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The Image of Melchizedek in the Epistle to the Hebrews and in the Jewish Texts of the Second Temple Period

Jesus' high priesthood and its superiority over the Levite priesthood is a unique and important theme of Hebrews. The central argument in the discussion about the superiority of Jesus' high priesthood is the Melchizedekian argument of chapter 7. In this chapter the author uses Gen 14:18–20, Ps 110, and some Jewish traditions about Melchizedek. Some of these texts portray him as a historical figure, while others depict him as an eschatological image. This article investigates the Jewish traditions about Melchizedek from the Second Temple period and explores how they are used in Hebrews. Then, the article shows how Melchizedek's figure works in the author's argument about the superiority of Jesus' high priesthood. It demonstrates that the author of Hebrews is interested in Melchizedek's figure not only as a real person of the past or the future, but rather more as the likeness of Christ and the unique biblical image of a person who is simultaneously both a king and a high priest. Such a typology plays an important role in the author's theological chain, which also includes other Old Testament images and characters, working metaphorically and shaping a multifaceted image of Christ as both God and human, priest and sacrifice, messianic king and perfect high priest. Further study of these metaphors in the context of modern metaphor theories can be a productive continuation of this research and can help us better understand the interpretive method of the author of Hebrews.

KEYWORDS: Bible, Hebrews, Melchizedek, Second Temple, Philo, Josephus, Enoch, Qumran typology.

Introduction

Jesus' high priesthood is one of the major themes of Hebrews. His priesthood is mentioned in 2:17–3:1, developed in 4:14–5:10, compared to Melchizedek's in 7:1–28, and detailed in 8:1–10:39. The Melchizedekian argument of chapter 7 may be seen as a culmination of the discussion about the superiority of Jesus' high priesthood [Longenecker, 172]¹.

1. Jesus' priesthood is an issue expressed unequivocally in Hebrews. Other New Testament texts are not so explicit. See the attempts to define Jesus as both

a royal and priestly Messianic figure in Mark 1–6 in [Fletcher-Louis 2006; Fletcher-Louis, 2007].

Melchizedek is introduced in chapter 7 through a midrash on Gen 14:18–20 [Kobelsky, 117; Lane, 158] with some references to Ps 110 and various other Jewish traditions from extrabiblical sources². The appearance of this enigmatic figure of the ancient king-priest in several Jewish texts indicates the significance of his image for Jewish theological thought of the 1st century C. E. Some texts portray Melchizedek as a historical figure, while others depict him as an eschatological image. How does the author of Hebrews perceive this figure, whether historically or eschatologically or in any other way? This the question with which this article is concerned. In order to answer that, I would like to investigate the surviving Jewish traditions about Melchizedek from the Second Temple period and show how their ideas could be incorporated into Hebrews, as well as how Melchizedek's figure works in the author's argument about the superiority of Jesus' high priesthood. For such a presentation of Jesus as a high priest and for his comparison with Melchizedek a special exegetical approach is involved, the essence of which is Christocentric.

Melchizedek's Figure in the Jewish Traditions

The Jewish traditions about Melchizedek can be divided into two main parts: the Old Testament passages, which probably serve as the basis for further legends, and Jewish traditions from extrabiblical sources.

MELCHIZEDEK IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Gen 14:18–20

Melchizedek first appears in the Masoretic text (MT) of the Hebrew Bible in Gen 14:18–20, a text which may be the prime source for the Melchizedek traditions in some later extrabiblical texts. It probably does not belong to any of the usual Pentateuchal sources [Fitzmyer, 65]. As Fred L. Horton suggests, this episode might have been inserted into chapter 14 between verses 17 and 21, and probably does not have the same historical value as the rest of this chapter. Furthermore, it most likely appeared before the time of the LXX translation of Genesis and the Genesis Apocryphon [Horton, 13, 18–23; Attridge, 187]³.

2. The figure of Melchizedek first appears in Hebrews 5:6, 10.

3. However, Gordon J. Wenham defends the unity and ancient origins of Gen 14 [Wenham, 307]. See also: [Tatu].

This passage describes the meeting between Melchizedek and Abraham⁴, who returned after the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him^{*1,5}. Melchizedek, who was both the king of Salem (מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֵם; βασιλεὺς Σαλημ in the LXX) and the priest of God Most High (כֹּהֵן לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן; ἱερεὺς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου in the LXX), brought out to Abraham bread and wine and blessed him^{*2}.

*1 Gen 14:17

*2 Gen 14:18–19

It is unclear from the MT and from the LXX who tithed, whether Abraham or Melchizedek: וַיִּתֶּן-לוֹ מֵעֶשֶׂר מִכֹּל (“he gave him the tenth of everything”)⁶. If Abraham is offering the tithe, it would be in line with the rest of the chapter and indicate the veneration of Melchizedek; if, however, Melchizedek is tithing, the text would indicate the exaltation of Abraham [Horton, 17]. The first option is compatible with the idea that this passage shows Abraham’s submission to the Jerusalem priesthood [Rowley, 468–469; Schmid, 149] and the assumption that Gen 14:18–20 is an insertion into chapter 14⁷. Thus, while Melchizedek may be seen as a historical figure in this passage, some problems with his historical provenance appear because of the variety with the dating of the passage.

Psalm 110

The name of Melchizedek also appears in Ps 110, which most scholars regard as a royal song [Allen, 111]. The enigmatic expression of 110:4 is as follows in the MT: אַתָּה-כֹּהֵן לְעוֹלָם עַל-דִּבְרֹתַי מִלְכִּי-צְדָק (“you are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek”; Σὺ εἶ ἱερεὺς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισεδεκ in the LXX⁸). There are some indications that thematically, but not literally, the appearance of the figure of Melchizedek in this Psalm is linked to Genesis 14 [Stuckenbruck, 127]. However, the exact date of the composition of Psalm 110 is problematic. Due to the similarities between Ps 110:4 and 1 Macc 14:41⁹, some commentators argue that it should be dated

4. He is “Abram” in the biblical text of this passage, as his name was changed to “Abraham” later in the narrative.

5. There are some differences between the Masoretic text and the LXX: instead of לֶחֶם (“bread”) the LXX has ἄρτους (“loaves”) (Gen 14:18); instead of קִנְיָה שָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ (“possessor of heaven and earth”) the LXX reads ὃς ἔκτισεν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν (“who created heaven and earth”) (Gen 14:19). There are also some dissimilarities in the rest of this chapter [Fitzmyer, 68]. In this article, translators of biblical and other ancient literature are indicated in parenthesis. If such an indication is absent, the translation is that of the author.

6. Καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ δεκάτην ἀπὸ πάντων in the LXX.

7. Heb 7:2 makes it explicit that it was Abraham who gave the tithe.

8. This is Psalm 109 in the LXX.

9. “The Jews and their priests have resolved that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever, until a trustworthy prophet should arise” (1 Macc 14:41 NRSV). Moreover, the first letters of each of the four verses of Ps 110 in the MT compose the name “Simon” [Horton, 30–31].

to the Maccabean period and related to Simon Maccabeus (142–134 B. C.) [*Duhm*, 398–399]¹⁰. The majority of scholars, however, refer this text to the monarchic period of Israel’s history and more specifically to one of the kings of the Davidic dynasty¹¹. They further connect it to a royal coronation in the Jerusalem Temple, the New Year festival, or a real battle [*Allen*, 112]. F. Horton suggests that Ps 110 represents a “song of victory sung upon David’s return to Jerusalem after defeating Ammon” [*Horton*, 34] as recounted in 2 Sam 12:27–30. Alternatively, this text may have been composed on the occasion of David’s conquest of Jerusalem and his succession to the Jebusite kingship^{*1} [*Allen*, 113], in which case Melchizedek could then represent a priest-king of the pre-Israelite period, probably of Jebusite origin.

*1 2 Sam 5:6–9

It is worth noting that while Melchizedek represents a priest-king of ancient times in Ps 110, a king of Israel also had some priestly functions; for example, he could offer some sacrifices^{*2} and wear a linen ephod^{*3}. The king directly was never called a priest, but the sons of David were called כְּהֹנִיִּם (2 Sam 8:18; cf. ἀρχαῖς {“the chiefs of the court”} in the LXX). In addition, a certain young man, who was a Levite, became a priest in Micah’s house^{*4}. His characteristic is rather surprising: he was from the tribe of Judah (מִמְּשִׁפְתַּח יְהוּדָה). It may mean that he did not belong to the tribe of Levi or that he was a Levite living among the tribe of Judah. Horton suggests that the word כֹּהֵן could be used not only for priestly functions, but also for chieftain or administrative officer and this view fits well the early years of David’s reign [*Horton*, 51]. If this suggestion is correct, this Levite did not need to belong to the clan of Levi.

*2 1 Sam 13:9;
2 Sam 6:13,17;
1 Kgs 8:62

*3 2 Sam 6:14

*4 Judg 17:7–13

Nevertheless, the figure of Melchizedek could be used in Ps 110:4 as reference to a person who combines some royal and cult functions and serves as a model for a royal priesthood [*Rooke*, 87]. Although the author of the Psalm may have considered Melchizedek a historical character from ancient times, his emphasis is on Melchizedek’s likeness to the king of Israel because of his combined functions¹². Therefore in Ps 110:4, the eternal priesthood, which is somehow related to Melchizedek, is granted to such a king [*Mason*, 144].

10. D. M. Hay suggests that Ps 110 was composed earlier and was used by Maccabean rulers to defend their claims to priestly and royal authorities [*Hay*, 24].

11. For example, A. A. Anderson, E. R. Hardy, T. N. D. Mettinger, D. A. Robertson, H. Rowley. See the survey of the basic scholarship on this subject and the bibliography in [*Allen*, 112–113].

12. Hebrew על־דְּבָרָתִי is difficult to translate. על־דְּבָרָתִי means “because of” or “manner of”. Hebrew ךְּבָרָתִי might be understood as ancient genitive ending, often used in Hebrew poetry (“דְּבָרָתִי”); [*Brown, Driver, Briggs*, 184]).

THE JEWISH TRADITIONS ABOUT MELCHIZEDEK
IN THE EXTRABIBLICAL LITERATURE

Philo

Philo (20 B. C. E. — 50 C. E.) mentions Melchizedek in *De congressu eruditionis gratia* (“On the Preliminary Studies”) *¹, implicitly in *De Abrahamo* (“On the life of Abraham”) *² and in *Legum allegoriae* (“Allegorical Interpretation”) *³. In the first text, where Gen 14:18–20 serves as a proof of the practice of tithing, Melchizedek does not appear in the center of the discussion [Horton, 55]. However, Philo indicates that Melchizedek has learned the tradition of the priesthood himself *⁴ (literary ἀὐτομαθῆ {“learned by himself”} and ἀὐτοδίδακτον {“self-taught”}).

In *De Abrahamo*, Melchizedek appears as ὁ μέγας ἱερεὺς τοῦ μεγίστου θεοῦ (“the great priest of the greatest God”), which is probably a paraphrase of the LXX’s ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὑψιστός (cf. יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ) [Horton, 55]. Philo adds some details to the story of Gen 14:18–20. First, Abraham did not lose anybody from his people. Then Melchizedek, having seen that, was astonished and stretched his hand to heaven in prayer for him. He also offered sacrifices of thanksgiving for the victory, rejoicing in Abraham’s victory as his own.

In *Legum allegoriae*, there is more extensive information about Melchizedek contained in the allegorical interpretation of Gen 14:18–20. Philo characterizes Melchizedek as βασιλεὺς τῆς εἰρήνης (“king of peace”) *⁵, interpreting Σαλήμ as “peace”¹³. Then, this Jewish philosopher regards Melchizedek as βασιλεὺς δίκαιος (“righteous king”), which stems from a possible translation of his Hebrew name, and as God’s own priest. As Horton notes, “God did not prefigure any work of Melchizedek (οὐδὲν ἔργον αὐτοῦ προδιατυπώσας) but set him out from the very first as priest and king” [Horton, 57].

Philo contrasts βασιλεὺς (“king”) as an author of laws with τύραννος (“despot”) as one who introduces lawlessness *⁶. In addition, he makes some allegorical interpretations: a despot is νοῦς (“mind”), who is easily swayed by παθῶν (“passions”), and ἄρχων πολέμου (“the ruler of war”) *⁷. A king, however, is ἡγεμὼν εἰρήνης, Σαλήμ *⁸ (“the chief of peace”) and is piloted by ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος *⁹ (“the right reason”). Melchizedek’s offering of bread and wine is interpreted as

¹³ This interpretation is from the similarity of מֶלֶךְ with מִלְשָׁם.

*¹ *De cong. erud.* 97–99

*² *De Abr.* 235

*³ *Leg. al.* 3.79–82

*⁴ *De cong. erud.* 99

*⁵ *Leg. al.* 3.79

*⁶ *Leg. al.* 3.79

*⁷ *Leg. al.* 3.80

*⁸ *Leg. al.* 3.81

*⁹ *Leg. al.* 3.80

the offering τῆ ψυχῆ τροφᾶς εὐφροσύνης καὶ χαρᾶς πλήρεις^{*1} (“to the soul food full of joy and gladness”) [Colson, 355] in contrast to the Ammonites and Moabites, who refused to supply Israel with food and were thus excluded from the divine congregation and assembly.

^{*1} *Leg. al. 3.81*

To sum up, in *De congressu eruditionis gratia* and in *De Abrahamo*, Melchizedek appears as a historical figure, but in *Legum allegoriae*, he is a representation of the eternal λόγος [Longenecker, 169; Horton, 58]. Thus, both meanings are significant for Philo, because of his allegorical interpretation of Scripture: a character or event in the Bible has both literal and allegorical meanings. Philo tries to underline the antiquity of Melchizedek’s priesthood, based on the fact that he was the first priest mentioned in the Bible, and he probably also uses some extrabiblical sources for the interpretation of Gen 14:18–20 [Horton, 58].

Qumran

There are two references to Melchizedek in the Qumran scrolls: the “Genesis Apocryphon”^{*2} and the Melchizedek Scroll^{*3, 14}. The first text offers a paraphrase of Gen 14:18–20 in Aramaic with some additions to the biblical text. The scroll dates from the end of the 1st century B. C. E. to the beginning of the 1st century C. E., with the original composition probably shaped by the end of the 2nd century B. C. E. [Horton, 61–62]. The portion of the text that pertains to Melchizedek reflects a fairly literal understanding of the biblical text without any specific Qumranic ideological additions, unlike the rest of this document [Horton, 64]. The significant distinctions from the MT are as follows: “the food and drink” instead of “bread and wine,” and the identification of Salem with Jerusalem^{*4, 15}.

^{*2} *1Qap Gen XXII.14–17*

^{*3} *11Q Melch*

^{*4} *1Qap Gen XXII.13*

11Q Melch is a badly preserved fragmentary text which is most likely a part of a larger work [Milik, 66] that would date to the middle of the 1st century C. E. It represents a very different view of Melchizedek, who appears as an eschatological figure. He is first mentioned in line 5 of column II and often appears thereafter as one who brings the elect ones, proclaims liberation to them, and frees them from their iniquities^{*5}. In addition, he makes atonement for the sons of Light^{*6}

^{*5} *11Q Melch II.6*

^{*6} *11Q Melch II.7*

14. The name of Melchizedek could also appear in three small fragments of “Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice” (4QShirShabb^{ah} [4Q400–407], 11QShirShabb [11Q17]) and “Visions of Amram” (4QVisions of Amram^b ar [4Q544]), but they are too fragmentary. Here he can be identified with a celestial priest or even the

head of the celestial priesthood, or with the archangel Michael and the Prince of Light [Mason, 164–168; Stuckenbruck, 130–132].

15. This identification would be the gloss [Horton, 63].

*1 11Q Melch II.13

and carries out God's judgments upon Belial and the spirits of his lot *1. Lines 10–11 relate some quotations from Ps 82:1–2 and 7:8–9 to Melchizedek. A. S. van der Woude tries to show that in the first quotation from Ps 82, Melchizedek is designated first as one of the אֱלֹהִים (the angels or some heavenly beings) and second, as a heavenly being who is higher than other אֱלֹהִים. He is also depicted as a heavenly redeemer figure who functions as an archangel-warrior with some priestly characteristics and, moreover, as a heavenly priest in the heavenly Temple [Van der Woude]. Marinus de Jonge [De Jonge], Yigael Yadin [Yadin], Joseph Fitzmyer [Fitzmyer], F. du Toit Laubscher [Du Toit Laubscher], and Richard Longenecker [Longenecker, 168] support this view, but do not identify Melchizedek as the archangel Michael. Jean Carmignac, however, applies אֱלֹהִים in line 9 to God and אֱלֹהִים in line 10 to the saints of the congregation. He does not see Melchizedek as a historical king-priest or celestial being like an angel, but rather as a certain historical person inside the Qumran Community, who was recognized by the sect as a character similar to the biblical Melchizedek [Carmignac, 358, 363–369]. Most scholars, however, do not support this position [Longenecker, 169].

Horton claims that אֱלֹהִים in lines 9–10 refers to Melchizedek himself, supporting his point by examples from the Old Testament where this word is used for beings and deities other than the Lord God of Israel (e.g., 1 Sam 5:7; Judges 11:24). Melchizedek, then, is more than a human being, and he has a place in the divine assembly and makes judgments similar to God's *2. He also appears as the adversary of Belial [Horton, 75, 77–78].

*2 11Q Melch II.11

Thus, while the “Genesis Apocryphon” sees Melchizedek as a historical person, 11QMelch understands him as a heavenly, eschatological, and probably messianic figure [Rainbow]. Here, he functions simultaneously as an angel who makes judgment upon Belial and as a high priest, brings atonement to the sons of Light. These features of Melchizedek are unique for the sources concerning him. Finally, his functions are probably connected with the interpretation of his name as “righteous king” and with his high priesthood from Gen 14:18–20.

Josephus

Melchizedek is mentioned twice in the works of Josephus (37 (39) — about 100 C. E.): in the “*Jewish War*” *3 and in “*Jewish Antiquities*” *4. According to the first text, Melchizedek was a Canaanite chief (Χαναανάλων δυνάστης *5), who founded the city Jerusalem. His name means

*3 B. J. 6:438

*4 Ant. 1.179–181

*5 B. J. 6:438

“righteous king” (βασιλεὺς δίκαιος) and fits his life. He was the first priest of God and built the first Temple (τὸ ἱερόν) in the city. Because of this fact, it was renamed from Σόλυμα to Ἱεροσόλυμα.

Ant. 1.179–181 describes the events of Gen 14:18–20 and also depicts Melchizedek as the righteous king and the priest of God in Jerusalem, which is the former Solyma. Melchizedek was very hospitable to Abraham and also to his army, providing them with all that they needed. In the course of the feast, he extolled Abraham and blessed God for delivering Abraham’s enemies into his hands. Abraham then gave Melchizedek a tithe of the spoil.

Thus, for Josephus as a historian, Melchizedek is, first of all, a historical person — a Canaanite chief, who became a priest of God because of his righteousness and who built the Temple in Jerusalem. Josephus resolves the problem of the ambiguity of Gen 14:20 about the tithe by indicating that it was Abraham who gave the tithe¹⁶.

The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the Rabbinical Sources

The book of Jubilees (161–140 B. C. E.) [*Wintermute, 44*] tends to elevate Levi over Judah, which may be seen in the blessings of Isaac^{*1} and in the employment of the title of “priest of the Most High God” connected with the priesthood of Melchizedek in Gen 14:18 for Levi and Judah, with particular emphasis upon Levi^{*2} [*Longenecker, 162*]. *Jub. 13:25*, which deals with the eternal divine ordinance to give the tithe to the priests, would imply Abraham’s meeting with Melchizedek, but it is too fragmentary and the name of Melchizedek is missing from most extant manuscripts of this book [*Mason, 149–150*].

*1 *Jub. 31:9–20*

*2 *Jub. 32:1*

The idea of the priesthood of the Most High God appears also in the Second (Slavonic) Apocalypse of Enoch¹⁷. The final chapters^{*3} of this book¹⁸ are dedicated to the miraculous birth of Melchizedek, who was born of God by Sothonim¹⁹, the wife of Nir^{*4, 20}. Melchizedek was

*3 *2 En. 71–72*

*4 *2 En. 70:16*

16. A short account about Melchizedek based on Genesis 14 is found in Pseudo-Eupolemus (2nd century B. C. E.; preserved in Eusebius, *Preap. ev. 9.17.5–6*). Here, Melchizedek is a ruler and a priest, who is associated with Argarizin, which probably represents Gerizim [*Mason, 152*]. Abraham (not Abram as in Genesis 14) received gifts from him.

17. Unfortunately, the historical provenance and the date of *2 Enoch* is a question for researchers. The date of this book may vary from the 1st century B. C. to the 10th century C. E., but some peculiarities of *2 Enoch* indicate that its origins are ancient [*Charles, Mor-*

phill, xxv–xxvi; Andersen, 94–97; Böttrich, 807–808, 812–813].

18. This story is found in both the long and the short recensions of *2 Enoch*; [*Macaskill, 236–249*].

19. Сопаннѣма отъ Софоннѣма in the different Slavonic manuscripts of *2 Enoch* [*Sokolov, 71*].

20. This legend was considered by some scholars as an interpolation into the text of *2 Enoch* [*Horton, 81*]. However, A. Vaillant [*Vaillant, xi, xxiv*] and F. I. Andersen [*Andersen, 92*] demonstrate that this story is an inherent part of the book.

*1 2 En. 71:30

*2 2 En. 71:18–19

*3 2 En. 71:28–30

*4 Cf. 2 En. 72:6

*5 2 En. 71.19–20,
29, 31, 33

*6 2 En. 71.34–
35, 37

*7 Lev. Rab. 25:6;
b. Ned. 32b, cp.
Ant. 1. 181

*8 Song. Rab.
2.13.4; b. Sukkah
52b

created by the word of God *1. He blessed the Lord (καὶ ἔβλασφη γὰρ) with his mouth and had the seal of the high priesthood *2. God revealed to Nir that this child would be taken by the archangel Michael to Paradise and after the Flood would become the head of all priests forever *3. This text apparently tries to express the idea that the spirit of Melchizedek was then incarnated in the high priests of Israel. According to this line of thought, Melchizedek of Genesis 14 may be one of the incarnations of the original, heavenly Melchizedek *4 [Attridge, 193]. The priesthood of Melchizedek could be a continuation of the priestly line from Methuselah, son of Enoch. Melchizedek himself is considered to be a grandson of Lamech in this text [Orlov, 28]. One may also see in this story a trace of the polemics about the legitimacy of several priestly clans of Israel [Orlov, 38]. The idea of Melchizedek as a head of high priests *5 is probably taken from Ps 110, while the idea that another Melchizedek will come in the last generation *6 is derived from 11Q13 [Stuckenbruck, 135].

The identification of Melchizedek as a descendant of Lamech appears also in the Targums and in the rabbinical traditions. Although these texts were compiled later than Hebrews, they might preserve earlier traditions. The Targums Onqelos, Neofiti, and Pseudo-Jonathan on Gen 14:18 indicate that Melchizedek is the king of Jerusalem (מֶלֶכָא דִּירוּשָׁלַם). The Targums Neofiti and Pseudo-Jonathan show that he is in fact Shem, the son of Noah (שֵׁם בֶּר נֹחַ). In addition, the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan declares that he was a righteous king (מֶלֶכָא צְדִיקָא). In some rabbinical texts, Melchizedek received his priesthood from Shem, but God later deprived him of it because Melchizedek blessed Abraham before God *7. However, in some other rabbinical texts Melchizedek is one of the four eschatological figures, along with the Davidic Messiah, the Messiah the son of Joseph, and Elijah *8 [Longenecker, 165–166].

Thus, 2 Enoch, Targums, and some rabbinic sources try to include Melchizedek in Enoch's genealogical line, while some other rabbinic texts put him together with several important eschatological figures. Moreover, 2 Enoch narrates his miraculous birth from God, suggesting his not completely human origin²¹.

21. A very interesting legend about Melchizedek and his meeting with Abraham is included into the text called the *Story of Melchizedek*, which is attributed to St. Athanasius of Alexandria [Piovanelli], the mediaeval apocryphal *Palaea historica* [Adler] and the Slavonic Abraham Cycle [Wittkowsky, Vitkovskaya].

In addition, there are some Coptic texts that mention Melchizedek (e.g., Melchizedek Tractate (NHC IX. 1) from Nag Hammadi library; the "Second Book of Jeu"). However, these texts could be of later origin and are therefore beyond the scope of this article.

The Use of the Jewish Traditions about Melchizedek in Hebrews

The Jewish traditions about Melchizedek play an important role in the midrash on Gen 14:18–20 in Hebrews 7. Paul J. Kobelsky picks out two separate strands of tradition incorporated into this midrash. The first one is based on Gen 14:18–20 and its interpretations, which are included in Heb 7:1–2. The author needs these to establish the superiority of Melchizedek over the Levitical priests in 7:4–10. The second strand of tradition appears in 7:3, and is further interpreted in 7:11–28 in order to explain Jesus' priesthood [Kobelsky, 121–122]²².

Thus, employing the material of Gen 14:18–20, Heb 7:1–2 mentions the meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek, and Melchizedek's blessing, but says nothing about what the words of his blessing were nor that this priest offered bread and wine. The author derives from the story of Genesis such important features of Melchizedek as his being the King of Salem and the Priest of God Most High and underlines the exchange (blessing — tithe) between Melchizedek and Abraham [Johnson, 176]. He resolves the ambiguity of Gen 14:20 concerning the subject of the tithe in the same manner that the writings of Josephus and the "Genesis Apocryphon" do: Abraham gave the tithe to Melchizedek. The etymological interpretation of Melchizedek's name as "righteous king" is similar to Josephus, Philo, and the Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan; referring to him as "king of peace" is similar to Philo. Such an interpretation of Gen 14:18–20, which shows Melchizedek to be greater than Abraham, is the primary basis of the superiority of Melchizedek over the Levites.

The argument of Heb 7:3 that Melchizedek has neither human genealogy nor a date of birth or death is based on an argument from silence, according to a method of the interpretation of Scripture, similar to that of Philo and the Rabbis. The essence of this method is that what is not in Scripture does not exist in the world [Attridge, 190]. Indeed, in the Torah there is no mention of Melchizedek's ancestors, nor of his birth or death. According to this method, it can thus be concluded that he is "without human antecedent". He therefore does not have a natural birth or death, which means he is eternal [Johnson, 177].

However, one can also expect the incorporation of some extrabiblical traditions into this verse. Moreover, some scholars suggest that po-

22. One could add that the argument of Heb 7:3 also plays an important role in the discussion of Melchizedek's superiority to the Levites.

etic or hymnic elements of traditional material are incorporated into Heb 7:3 [Kobelsky, 120; Attridge, 189]. These features of Melchizedek are similar to those of *11Q Melch*, *2 Enoch*, and some rabbinic texts, in which he is represented as a heavenly eschatological figure and a heavenly priest. The Qumranites' idea that Melchizedek will bring atonement to the sons of Light may have influenced the author of Hebrews. It may have suggested to him the idea about the Day of Atonement within his argument about Jesus' high priesthood. Some scholars believe that Qumran influences in Hebrews may indicate that the audience of this letter consisted of former Qumranites [Longenecker, 171–172; Brown, 6], but regardless of this, the ideas about Melchizedek's eternity in Heb 7:3 appear similar to the concepts of *11Q Melch*. The eternity of Melchizedek is, in turn, a reason for his eternal priesthood in Heb 7:3. This is the second basis for his superiority over mortal Levitical priests^{*1} and the main point of comparison between Melchizedek and Jesus.

*1 Heb 7:7–8

Thus, one can see in Hebrews 7 the influence of the traditions regarding Melchizedek both as a historical and as an eschatological figure. It is impossible to show unambiguously with which traditions the author of Hebrews was familiar. One might see connections to Philo, Josephus, the Qumranic texts, the Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan, *2 Enoch*, and some rabbinic texts. Such attention given to Melchizedek in various Jewish traditions independently of one another testifies to the significance he plays in several strands of Jewish thought of that period. After all, it is quite possible that these Jewish sources do not express their own unique ideas, but widespread traditions about Melchizedek.

Much more important, however, is how the author of Hebrews deals with the traditions he has at hand. He uses them in the same manner as he does the arguments from Scripture in Heb 1:3–2:4; 2:5–18; 3:1–4:13; 8:31–34, and elsewhere. His creative method of the interpretation of Scripture is based on a Christocentric perspective [Longenecker, 175], i.e., the interpretation of a passage in the light of the experience of life with Christ. The author shows his audience that the words of Scripture are addressed to them in the same manner as they were addressed to their ancestors^{*2}. In the same way that he shows what *today*, cited from Ps 94:7–11 in Heb 4:3–11 and the *new covenant* cited from Jer 31:31–34 in Heb 8:8–13, mean for God's people, he shows what the figure of Melchizedek actually means.

*2 Heb 1:1

Thus, the author of Hebrews is not so interested in the figure of Melchizedek himself, but shows that the meaning of this figure, which

had a large impact on Jewish theological thought and messianic expectations, can be properly understood only in the light of Christ²³. The passages from Scripture and the extrabiblical traditions about Melchizedek as well as their interpretation in Hebrews build the theological basis for his likeness to Christ. This means that the overall method of interpretation of the figure of Melchizedek in Hebrews is in essence typological [*Velardo, 16*].

Moreover, it involves the rhetorical approach of *syncretis* in order to indicate not only the likeness of Melchizedek's (as well as other Old Testament figures and events) to Christ, but also Christ's superiority over them [*Mason, 195*]. The author of Hebrews tries to show that Scripture and these traditions themselves indicate this likeness [*Johnson, 177*] and superiority. He needs only to reveal this to his audience. Thus, using the etymological method of the interpretation of Melchizedek's name in 7:2, he shows the connection between the traditions and the messianic expectations reflected in Ps 45:8 (cf. Melchizedek as the king of righteousness) and Isa 9:6; 32:17; Mic 5:5; Zech 9:10. Employing the tradition about Melchizedek's eternity in 7:3, he directly indicates his resemblance to Christ: ἀφρομοιωμένος δὲ τῷ υἱῷ τοῦ θεοῦ (“having been made like the Son of God”) ²⁴ and thus builds a bridge to the likeness of his priesthood to Christ's. Hebrews 7:11 also indicates that Melchizedek is in fact only the likeness of Christ who is regarded as another priest according to the order of Melchizedek, but not Melchizedek himself. In Heb 7:15–17 the author also concludes that Christ as ἕτερος ἱερεὺς (“another priest”) is κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα Μελχισέδεκ (“in the likeness of Melchizedek”), linking together their eternity with the support of Ps 110:4. Hebrews 7:3 attributes to Melchizedek the eternal priesthood (εἰς τὸ διηνεκές) as Ps 110:4 does with the Davidic king — εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα [*Kobelsky, 124*]. The connection between these two texts is possible because of the messianic understanding of Ps 110 in that period (cf. Act 2:34–35) [*Longenecker, 175*].

In addition, Melchizedek is not only the likeness of Christ for Hebrews, but also the embodiment of a person who is simultaneously a king and a high priest. Indeed, he is a unique embodiment of the combination of royal and priestly functions, which was derived from Gen 14:18–20 and used by Ps 110 as a model of the royal priesthood.

23. One might compare such a method of interpretation with the Pesharim as “eschatological” and “fulfillment” modes of interpretation of the Bible in the Qumran community [*Charlesworth*].

24. Ἀφρομοιώω can be translated as either “make like” or “compare” as it appears in Plato's *Rep. 517B*.

Conclusions

To sum up, one may see in Hebrews 7 the influence of the numerous traditions about Melchizedek, including some Old Testament passages (Gen 14:18–20; Ps 110:4) and several extrabiblical texts. Some of them present him as a historical figure, others as an eschatological one. However, it is impossible to show exactly which extrabiblical sources the author of Hebrews uses in his Melchizedekian argument, because most of the sources examined above may only reflect widespread traditions. Such attention to Melchizedek in numerous Jewish texts of the Second Temple period indicates his importance for several strands of Jewish thought of that time.

Nevertheless, the author of Hebrews is not so much interested in Melchizedek's figure itself but, employing a creative method of scripture interpretation in light of the experience of the life with Christ, he shows his audience the genuine meaning of Melchizedek: he is a likeness of Christ. The author of Hebrews requires this figure for his discussion about the superiority of Christ's priesthood. The Melchizedekian argument works in the following way: Hebrews derives two basic reasons of the superiority of Melchizedek to Levitical priests: he is greater than Abraham, and he is a priest forever because of his eternity. The last argument is the main point of comparison between Christ and Melchizedek. The superiority of Melchizedek over Levi is a likeness of the superiority of Christ's high priesthood over that of Aaron; Melchizedek's eternity and his eternal priesthood is a likeness of the eternity of Christ and of the nature of his high priesthood.

Finally, Melchizedek is not only the likeness of Christ but also the unique Old Testament image of the combination of royal and priestly functions. Such an image is well suited for the argument about the union of the messianic functions of king and priest in Jesus, which were often viewed as separate in several strands of Jewish messianic expectation, as, for example, in the separation of Davidic and priestly messianic concerns in Qumran [Collins]. This suggestion indicates that the author of Hebrews may have used this image of a person who is simultaneously a king and a high priest as a link in his theological chain. Such a chain is very important for the composition of this text, because it helps its author to build a typology of Jesus Christ' high priesthood. In this regard, Melchizedek, as a prototype of the high priest, is connected with Moses as a prototype of Christ in such an important feature for the high priest as mediation between God and peo-

ple ^{*1}, Melchizedek is also connected with Joshua ^{*2} as a prototype of Christ, who “entered into His rest” ^{*3} and offers God’s people a share in divine life. This typology is also found in the comparison of the imperfect Old Testament sacrifices with the perfect sacrifice of Christ, who entered the heavenly sanctuary and blotted out sin with His blood ^{*4}.

^{*1} Heb 3:1–6

^{*2} Heb 4:8

^{*3} Heb 4:10

^{*4} Heb 9:1–28

All these links of the theological chain are connected in Hebrews by the rhetorical approach of syncrisis, which the author widely uses in his method of interpreting the sacred text. Further research of this creative method of interpretation, not only from the point of view of typology, but also in terms of modern theories of metaphor, first of all, Cognitive Metaphor Theory [*Lakoff, Johnson*] and Conceptual Blending Theory [*Fauconnier, Turner*], seems to be very productive²⁵. Together with Melchizedek other images and characters with which Christ is compared, can be considered as a whole set of Christological metaphors, without which the author of Hebrews could not create in his reader’s mind such a multifaceted image of Christ as both God and human, priest and sacrifice, messianic king and perfect high priest.

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Abbreviations

Bible

MT	The Masoretic text
LXX	The Septuagint

Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

<i>Jub.</i>	The book of Jubilees
<i>2 Enoch (2 En.)</i>	The Second (Slavonic) Apocalypse of Enoch

Eusebius of Caesarea

Preap. ev. “Preparation for the Gospel”

Josephus

B. J. “Jewish War”

Ant. “Jewish Antiquities”

Coptic texts

NHC Nag Hammadi Codices

Qumran Texts

1Qap Gen “Genesis Apocryphon”

11Q Melch Melchizedek Scroll

4Q ShirShabb^{a-h} “Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice” from the 4th cave, copies a–h
(manuscripts 4Q400–407)

11Q ShirShabb “Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice” from the 11th cave, manuscript
11Q17

4QVisions of Amram^b ar “Visions of Amram”, manuscript 4Q544

Plato

Rep. “Republic”

Rabbinical Texts

Lev. Rab. Midrash Leviticus Rabbah

b. Ned. Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim

Song. Rab. Midrash Song of Songs Rabbah

b. Sukkah Babylonian Talmud, Sukka

Philo of Alexandria

De cong. erud. “On the Preliminary Studies”

De Abr. “On the life of Abraham”

Leg. al. “Allegorical Interpretation”

Christian Apocrypha

Palaea historica The Historical Palaea

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