems to indicate that its Hebrew Vorlage was longer. The following parallels can be detected between the Septuagint and the Masoretic consonant text:

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Κύριε, εισακήκοα τὴν ἀκοήν σου καὶ ἐφοβήθην | יהוה שמעתי שמעך |
| κατενόησα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ ἐξέστην. | יראתי יהוה פעלך |
| ἐν μέσῳ δύο ζώων γνωσθήσῃ, | בקרר שנים חיהו |
| ἐν τῷ ἐγγίξειν τὰ ἔτη ἐπιγνωσθήσῃ, | בקרר שנים תודיע |
| ἐν τῷ παρῆναι τὸν καιρὸν ἀναδειχθήσῃ, | |
| ἐν τῷ παραχθῆναι τὴν ψυχὴν μου | |
| ἐν ὀργῇ ἐλέους μνησθήσῃ. | תזכור רחם ברגז |

The Septuagint reading ἐν μέσῳ δύο ζώων γνωσθήσῃ (“in the midst of two living figures you will be known”) indicates that the Jewish translator has understood the Hebrew unvocalized text as rendering *bəqereb šəṇayim ḥayyōt*. On the other hand, ἐν τῷ ἐγγίξειν τὰ ἔτη ἐπιγνωσθήσῃ (“when the years draw near, you will be recognized”) can be translated back to *bəqereb šānīm tiwwādēa*^c. Thus, the Hebrew Vorlage of the Septuagint was understood *bəqereb šəṇayim ḥayyōt bəqereb šānīm tiwwādēa*^c and after vocalizing *tiwwādēa*^c (instead of the MT’s *tōdīa*^c) the translator understood it elliptically. This resulted in the double translations γνωσθήσῃ and ἐπιγνωσθήσῃ. Is such a Hebrew text meaningful in the context? It becomes so if the two living figures, in the midst of whom Yahweh will be known, signify either the two Cherubim which are depicted in the Mercy Seat of the Ark (Exod 25:17–22) or the two massive Cherubim over the Mercy Seat (1 Kgs 6:23–28).³² In Hab 2:20, the verse immediately preceding the prayer of Habakkuk, the reference is to Yahweh, who will manifest his message from the Temple of Jerusalem. The verb *yāda*^c (niphāl) has been used elsewhere for Yahweh as the subject in the meaning “make oneself known”, for example, in Exod 6:3; Isa 19:21; Ps 9:17. That Yahweh will reveal himself in the midst of the Mercy Seat of the Ark is a prominent theme in the Hebrew Bible (see e.g. Lev 16:2). Yahweh’s epithet is ישב הכרובים (“the one who is enthroned over cherubim”, 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; Ps 80:2; 99:1; Isa 37:16) indicating that he is seated as king between the two living cherubim.

Additional support for this religious-historical understanding of Hab 3:2 can be found in Hab 3:5, which describes how two personified powers, Deber and Resheph, will assist Yahweh in his march to help his people. That these powers are angelomorphic receives support from the Hebrew Bible. In 2 Sam 24, Yahweh’s angel will spread pestilence among the Israelites. Amos 5:10 reports that Deber was sent against

³² This option is also mentioned by Andersen (2001, 280) but he does not develop idea further.

the Egyptians and the parallel passages in Ps 78:49–50 speak of “destroying angels” deployed against the Egyptians to kill them with pestilence (*deber*). This evidence shows that Deber was an angelomorphic figure. Resheph is attested in Ugaritic texts (KTU 1.14 I:18–19; 1.15 II:6; 1.82:3) and it is clear that he is a god of destruction. Deut 32:23–24 and Ps 78:48, as well as the imagery in Job 5:7, Ps 91:5–6, and Ben Sira 43:17, make it probable that Resheph, too, was regarded as a flying demon or angel.³³ This being the case, we have good grounds to argue that the religious-historical background of Hab 3:2 are the two Cherubim in the Mercy Seat which were interpreted as referring to Deber and Resheph in Hab 3:5.

The expression ἐν τῷ παρεῖναι τὸν καιρὸν ἀναδειχθῆσθαι (“when the right time comes you will be displayed”) is, however, more problematic. Its outcome may be a double translation of the Hebrew *bēqereb šānîm tôdîa*^c – a phenomenon which is well-known in the Septuagint.³⁴ The final phrases in the Septuagint ἐν τῷ παραχθῆναι τὴν ψυχὴν μου ἐν ὀργῇ ἐλέους μνησθήσθαι (“when my soul is troubled in wrath you will remember mercy”) is probably an attempt to understand the last Hebrew phrase *bērōgez rahēm tizkôr* in its context. The translator apparently argued that the prophet, after hearing the message of the invading Chaldeans, was troubled by the wrath of Yahweh, (Hab 1–2) and here simply asks Yahweh to remember his mercy.

These comments on the translation of the Septuagint suggest that its Hebrew (consonant) Vorlage was not fundamentally different to that found in the Masoretic text. However, the Septuagint version shows that at one point the Masoretic text reads otherwise, namely the reading *ḥayyêhû*. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew text as if it reads *ḥayyôt*.

The question is whether we may, nonetheless, still retain the Masoretic consonants *ḥ-y-y-h-w*? I think we may. One possible reading would be *bēqereb šēnayim ḥay yāh wēbēqereb šēnayim tiwwādēa*^c. In that case we would have an ancient form of the name of Yhwh, which appears in Ps 68 *inter alia*. The use of this ancient title in later texts is confirmed by the so-called Hallel-psalms, where the Hebrew expression Hallelujah also contains this form. The expression *ḥay yāh* (alternatively *ḥay yāhû*) has many equivalents in the Hebrew Bible as, for example, *ḥay ʿēl*, *ḥay Yhwh*, *ḥay ʿlōhîm* etc. and in the so-called Lachish Letters.³⁵ The expression *bēqereb šēnayim* is easy to understand in the context where the reference is to Yahweh and his Temple (Hab 2:20). As stated above, Hab 3:5 could support the interpretation whereby the reference is to two Cherubim. That *bēqereb* can be used of Yahweh being in the midst of divine beings is clear from Ps 82:1 where the expression: “He will judge in the midst of gods (בְּקִרְבֵּי אֱלֹהִים)” is found.

³³ For this see Xella 1999, 700–703. Concerning the religio-historical background of Deut 32:24 and Hab 3:5 see van der Toorn 2003, 61–83; Niehr 2003, 84–107. It is also worth noting the opinion of Sanders 1996, 401–2, according to which “Rešep is still regarded as a deity in Hab. 3:5 and Deut. 32:24” (1996, 402).

³⁴ See e.g. Tov 2015, 140–41.

³⁵ For this solution see also Andersen 2001, 281.

In ancient Israelite poetry it was usual to emphasize that the God who revealed himself at Sinai would come to help his people and finally establish his kingship on the top of the Mount where his Temple is built (Exod 15:1–18; Deut 33; Ps 68). The prayer of Habakkuk reverses the order. When formulating his prayer in Habakkuk 3, Habakkuk is dependent on an earlier Israelite cultic tradition. This is well illustrated in Hab 3:10–12, 15 which contains close parallels to Ps 77:17–20.³⁶ The prophet introduced his prayer by stating how Yahweh will manifest his power from the Temple of Jerusalem (Hab 2:20). He begins by referring to the Holy of Holies and the Mercy Seat of the Ark before turning to earlier Israelite poetic traditions concerning Yahweh's march from the South to assist his people.³⁷

This being the case, I suggest the following version of Hab 3:2 in its original literary context:

Yahweh, I have heard your message,
 Yahweh, I am afraid in the face of your work.
 In the midst of the two (cherubim) Jah is alive!
 In the midst of the two (cherubim) you will reveal yourself!
 In wrath you will remember mercy!

Later transmitters of the Hebrew text apparently regarded Hab 3:2 as a theologically problematic text. The text does not say explicitly who these two living figures are and, consequently, it was regarded as problematic in its relation to Jewish monotheism.³⁸ The text was, therefore, revised by associating “Jah is alive” with the verb “make it live.” This revision was subsequently transmitted to the Masoretes who vocalized the text according to the tradition, and thereby produced the new meaning – as can be perceived in the present form of the MT. It is worth noting that the Targum of the Book of Habakkuk (attested before the Masoretic punctuation) already used the Masoretic-like understanding of Hab 3:2 as its starting-point. The meturgeman associates the MT's “your work” with what follows and interprets the beginning of the verse:³⁹ “Lord, I have heard the report of *your strength* and I was afraid!” The MT reading, “your works in the midst of the years,” is interpreted as referring to an exhortation to the wicked: “O Lord, your works *are great, for you grant an extension of time to the wicked to see if they will return to your law; but they have not returned and they provoke* before you in the midst of the years *in which you have given them life.*”

³⁶ This is commonly mentioned in commentaries. See, e.g., Rudolph 1975, 244–45; Andersen 2001, 328–29.

³⁷ It is worth noting that the discussion concerning the structure of Hab 3 should take into account the fact that the MT vocalization in Hab 3:2 cannot be correct. See, e.g., Barré 1988, 184–97; 2013, 446–62 and literature referred within. Michael Barré attempts to emend the MT without considering the fact that the LXX reading would give him the better option to integrate Hab 3:2 into its context.

³⁸ For the theological problems related to other divine beings in addition to Yahweh see Segal 2002.

³⁹ See Sperber 1992. Concerning the English translation see Cathcart and Gordon 1989, 156.

The MT expression “in the midst of the years make it alive” is interpreted as referring to the renewal of the world: “Therefore you will display your *might* in the midst of the years for you have promised to renew the world to take vengeance on the wicked who have disregarded your Memra.” The last phrase of the MT in Hab 3:2 is interpreted in the Targum as follows: “but in *the midst of your anger* you will remember in mercy *the righteous who do your will.*”

Instead of the MT, the Septuagint has preserved the Greek translation of the Hebrew text which, in my view, corresponded to the original understanding of Hab 3:2. This understanding clarifies well the interpretation of Hab 3:2 in patristic literature. The patristic exegesis simply followed the original meaning of the text by relating the two living beings in Hab 3:2 to the Cherubim above the Ark of Covenant. That such a reading was possible also in Hebrew before the Masoretic punctuation has already been presented above. Consequently, it is entirely possible – even though impossible to prove – that Origen received the idea of relating the Seraphim in Isa 6 to Hab 3:2 from his Hebrew Master. Our next question concerns how the two Seraphim in Isa 6 and their parallels, the Cherubim (depicted on the *kappōret* of the Ark of Covenant), are understood in early Christian interpretations.

3. Seraphim are Cherubim of the Ark of Covenant

The wording of Isa 6:3 indicates that there are only two Seraphim; one seraph calls to the other seraph by saying (καὶ ἐκέκραγον ἕτερος πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον καὶ ἔλεγον): “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Sabaoth; the whole earth is full of his glory.” Because Isaiah saw his vision in the Temple of Jerusalem and in front of the Holy of Holies the two seraphim could easily have been related to the two Cherubim represented on the *kappōret* or to the two massive Cherubim built by Solomon. The earliest example of where this connection between Seraphim and Cherubim has been presented is found in Irenaeus’ passage in the *Epideixis*:⁴⁰

Now this God is glorified by His Word who is His Son continually, and by the Holy Spirit who is the Wisdom of the Father of all: and the power(s) of these, (namely) of the Word and Wisdom, which are called Cherubim and Seraphim, with unceasing voices glorify God; and every created thing that is in the heavens offers glory to God the Father of all. He by His Word has created the whole world, and in the world are the angels; and to all the world He has given laws wherein each several thing should abide, and according to that which is determined by God should not pass their bounds, each fulfilling his appointed task. (Irenaeus, *Epid.* 10)

⁴⁰ See Irenaeus, *Epideixis tou apostolikou kerygmatos*, SC 211.

The text has been preserved only in Armenian and, therefore, has been interpreted in different ways. Anthony Briggman has shown convincingly that the Armenian text does not identify the Son and the Holy Spirit with the Cherubim and Seraphim but rather regards these angelic figures as coming under their powers. He also noted that Irenaeus' other passages support such a conclusion.⁴¹ This being the case, there is no solid textual basis for the idea that Irenaeus would have followed a similar exegesis to that of the Hebrew Master in Origen's texts.⁴² Irenaeus is, apparently, dependent on other earlier Christian traditions where the Cherubim and Seraphim together with the Word (Christ) and Spirit glorify God. Such a tradition is available, for example, in the *Ascension of Isaiah* which I deal with later in this article.

Returning to the tradition of the Hebrew Master transmitted in Origen's works, we may note that an identification between the Seraphim and Cherubim was the result of logical reasoning because the theophany of God in Isa 6:1–3 was interpreted as having taken place in front of the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem where the two massive Cherubim and the Ark of Covenant (along with two smaller Cherubim) were situated. *First*, the revelation of God for Isaiah follows the promise he has given in Lev 16:2: "I appear in the cloud upon the *kappōret/hilastērion*." If God himself appears upon the Ark, then two Cherubim are also present in the vision in some way. *Second*, Isaiah sees God sitting on the throne. The expression יֵשֶׁב הַכְּרֻבִים is used for Yahweh elsewhere (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15 = Isa 37:16; Ps 80:2; 99:1; 1 Chr 13:6) and is related to the *kappōret* upon which God reveals himself. Therefore, the Seraphim were regarded as Cherubim. This being the case, Isa 6:1–3 should be related to the theophany of God and – as already noted – early Christian theology used angelomorphic manifestations of God in the Old Testament to refer to the theophanies of Christ.

Irenaeus also refers to Hab 3:2 on one occasion when presenting Christological arguments (*Haer.* 3.16.7). Irenaeus understands the end of Hab 3:2 as referring to the life, passion and death of Jesus that were preordained by God. However, it is significant that the text form of Hab 3:2 which Irenaeus quotes does not contain the beginning of the verse but only the end (underlined in what follows):⁴³

O Lord, I have heard of your renown and feared;
I considered your works and was astonished.

⁴¹ See Briggman 2012, 194–203. Briggman concludes (2012, 202): "In *Proof* 10 Irenaeus writes not of the identity of the Son and the Holy Spirit with the Powers of God called Cherubim and Seraphim, but of their sharing with these Powers in the worship of the Father."

⁴² Contra Thomas Scheck who writes in his translation of Jerome's *Commentary on Isaiah* (Hieronymus, *Commentariorum in Isaiam libri XVIII*, ACW 68, 882): "The assimilation of the Word and the Spirit (Wisdom) to the cherubim and seraphim came from Judeo-Christian sources and was already found in the work of St. Irenaeus, *Dem* 10."

⁴³ See the text in Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, SC 211, 314–17.

You will be known in the midst of two living ones;
you will be recognized when the years draw near;
you will be displayed when the right time comes;
you will remember mercy when my soul is troubled in wrath.

It is difficult to know whether Irenaeus relates the “two living ones” at the beginning of Hab 3:2 to the Cherubim and Seraphim. Assuming that Irenaeus interrelates Hab 3:2 and Isa 6:1–3 then he could have understood Isa 6:1–3 as the prophet having seen the Christ. This means that Irenaeus simply followed the interpretation of John 12:41. This conclusion is not in tension what we know about Irenaeus’ way of using the Gospel of John in Christological matters.⁴⁴

Tertullian (*Marc.* 4.22.12–13) connects Hab 3:2 with the story of the transfiguration of Jesus and interprets the “two living ones” as referring to Moses and Elijah. Tertullian reads Hab 3:2 according to the Septuagint version or, if the Latin translation is not his own, then according to a version of *Vetus Latina* which, in turn, follows the Septuagint.⁴⁵

But we have the entire structure of this same vision in Habakkuk also, where the Spirit in the person of some of the apostles says, “O Lord, I have heard Thy speech, and was afraid.” What speech was this, other than the words of the voice from heaven, This is my beloved Son, hear ye, Him? “I considered thy works, and was astonished.” When could this have better happened than when Peter, on seeing His glory, knew not what he was saying? “In the midst of the two living ones Thou shalt be known (*in medio duorum animalium cognosceris*)”—even Moses and Elias.⁴⁶

There is no need to deal with the different interpretations of Hab 3:2.⁴⁷ More essential to the task at hand is to see how these parallel patristic texts help us understand Origen’s interpretation of Hab 3:2 in *Orig. Princ.* 1.3.4. As we have already seen Origen combines Isa 6:3 with Hab 3:2 and argues that the “two living ones” are the Seraphim and Cherubim of the Ark and refer to Christ and the Holy Spirit. Origen continues by explaining how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are intimately related to each other (*Orig. Princ.* 1.3.4): “We must understand, therefore, that as the Son, who alone knows the Father, reveals Him to whom He will, so the Holy Spirit, who alone searches the deep things of God, reveals God to whom He will.” In another passage, (*Orig. Princ.* 4.3.14),⁴⁸ Origen explains what he means

⁴⁴ Concerning the connection between the theology of Irenaeus and that of the Gospel of John, note especially Mutschler 2004; 2010, 319–43.

⁴⁵ See the text in Tertullianus, *Adversus Marcionem*, SC 456, 286–89.

⁴⁶ The translation is according to ANE.

⁴⁷ For this see Bucur and Mueller 2011, 86–103.

⁴⁸ See the text Origenes, *De principiis*, OECT 2:556–59.

by this identification of the two Seraphim/Cherubim with our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Only the two Seraphim/Cherubim – and not ordinary created angels – can comprehend the beginning and the end of everything:

For my Hebrew teacher also used thus to teach, that as the beginning or end of all things could be comprehended by no one, save only our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, so under the form of a vision Isaiah spoke of two seraphim alone, who with two wings cover the countenance of God, and with two His feet, and with two do fly, calling to each other alternately, and saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of Sabaoth; the whole earth is full of Your glory.” That the seraphim alone have both their wings over the face of God, and over His feet, we venture to declare as meaning that neither the hosts of holy angels, nor the holy seats, nor the dominions, nor the principalities, nor the powers, can fully understand the beginning of all things, and the limits of the universe.

Origen continues by explaining that the many divine mysteries have been revealed “through revelation from the Son of God and from the Holy Spirit” even though “The most part of the works of God are hid’ [Sir 16:21].”

Orig. Princ. 4.3.14 is important for three reasons. *First*, Origen explains further how he has understood the teaching of his Hebrew Master. As the quotation reveals, the two Seraphim or Cherubim had to be distinguished from other created angels. *Second*, Origen connects Hab 3:2 with Isa 6:3 and uses them both as arguments for Christology and, in fact, also for the Holy Triad.⁴⁹ *Third*, he is dependent on some early Jewish-Christian material which was mediated to him by his Hebrew Master and which clearly represents an orthodox variant of Christology.⁵⁰ That Origen transmitted an early Jewish-Christian interpretation of Hab 3:2 in *De principiis* is optional⁵¹ because in his *Commentary on Romans* (3.8.2–8) he interprets Hab 3:2 by connecting the verse to Exod 25:22 and argues that the two living figures refer to the Cherubim on the Ark.⁵² Only then does he make his own Christological implications by emphasizing that the mercy-seat (ἰλαστήριον in Rom 3:25) is Jesus and

⁴⁹ Concerning the concept “Holy Triad,” which was a common concept in early patristic literature and differs from the concept Trinity, see Kelly 1978.

⁵⁰ Concerning the patristic evidence of the Jewish-Christian groups see Klijn and Reinink 1973; Skarsaune and Hvalvik 2007. The Christologies of the Jewish-Christian groups were not coherent. Ray Pritz (1988) has rightly argued that we must distinguish between two essentially different Jewish-Christian groups which had different Christologies. Origen’s Hebrew Master apparently regarded Jesus as being more than “solely man.” Concerning the interpretation of Origen’s passage in the tradition of Jewish-Christian Christology see further Skarsaune 2007a, 325–78. Skarsaune (2007a, 367–69) comments on the passage of Origen under question and characterizes it as an example of “early Jewish Christian Trinitarian theology” (2007a, 368).

⁵¹ See my discussion of the textual problems of Hab 3:2 where I concluded that the Hebrew text before the Masoretic punctuation could well have allowed an interpretation where the passage is related to the Mercy Seat of the Ark.

⁵² See this text and its translation in Origenes, *Commentarii in Romanos*, SC 539, 124–35; FC 103, 217–21.

the Word (Origenes, *Commentarii in Romanos*, FC 103, 218): “It seemingly appears that the Apostle found the word ‘propitiatory’ in this passage and now has recorded it in his own writings, of which our current discourse is speaking. It also seems that this propitiatory which had been written about in Exodus referred to nothing other than the Savior and Lord since it says, ‘God pre-determined him as a propitiatory through faith.’”

Origen continues to explain the mystery of Christ and argues that it can be revealed only through the Holy Spirit (Origenes, *Commentarii in Romanos*, FC 103, 220): “Moreover, he writes similar things about the Holy Spirit when he says, ‘But God has revealed it to us through his Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God’ [1 Cor 2:10]. Therefore, he signifies, as I think, that the Word of God, who is the only begotten Son, and his Holy Spirit always dwell in the propitiatory, that is, in the soul of Jesus, and that is what the two cherubim placed over the propitiatory indicate.”

So far we have seen that the two Seraphim in Isa 6:1–3 have been identified with the two Cherubim on the Ark of Covenant (Exod 25; Hab 3:2) and both cases have been understood as an example of the Holy Triad: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Moving on, we must bear in mind that the identification of the Son and the Holy Spirit with the Seraphim or Cherubim does not imply that they would have been created figures. Justin Martyr’s exegesis indicates the potentiality to see these angelomorphic figures as non-created representants of the Holy Triad. In the next section I discuss the early Jewish-Christian text *Ascension of Isaiah* where the Holy Triad is closely related to Isaiah’s heavenly vision in Isa 6.

4. Isaiah 6 and the Ascension of Isaiah

The *Ascension of Isaiah*⁵³ is an early Christian text written in a Judeo-Christian milieu. It contains older Jewish traditions and theological concepts.⁵⁴ It is, therefore, a suitable text for understanding which kind of tradition the Hebrew Master – presumably

⁵³ See the text and its commentary in *Ascension of Isaiah*, CCAS 7; Norelli 1995. Concerning the additional Ge‘ez manuscripts which have been found in explorations of Ethiopian collections, see Piovanelli 1990, 347–63; Erho 2013, 75–97; esp. 95–97. An English translation from the Ethiopian text (Ge‘ez) is *Ascension of Isaiah*, Knibb, 143–76. I have translated the *Ascension of Isaiah* from Ge‘ez to Finnish with an Introduction and commentary. This work has gone through peer-review process and will be published in *Studia Patristica Fennica*. While working with this fascinating early Christian (or perhaps Jewish-Christian) text I have come to realise in which ways it is relevant to understanding Origen’s passage in *De principiis* 1.3.4.

⁵⁴ For this, see Knight 1995. After the publication of the edition and the commentary of Norelli’s team, scholars often take the Christian authorship as the self-evident starting-point. See e.g. Knight 1996; 2012, 66–105; Stuckenbruck 1995; Hannah 1999a, 80–101. See further the articles in Bremmer, Karmann, and Nicklas 2016; especially Henning and Nicklas 2016, 175–98.

a Jewish-Christian – could have been dependent on. The central belief in the *Ascension of Isaiah* is the idea of salvation which will take place in Christians' ascent to heaven (*Ascen. Isa.* 2:9). This has become possible when Beloved (i.e. Christ) has descended from heaven to save humankind. In his descent from the seventh heaven, Christ changed his form in every level of heaven and was finally born as a human through the virgin Mary. This descent has been compared to the Christological hymn in Phil 2:6–10 with good arguments.⁵⁵ The idea of a changing form is also important for Origen's Christology. Dragoş Giulea has demonstrated that Phil 2:6, with its concept "form of God", was an important aspect in Origen's Christological speculations because Christ's polymorphism was essential in the economy of salvation. According to Origen, Logos Christ could change his form so that beginners could see his human form while the more advanced were able to contemplate his invisible and eternal form.⁵⁶ The connection between Origen's Christology and that of the *Ascension of Isaiah* has been emphasized by Charles Gieschen, among others.⁵⁷ It is impossible to examine this relationship between Christology in the *Ascension of Isaiah* and in Origen's writings more closely in this short article, but it would be a good topic for further research. In this article I demonstrate in which ways Isa 6 plays an important role in the Christology of the *Ascension of Isaiah* and thus provides an important parallel to the Christological tradition of the Hebrew Master.

The *Ascension of Isaiah* contains significant Christological tradition with the early Christian concept of the Holy Triad where God (= "the Great Glory" = Father) and two angelomorphic divine agents the Lord or the Beloved One (= Christ, Son of God) and the angel of the Holy Spirit⁵⁸ are interrelated. These theological reflections on the Holy Triad are apparently based on Isa 6:1–3, the great vision of Isaiah, and it is from here that the writer developed the idea of Isaiah's ascension.⁵⁹ This becomes especially visible in *Ascen. Isa.* 9:37–42:

37 And I saw the Great Glory (*ware'iku sebbehāta ʿabiya*) while the eyes of my spirit were open, but I could not thereafter see, nor the angel who (was) with me, nor any of the angels whom I had seen worship my Lord (*laʿegziʿeya*). 38 But I saw the righteous as they beheld with great power the glory of that one. 39 And my Lord (*ʿegziʿeya*) approached me, and the angel of the Spirit (*wamalʾaka manfas*), and said, "See how it has been given to you to see the God (*laʿegziʾabhēr*), and (how) because of you power has been given to the angel who (is) with you." 40 And I saw how my Lord (*ʿegziʿeya*) and the angel of the Holy Spirit

⁵⁵ For this, see especially Bauckham 2016, 23–43.

⁵⁶ Giulea 2016, 407–37.

⁵⁷ Gieschen 1998, 195–96, 229–37.

⁵⁸ It is worth noting that *Ascension of Isaiah* regularly speak about the Holy Spirit as an angelomorphic figure.

⁵⁹ In another article, "Isaiah Reception in the Ascension of Isaiah – Comparison to Isaiah Reception in the Book of Revelation", I deal with the question of how Isaianic reception has been treated in the Ascension of Isaiah.

(*wamal'ak zamanfas*) worshiped and both together praised the God (*la'egzi'abhēr*). 41 And then all the righteous approached and worshiped, 42 and the angels approached and worshiped, and all the angels sang praises.

It is significant that the Latin version 2 as well as the Slavonic version differ from the Ge'ez text. For example, the Latin and Slavonic texts have changed the wording in *Ascen. Isa.* 9:40 by eliminating the idea according to which “my Lord” (= Christ) and “the angel of the Holy Spirit” worshiped God.⁶⁰ Such a change was due to Christological and Trinitarian reasons and the Ge'ez version clearly preserved the original form of the text. The Ge'ez version should not be interpreted as “my Lord” (= Christ) and “the angel of the Holy Spirit” being created angelic figures. After all, in *Ascen. Isa.* 9:37–42 the same word *'egzi'* has been used both for Christ and God. This indicates that the writer of the *Ascension of Isaiah* understands Christ to be divine person and not a created angelic figure – something which receives support from the fact that even Christ (as well as “the angel of the Holy Spirit”) is worth veneration (see below).

There are good arguments to conclude that *Ascen. Isa.* 9:37–42 is related to the reception of Isa 6:1–3. *First*, the text emphasizes that Isaiah had seen God. God the Father has been identified with the Great Glory which parallels Isa 6:1–3 well where reference is made to the glory of God which fills the whole earth. *Second*, the context emphasizes how everyone in the Universe will worship and praise God – a theme which is emphasized in Isa 6:1–3. *Third*, both the Beloved One (the Christ) and the angel of the Holy Spirit⁶¹ glorified God (the Father), thus paralleling the tradition of the Hebrew Master and another interpretive tradition in Irenaeus' *Epid.* 10.

The idea of the *Ascension of Isaiah*, according to which the Lord (= Christ) and the angel of Holy Spirit worshiped and praised the Lord (= God), can be related either to the Jewish-Christian tradition according to which the Seraphim are Christ and Holy Spirit (i.e. the opinion of the Hebrew Master), or alternatively to the tradition behind Irenaeus' *Epid.* 10, where the Lord and the Holy Spirit together with the Seraphim and Cherubim worship God. Nevertheless, because the Beloved One i.e. Christ and the Holy Spirit have been presented as angelomorphic figures it seems to me that the first alternative is to be preferred. This interpretation may also receive support from *Ascen. Isa.* 11:32–33: “(32) And I saw how he ascended into the seventh heaven, and all the righteous and all the angels praised him. And then I saw that he sat down at the right hand of that Great Glory, whose glory I told you I could not behold. (33) And also I saw that the angel of the Holy Spirit sat on the left.”

⁶⁰ For the new wordings in Latin 2 and Slavonic versions of *Ascen. Isa.* 6–11, which are justified for Christological and Trinitarian reasons, see Norelli 1995, 498. See further Knight 2012, 66–105.

⁶¹ Actually, the Holy Spirit has been always presented as Angelomorphic figure. For this see especially Stuckenbruck 2004, 308–20.

This description has also been related to Ps 110:1⁶² – an idea which I do not oppose. Nevertheless, it seems to me that *Ascen. Isa.* 11:32–33 should be related to the fundamental iconographic representation in the Temple of Jerusalem where the Ark of Covenant or the two massive Cherubim in the Holy of Holies indicate that God will reveal himself between two Cherubim (Lev 16:2; Hab 3:2). Therefore, it seems to me that the *Ascension of Isaiah* illustrates the opinion of the Hebrew Master, according to whom the Christ and the Holy Spirit can be identified with the two Seraphim and Cherubim who, in turn, correspond to divine angelic persons who, in the theophanies, represent themselves to be the Lord or God.

There is another tradition in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, which is possibly related to the Ark of Covenant, namely the quite enigmatic expression in *Ascen. Isa.* 3:17: *wawētu fequr nabiro diba matakeftihomu yewaḏde' wayefēnnu*⁶³ *10wa2'ardā'ihu*, “and that Beloved, sitting on their shoulders, will come forth and send out his twelve disciples.” Just prior to this text reference is made to two angels who will open the grave of Christ and, therefore, the expression “their shoulders” should be taken as referring to the shoulders of angels. Behind the expression is, presumably, the Hebrew idiom *ישב הכרבים*. Through his resurrection Christ has been shown to be a divine king – a theme which already in the New Testament was related to the interpretation of enthronement of the Messianic king in Ps 2:7 (Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5).

5. Origen's Interpretation of Isaiah 6

Assuming that my interpretation connecting the concept of the Holy Triad in the *Ascension of Isaiah* to the opinion of the Hebrew Master in *Orig. Princ.* 1.3.4 holds, then Origen's own Christology seems to follow the interpretive tradition formulated by his teacher. The Hebrew Master presented both Christ and the Holy Spirit as divine persons albeit in a subordinate status to Father God. Origen's Christology is similar. For example, in the *Handbook to Origen*, Charles Kannengieser summarizes that “Origen categorically states that Christ is Son of God by being equal in eternity and divinity with the Father (PArch 1.2),”⁶⁴ and Joseph O'Leary again that “the variations in Origen's accounts of the status of the Logos both in respect to God and in respect to creation occur within the subordinationist context that was that of mainstream ante-Nicene theology.”⁶⁵

⁶² So e.g. Norelli 1995, 585.

⁶³ The form is from the verb *fannawa* (D “send”) imperfect sing 3. masc (not plural 3. masc). According to the paradigm the form is *yefēnnu* but it will be assimilated to *yefēnnu*. See Lambdin 2006, 214.

⁶⁴ Kannengieser 2004, 73–78; quotation is from p. 74. A more detailed study on Origen's Christology is available in Jacobsen 2015. Jacobsen analyses several of Origen's writings.

⁶⁵ O'Leary 2004, 142–45; quotation is from p. 144.

There are some other texts by Origen where Isa 6:1-3 is interpreted. In his *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis* 2.178, for example, Origen compares the mission of John the Baptist and that of Isaiah but the text is unclear as to how Origen interprets the Lord sitting on a throne in Isa 6:⁶⁶

The opponent to the implicit deeper sense will say that just as Isaias was sent, not from another place besides this world but, after he had seen “the Lord sitting on a throne high and elevated,” he was sent to the people that he might say, “You shall certainly hear and not understand” etc., so also John, because the silence regarding the beginning of his mission is analogous to that of Isaias, is sent forth to baptize and to prepare “for the Lord a prepared people” and to give testimony “of the light.”

In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (6.23) Origen relates the two Seraphim in Isa 6 to the vision of Ezekiel where he too saw Cherubim, but offers no more particulars. A similar unclear note is also made in *Contra Celsum* 1.43 where Origen interprets Isa 6 and Ezekiel 1 so that both Isaiah and Ezekiel have seen the Lord of Sabaoth. In this context, Origen is writing about the reliability of the prophetic visions and therefore does not write *expressis verbis* to whom Isa 6:1-3 refer to. However, later in *Contra Celsum* 6.18 Origen is more explicit when he comments on Celsus’ Platonic triadic statement concerning his philosophical god: “All things centre in the King of all, and are for his sake, and he is the cause of all that is good. The second things centre in the Second, and the third things centre in the Third. The human soul, then, yearns to learn about these things to find what is their nature, by looking at the things that are related to itself, none of which are perfect. Now where the king and the principles which I mentioned are concerned, there is nothing of this sort.”⁶⁷

Concerning this statement Origen continues and writes:

I could quote the statements about the seraphim, as they are called by the Hebrews, described by Isaiah as hiding the face and the feet of God, and about what are called cherubim, which Ezekiel portrayed, and of their shapes, as it were, and of the way in which God is said to be carried upon the cherubim. But, as these things are expressed in a very obscure form because of the unworthy and irreligious who are not able to understand the deep meaning and sacredness of the doctrine of God, I have not thought it right to discuss these matters in this book.

Again, Origen is not explicit in his commentary, but his formulations do seem to corroborate well with the ideas of his Hebrew Master. The only reference to

⁶⁶ See the text in Origenes, *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis*, GCS 4, 86, and the translation: FC 80, 142-43.

⁶⁷ See the text in Origenes, *Contra Celsum*, GCS 3, 88-89 and the translation: Chadwick, 331.

John 12:41, according to *Biblia patristica*, is found in Origen's *Commentary on Romans* 6.7.6, where he agrees with the evangelist that Isa 6:1–3 refer to the Son of God: "So then, among the first people many were advancing in spiritual knowledge and were seeing the glory of the Word of God, as it is written that Isaiah too saw the glory of the Son of God, as John testifies when he says, 'But Isaiah said these things when he saw his glory.'"⁶⁸

This comment confirms that Origen has no problem in accepting the bipartite interpretation in the Johannine literature where the Lord in Isa 6:1–3 can refer to Christ (John 12:41) or to Father God (Rev 4) as in the teaching of the Hebrew Master. This corroborates well with the thesis of this article that, according to the Hebrew Master, Christ and the Holy Spirit are divine subjects in the mystery of the Holy Triad.

Conclusions

The starting-point in the article was Origen's statement of the Christological tradition transmitted by his Hebrew Master concerning Isa 6:1–3. The New Testament has two different interpretive perspectives to the Isaianic passage. According to John 12:41, Isaiah saw the glorified Son of God, while Revelation 4 interprets the passage as referring to God (the Father) without saying anything specific about the roles of the Seraphim. This twofold reception of Isa 6:1–3, as early as in the New Testament writings, indicates that we cannot expect the later reception history of the passage to be coherent. Even Origen knew these alternatives and accepted them both.

I have argued in this article that the Hebrew Master's teaching of Isa 6:1–3 cannot be taken in a simplistic way so that Christ and the Holy Spirit would have been created figures. On the contrary, I have emphasized that the Hebrew Master's teaching was adopted by Origen, and he developed it in his writings. What is clear in any case is that Origen does not regard the Hebrew Master's teaching as problematic. He turns to it in several times in his writings and uses it to explain the concept of the Holy Triad where Christ and Holy Spirit are subordinate to the Father.

In this article I have dealt with the spiritual milieu where Seraphim were identified with the Son and the Holy Spirit. I demonstrated, by referring to the investigations of other scholars, that an early form of Christology was closely related to Old Testament theophanies where angelomorphic figures reveal themselves to humans and speak in the first person, and thus identify themselves with God. I took examples from Justin Martyr's writings. The angelomorphic figures in such theophanies in early Christian reception history could be related to the iconographic image where

⁶⁸ See the text in Origenes, *Commentarii in Romanos*, FC 543, 142–43, and the English translation (where the passage is 6.7.7): FC 104, 23.

the Lord Sabaoth is sitting on the throne of Cherubim – a scene that the prophet Isaiah also saw in Isa 6. Isaiah saw two Seraphim in the Temple indicating that they were identified with the Cherubim, at least according to Origen's passage where he refers to the Hebrew Master's teaching on Isa 6. Origen also refers to Hab 3:2 (according to the Septuagint version) combining it with the Cherubim of the Mercy Seat on the Ark of Covenant. He identified the two living figures of Hab 3:2 with angelomorphic divine Persons representing the Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Finally, I also dealt with the Christology in the *Ascension of Isaiah*. This early Christian text gives a good basis for understanding the nature of the Christology of the Hebrew Master. In *Ascension of Isaiah* both Christ (the Beloved One) and the Holy Spirit are depicted as angelomorphic figures who are divine and worthy of worship. According to *Ascension of Isaiah*, the Beloved One and the angel of the Holy Spirit worship the Great Glory God – a theme which is visible in Isa 6:1-3 as well as in the tradition of the Hebrew Master to which Origen refers.

This evidence shows that there is no longer any valid reason to claim that the Christology of the Hebrew Master would have prepared a way for Arian Christology. On one hand, it represented a high Christology, and on the other hand, it was subordinationist in the same way as the Christology in the ante-Nicene period often was. For those two reasons alone, the Hebrew Master's teaching was suitable for Origen when he presented his own Christology.

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