IRIDESCENCE IN EZEKIEL
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Introduction

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

Ezekiel's Explicit Iridescent Imagery

The explicit use of iridescent imagery occurs in only one place in Ezekiel. In Ezek 1, the prophet has an extraordinary, scintillating visionary experience of the glory2 of the LORD by the Chebar River (1:1; cf. 8:4 and 43:3). Ezekiel begins his visionary description this way: “As I looked, behold, a storm wind was coming from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it [נִבְרָתָו], and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire” (1:4).3 Ezekiel’s description subsequently moves inward as he describes, first, the four living creatures (vv. 5-12, 14, 23-24), then the burning coals of fire that flash forth lightning within the living creatures (v. 13), the mysterious wheels filled with eyes (vv. 14-20), the firmament above the living creatures (v. 22), the throne above the firmament (v. 26), and, finally, the being on the throne (vv. 26-27).

Ezekiel, consequently, sees a brightness or radiance surrounding the being upon the throne (1:27: בַּלַּע אֵלֶּה).4 He then describes further how this radiance appeared: “Like the bow [נָשָּׁם] in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendor [נְנוֹר] all around” (1:28a). The Hebrew word for

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

2For the purposes of this article, I have decided not to capitalize “glory” unless a quoted source has done so.

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

4Moshe Greenberg argues that this radiance surrounds the entire figure on the throne, instead of just the lower description of this being (Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, AB 22 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983], 50-51).
“bow” in this text (נַחַל) occurs numerous times in the OT and normally refers to the bow of an archer. The meaning of “rainbow,” however, occurs in Ezekiel only here (cf. 39:3, 9); elsewhere in the OT it occurs only in Gen 9:13, 14, and 16. Thus this passage is the only explicit place where the prophet Ezekiel compares the radiance (נַחַל) surrounding the being on the throne to a rainbow (נַחַל).

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

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

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


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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Radiance Imagery in Ezek 1:4 and 1:27-28</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ezek 1:4</td>
<td>Ezek 1:27-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cloud</td>
<td>נַעַשׂ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brightness</td>
<td>נַעַשׂ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>around it</td>
<td>נַעַשׂ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fire</td>
<td>נַעַשׂ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gleaming amber</td>
<td>נַעַשׂ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The terms do not occur in the same order, and there is not an exact one-to-one correspondence with some of the terms. Nevertheless, the clustering of these terms in close affinity to each other within their respective contexts leads one to conclude that since Ezekiel has compared the brightness (נַעַשׂ) to iridescent imagery (נַעַשׂ) in 1:27-28, this brightness is the same brightness (נַעַשׂ) that occurs for the first time in 1:4.

In other words, I would suggest that the rainbow imagery in 1:27-28 is implicit in 1:4.

[Siebeck], 1988), 252-257.

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

11F. Field cites the enigmatic "Hebrew" (Ὁ Ἑβραῖος) in Origen's Hexapla on Ezek 1:4: φῶς γὰρ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτοῦ, ὃς ὀρασὶς τριδὸς (“For there was a light in the middle of it, as the appearance of a rainbow” [my translation]; text in F. Field, Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt; sive veterum interpretum graecorum in totum vetus testamentum fragmenta [Oxford: Clarendon, 1875; reprint ed., Hildesheim, Germany: Georg Olms, 1964], 2:769). Here the מַע becomes the φῶς, and the latter assumes the appearance of the ἤρι (rainbow), showing that the interpretation advanced here is not new, but ancient. Cf. also Halperin, Faces, 526.
The word נְבוֹע (nebo) occurs in only one place in Ezekiel outside of chapter 1. In Ezek 10:4, the prophet observes the movement of the glory of the LORD: "Then the glory of the LORD rose up from the cherub to the threshold of the house; the house was filled with the cloud, and the court [נְבוֹע] was full of the brightness [נְבוֹע] of the glory of the LORD." The court filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD in 10:4 is the inner court, since Ezekiel explicitly refers to the inner court in the previous verse and the outer court in the next verse. A distinction appears to be made between the cloud and the brightness: if, as in 1:4, the brightness (נְבוֹע) surrounds the cloud, this would provide a parallel to 10:4 and help to explain why the brightness is in the inner court, while the cloud fills the house. Another observation is that the cloud is not identical with the glory of the LORD, for while the cloud fills the house/temple, the glory remains at the threshold (cf. 10:18). It appears that while the glory is at the threshold of the temple, the surrounding cloud fills the temple and the brightness of the glory fills the inner court.

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


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

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

Cf. the description in Sir 50:5-7 of the exit of the High Priest Simon II from the "house of the curtain" (οῖκον καταπετάσματος) into the court, where he is described as a "rainbow gleaming in splendid clouds [τόξον φωτιζον ἐν νεφέλαις δόξης] (NRSV)." On the use of Greek as a starting point for the exegesis of Sirach, see the recent analysis by Jan Liesen, Full of Praise: An Exegetical Study of Sir 39, 12-35, JSJSup 64 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 19-20.

The glory of the LORD fills the tabernacle/temple/house in Exod 40:34-35, 2 Chr 7:1-2, and Ezek 43:5 and 44:4 (cf. Isa 6:1 [LXX]; Rev 15:8). On the other hand, the cloud fills the temple/house in 1 Kgs 8:10-11 and 2 Chr 5:13-14. It is in these latter texts, however, that the cloud is explicitly equated with the glory of the LORD (see, e.g., 1 Kgs 8:10-11: "And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD"). See also reference to the glory of the LORD appearing in the
radiance of the glory of the LORD can be none other than that which Ezekiel saw by the Chebar River (1:27-28), for the language is virtually the same; the rainbow-like radiance filled the inner court.\(^{16}\)

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

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

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

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

\(^{16}\)Since Ezekiel ties the rainbow-like radiance to the glory of the LORD in 1:27-28, the radiance of the glory of the LORD in 10:4 can be none other than what 1:28 refers to. See Block, *Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 321, n. 33.


\(^{18}\)See below for the discussion of the הָנַע in Ezek 1:13.

\(^{19}\)Richard M. Davidson suggests that the overall structure of the book of Ezekiel is important for understanding God's glory returning to the temple ("The Chiastic Literary Structure of the Book of Ezekiel," in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*, ed. David Merling [Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of Archaeology, Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum, Andrews University, 1997], 71-94). I wish to thank Jiří Moskala for drawing my attention to this article.
LORD as seen initially in Ezekiel’s Chebar vision—but without mentioning its splendor or radiant quality—would also implicitly include the rainbow-like radiance, unless otherwise qualified as in 10:4.²⁰ Despite the paucity of texts, particularly explicit ones, the significance of the iridescent glory in Ezek 1 and its reverberations throughout the work cannot be dismissed.

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

It is possible that iridescence in Ezekiel may not be limited to the texts we have thus far explored. Margaret Barker has provocatively suggested that another reference to iridescent imagery occurs in the Hebrew Vorlage of the LXX version of Ezek 9:2.²¹ There the prophet sees six men approach and stand beside the bronze altar. Among these men, however, is one who is “clothed in linen, with a writing case [ῥηγὴ χαλάς, literally, ‘a scribe’s writing case/palette’] at his side.” But the LXX of this text is radically different: the “Man in Linen” is instead a man clothed in a long robe (ἐνδεδικωκός ποδήρη). Further, the LXX says he has a lapis lazuli²² ceremonial belt/sash²³ at his waist (ζώνη σαπφέρου

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


²²σαφφέρος does not refer to our modern “sapphire” (blue corundum), as found in many modern translations (cf. the NASB, NIV, and NRSV on Exod 24:10). Walter Schumann observes that from antiquity until as late as the Middle Ages “the name sapphire was understood to mean what is today described as lapis lazuli” (*Gemstones of the World*, trans. Evelyne Stern [New York: Sterling, 1977], 86); cf. *DBAG*, s.v. “σαφφέρος”; *LSJ*, s.v. “σαφφέρος”; John S. Harris, “An Introduction to the Study of Personal Ornaments of Precious, Semi-Precious and Imitation Stones Used Throughout Biblical History,” *ALUOS* 4 (1962-1963), 69-70; idem, “The Stones of the High Priest’s Breastplate,” *ALUOS* 52 (1963-1965), 52, where he states: “So strong are the arguments concerning the relation of the ancient name Sapphire to the mineral Lapis-Lazuli that little more need be added”; Mohsen Manutchehr-Danai, *Dictionary of Gems and Gemnology* [Berlin: Springer, 2000], s.v. “lapis lazuli”; H. Quiring, “Die Edelsteine im Amtsschild des jüdischen Hohenpriesters und die Herkunft ihrer Namen,” *Sudhoffs Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin und der Naturwissenschaften* 38 (1954): 200-202; and Nahum N. Sarna, who agrees and states that the modern sapphire “was unknown in the ancient Near East,...” (*Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPSTC [Philadelphia: JPS, 1991], 153). See, e.g., Pliny the Elder *Nat. 37.119-120, where sappirus cannot mean sapphire because it has gold flecks in it, as one finds in lapis lazuli; and Theophrastus *Lap. 1.8; 4.23; and 6.37. Lapis lazuli is “an attractive, massive, complex aggregate of several blue minerals” and “it consists chiefly of lazurite, haiyinite, which gives it color, also sodalite, noselite, and flecks of pyrites in a matrix of calcite” (Manutchehr-Danai, *Dictionary*, s.v. “lapis lazuli”). Its primary blue color ranges from azure to green to purple-blue (ibid.).

²³“Girdle” has the wrong connotation today. Since commentators typically refer
Why are the MT and the LXX so divergent here? Two broad possibilities immediately come to mind. First, the LXX could have misunderstood the Hebrew. A. M. Honeyman’s derisive comment that the LXX “succeeds in making nonsense of the [Hebrew] phrase” is an example of taking this approach. Alternatively, the LXX could have read different Hebrew words. In this case, the LXX would not be guessing but rather translating.

According to Barker, in the phrase "scribes writing instead of having a writing case/palette, as in the MT." Why are the MT and the LXX so divergent here? Two broad possibilities immediately come to mind. First, the LXX could have misunderstood the Hebrew. A. M. Honeyman’s derisive comment that the LXX “succeeds in making nonsense of the [Hebrew] phrase” is an example of taking this approach. Alternatively, the LXX could have read different Hebrew words. In this case, the LXX would not be guessing but rather translating.

According to Barker, in the phrase “and a scribe’s writing to either the belt or sash, or to both of them as alternative translations, I have kept both terms in use.

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

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


Lust, “Lexicon,” 300.

For example, Robert Eisler took this route and suggested that the LXX read ἐντούτος instead of ἐπὶ (“ἐστὶν = τῶν ἐνδεδυκότων τὴν στολὴν = ἐπὶ τῶν ἐνδεδυκότων τὴν στολὴν im Danielkommentar des Hippolytos von Rom,” OLZ 33 [1930]: col. 586). But Eisler’s ἐπὶ appears incorrect and should instead be ἐπὶ, “alliance, conspiracy” (“ἐπὶ,” HALOT 3:1154); the latter term would be understood to be in line with a related word, such as στήμφλως, “ribbons, breast-sashes [of women]” (“ἀπατωρία,” HALOT 3:1154). The related verb is ἐπιτεθῆ, which, among its meanings, can mean “to tie or tie up,” as in Job 38:31, and “to tie on or wear as a belt,” as in Isa 49:18 (see “ἐπί,” HALOT 3:1153-1154). In any case, ἐπὶ would not seem too distant from τῶν. Despite his use of ἐπὶ, this is where Eisler ended up in his retroversion ("ἐστὶν," col. 586; cf. W. Max Müller, “Zwei ägyptische Wörter im Hebräischen,” OLZ 3 [1900]: cols. 49-50). Cf. Lust, “Lexicon,” 300; and Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, 224. If the Greek translator had seen ἐπὶ, as Eisler suggests, he would have had to guess at a cognate of this word (e.g., ἔγραψε) in order to arrive at τῶν. But this seems overly complex and unlikely.
case/palette at his side” [my translation]), וְאָסָי was read as וְאָסָי (“lapis lazuli”) and no scribe was seen. The first term, תֹּמְפָא, a rare term (it occurs only in Ezek 9:2, 3, and 11 in the OT), was read instead as the more common word תֹּמְפָא (“bow” or “rainbow”). Thus the concept was understood to mean a rainbow of lapis lazuli on his waist and became written as כְּדִוָּא הָעֲבָרָאוּ האֹתָא. Though Barker never explains how a rainbow could turn into a belt/sash, her hypothesis remains intriguing. With regard to the first Hebrew term in this enigmatically translated phrase, Maximilian Ellenbogen notes that תֹּמְפָא “has no cognate in any Semitic language and the Hebrew itself does not offer any etymological connections.” The consensus of scholars is that תֹּמְפָא is a loan-word from the Egyptian gstj, yet this is problematic in that the Egyptian ś is frequently represented by the Hebrew א instead of א. It is thus possible that the Egyptian word could have been transliterated into Hebrew as תֹּמְפָא—but that is also the same series of consonants as the “bow” or “rainbow.” In any event, Barker translates it, however, as “sapphire” throughout (Revelation, 268, 269).

30Barker appears to be wrong when she states that the term “does not occur anywhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures,” for the only text she has referred to in that paragraph is Ezek 9:2 (ibid., 268).

32Cf. ibid.


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

36Here I follow D. M. Stec, who complained about “the all too frequent practice of pointing סין and סין in an otherwise unpointed Hebrew text. I cannot see the reason for this” (review of Translation Technique in the Peshitta to Job: A Model for Evaluating a Text with Documentation from the Peshitta to Job, by Heidi M. Szpek, JSS 40 [1995]: 156). Cf. “תֹּמְפָא,” HALOT 3:1301, which also notes that originally there were no diacritical marks. Consequently, I do not print the diacritical marks in order to more faithfully reproduce what the Greek translator would probably have seen. They are printed, however, when I refer to what other authors have said about this problem in order to be clear about their discussion.
case, נַעַפֶּה was a difficult—if not impossible—word for some Greek translators; Walther Zimmerli notes in both Aquila and Theodotian's translations of κάστυ γραμματέως, the first word is basically their attempt to transliterate "the unintelligible נַעַפֶּה."

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

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

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37Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, 224. Symmachus has ποιητοφοι γραφεως ("writing tablet of a writer/scribe"), while the 2d edition of Aquila has μελανοδοξεων γραφεως ("inkstand of a writer/scribe") and ὁ Ἐβραῖος has μελαν καὶ καλαμός γραφεως ("ink and reed of a writer/scribe"); see Ziegler, Ezekiel, 122.


42Ibid.
Attempts to recognize the value of the Peshitta have continued.43 In his 1988 dissertation on the influence of the LXX on the Peshitta in Genesis and Psalms, Jerome A. Lund concluded:

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

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


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

Azevedo concludes that this is “strong evidence for an independence of translation” between the Peshitta and the LXX in Ezekiel. The fact that the Peshitta of 9:2, 3, and 11 mirrors the MT in referring to the linen clothing of this being (MT = בֵּיתוֹן) [9:2], while in all three verses the LXX refers instead to his long robe (παλαιήρ), might further support such a conclusion. But even this conclusion—that apparent, nonconsistent use of the LXX by the Peshitta shows independence—has been countered by Weitzman. He concluded that “it is wrong to argue that, because P’s translator has not followed LXX consistently, he was not influenced by LXX at all,” for “this is in fact typical of the way that P’s translators used LXX.” Again, on the other hand, if the Peshitta did indeed consult and utilize the LXX here in its translation, it may have been because the LXX translation simply made sense.

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

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

47 Ibid. Azevedo also believes that there is strong evidence that there was a single translator for Ezek 9 (ibid., 205, 220).
48 In Ezek 9:2, Aquila has εἰκαίρετα, Symmachus has λίνα, and Theodotion has βαδίν, while in 9:11 the same translations occur, but with the articles (i.e., τὸ εἰκαίρετα, τὸ λίνα, and τὸ βαδίν); cf. Ziegler, Ezekiel, 122 and 124; and Field, Origenis, 2:790 and 792.
49 Weitzman, Syriac, 79.
52 Ibid., 324.
55 Ibid. Cf., however, Tov, who states that the close relationship between the Peshitta and the LXX was often the result of common exegetical traditions, and “by definition, these common traditions have no bearing on the issue of the Hebrew text presupposed by the versions” (Text-Critical Use, 188).
phrase does not occur in 9:11; there it is only זְרֵעַ מֵאכֶסֶן נַעַרְתִּי. 56 But I would further suggest that the Peshitta has not omitted what its Hebrew text has. When the Peshitta and LXX of Ezek 9:2 speak of a “belt of sapphire /lapis lazuli,” one could reasonably hypothesize that they both read the Hebrew words as נָשָׁנָן and אכֶסֶן without the Peshitta necessarily depending on the LXX for its translation. 57

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

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

56Azevedo says that the relative clause בַּשֹּשֵׁם הַשָּׁמֶשׁ הָאַרְרָּבָה נַעַרְתִּי in the MT of 9:11 is the “same phrase” as in 9:2 and 3, but this is not correct. The phrase that occurs in those two verses is בַּשֹּשֵׁם הַשָּׁמֶשׁ הָאַרְרָּבָה and אכֶסֶן, a fact which even he acknowledges (“Textual Relation,” 220).

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

58See Weitzman, Syriac, 83-84.


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

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

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


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


66Outside of Ezek 9:2, 3, and 11, the terms ποδήρας and ζώνη occur together in only one verse (Exod 28:4), part of a larger passage (28:4-39) mostly describing the clothing of the high priest (cf. also 28:31 [ποδήρας] and 39 [ζώνη]; and 29:5 [ποδήρας] and 9 [ζώνη]). There may have been a tradition of interpreting the executioners of Ezek 9 in high-priestly terms; see, e.g., the remarks of James R. Davila, who suggests that the
of the נֵפ in a context that already included ποδήρις, and thus utilized the צוֹנֵה, which could easily work in a high-priestly context that included polychromatic imagery.

This leaves us with σάπφειρος. Outside of our text and the problematic Ezek 28:13, σάπφειρος translates רֶפֶס (Exod 24:10; 28:18; 36:18 [MT 39:11]; Job 28:6, 16; Sol 5:14; Isa 54:11; Lam 4:7; Ezek 1:26; 10:1; Tob 13:16). Commentators typically suggest that the LXX misread or confused the Hebrew.68 Azevedo, however, suggests the possibility of the opposite: "the Hebrew word רס, 'writing, writer,' could well be a misunderstanding of an unvocalized text containing the word רס, 'lapiz [sic] lazuli' (see Exod 24:10)."69 This is a possibility, but again it remains conjectural. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to see how σάπφειρος might have been derived from something approximating רס.70

What about the phrase צוֹנֵה σחָפֶרִים?71 While the words can be explained, can the phrase be explained? What is a "belt/sash of lapis lazuli"? Two possibilities suggest themselves. One would be to take the reference to lapis lazuli to be a synecdoche for all the actual colors embroidered in the priestly

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67Although there is no precise, sequential, one-to-one correlation between the stones of the MT and the LXX adorning the Tyrian king in Ezek 28:13, רס occurs in the MT and σάπφειρος occurs in the LXX. In Tobit, רס appears in 4QpapTob4 ar frg. 18 and correlates to σάπφειρος in Tob 13:16 as found in the critical edition by Robert Hanhart, Tobit, Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum 8 part 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 173.

68E.g., Ellenbogen, Foreign Words, 150; Honeyman, "Pottery Vessels," 90; Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1, 224.


70If צוֹנֵה derived from נֵפ, what we have in the LXX is possibly even more noteworthy. In Ezek 1:26-28, one finds reference in both the LXX and the MT to lapis lazuli (v. 26), the waist of the being on the throne (v. 27: σφυς [cf. 8:2; 9:2, 3, and 11]), and a rainbow (v. 28). The terms do not have the same reference, since the lapis lazuli describes the throne, the waist refers to the being on the throne, and the rainbow describes the brightness surrounding the being. Nevertheless, it suggests that the LXX translator may have seen the man in 9:2 in light of the being on the throne in 1:26-28 (so Barker, Revelation, 269). Martha Himmelfarb suggests that the description of the glory of God in Ezek 1 drew on an understanding of "the high priest as rainbowlike" (Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 20).

71If this had indeed derived from רס נֵפ ("rainbow of lapis lazuli"), cf. Rev 4:3: יִמְכָּלְדֵהוּ תֵוּן תְּרוּנְו יֵמוֹ לֶךֶם דְּרָאָא סָמָאָאֲגֶנְיָא ("around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald").
Iridecense in Ezekiel

ζωνη: υακινθου και πορφυρας και κοκκινου (Exod 36:36 [MT 39:29]: “blue, purple, and crimson”). Here υακινθος translates the MT נַוָּן (as it also does in Ezek 27:7 and 24; cf. 16:10), which was associated with lapis lazuli in later Jewish interpretation. The LXX’s maintenance of σάπφειρος, instead of the actual υακινθος of the ζωνη, would have been not only because of the Hebrew רְסֶס, but because it would have also provided an allusion to the color of God’s throne, as found in 1:26 and 10:1.

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

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

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


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

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

77 See §398b (cf. §389b) of Peter Schäfer’s synopsis of the mystical Hekhalot corpus (Peter Schäfer, Synopsis zur Hekhalot-Literatur, TSA) 2 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981]), where the “Youth” has six men in an apparent allusion to Ezek 9:2 (Halperin, Faces, 494). That the “Youth” enters beneath the throne of glory in §385 and §398a indicates an allusion to Ezek 10:1-2 (cf. ibid., 492; Barker, Revelation 264, 269).
Siddur Rabbah 36 in the pre-kabbalistic Jewish Shērur Qomah ("The Measurement of the Body") traditions, the "Youth" is not girded in stone; rather, his "body is like the rainbow"!78 This latter statement is all the more intriguing since Shērur Qomah speculation was related to interpretation of the Song of Songs,79 and it is in Cant 5:14 that we have already seen lapis lazuli—with a rainbow nowhere in sight there. This causes one to wonder about the exegetical traditions of Jewish mysticism that could alternate between describing the "Youth" with a body of lapis lazuli or with one that looked like a rainbow—especially since these alternating descriptions remind us of the question of the Hebrew Vorlage of the LXX's translation of Ezek 9.

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

78Quoted from Martin Samuel Cohen, The Shērur Qomah: Texts and Recensions, TSAJ 9 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1985), 41. See also the following text found in Schäfer, §398: "His body resembles the rainbow,..." (quoted from Halperin, Faces, 405).

79So Ithamar Gruenwald, Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism, AGJU 14, (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 213. In Cant 7:7 (LXX 7:8), one finds the term נחש ("height/stature"), from which Qomah derives.

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

81See Exod 9:31; Prov 31:13; Isa 19:9; by metonymy, the term means "linen" (Deut 22:11; Pss. Sol. 8:5 [?]).

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

83Beale, 804-805, mounts a defense of this lectio difficilior in Revelation, 804-805.

84My translation.

85I have left the Hebrew untranslated. Both the LXX and Theodotion left it that way as well and simply transliterated it (θαρσος). English translations vary: e.g., the NASV and the NRSV translate it here as "beryl," while the NIV translates it as
Another text like Dan 10:6 that describes a being with a stone body is the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which refers to the principal angel Yaoel having a body of “sapphire” (11:2). In this latter text, the reference might be a reflection of Exod 24:10 and Ezek 1:26 and 10:1 (alluding to the material nature of God’s throne). But the lapis lazuli clothing of the Man in Linen in the LXX of Ezek 28:18; 36:18 [MT 39:11]; Isa 54:11; Sir 32:5; Tob 13:17; the MT and the LXX in Ezek 28:13 do not agree.

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


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

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

9 must also be seriously entertained as a possible influence.

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

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Line 5
luminous spirits. All their [workmanship] (is of) holy wondrous mosaic, spirits of mingled colours, figures of the shapes of god-like beings, engraved round about their glorious brickwork, glorious images of splendid and majestic living god-like beings (are) all their construction and the images of their figures (are) holy angels.

Line 6
The figures engraved around about the glorious brickwork (lines 5-6) most likely refer to the lapis lazuli platform upon which the throne of God rests (Exod 24:10: ובנהו נשמת). Thus these angelic figures have, in essence, “bodies” of lapis lazuli. At the same time, these (implied) lapis-lazuli bodies are situated in a context describing a polychromatic mosaic or plating of mingled colors (line 5)—the term later being used in another Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice text (4Q405 20 ii-21-22 11) as a circumlocution for the rainbow of Ezek 1:28.
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The concept of celestial beings “engraved” or “attached” to the throne may also appear in Rev 4:6. This verse, in part, describes the four living creatures: כָּלְכֶל עֲמֵֽרוֹ הַרְוֹעַשׁ לְכוֹץ לְכִלָּו הַרְוֹעַשׁ יְשָׁרְאְרוֹ צָּא ("Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures"). How can these four living creatures be “in the midst” of the throne?


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


93 So Baumgarten, “Qumran Sabbath Shirot,” 204.
and “around” the throne? Robert G. Hall, suggesting that the text assumes that the throne is patterned on the OT tabernacle ark, concluded that one should take the text just as it reads (i.e., the creatures are both in the midst of the throne and around it), with the living creatures in the midst of the throne as components of it.94 Such an interpretation would be in line with the Jewish tradition of God sitting on a cherub throne.95 In relation to the ark in the tabernacle, Josephus reports that Moses saw the two cherubim (πρόστυχοι δύο) sculpted on the throne of God.96 Some later Jewish interpreters understood that the four living creatures were components of the throne.97 If such a view were correct in Rev 4:6, Rev 5:6a (Και εἶδον ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἄρνιον ἄστηκεν ὡς ἀσφαγμένον) would make sense as the NASB translates it: “And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain.”98 Thus, with Hall’s interpretation, the four living creatures would be parts or components of the (lapis lazuli?) throne, yet able to move and even worship the occupants of the throne (Rev 5:8; 19:4).99 In this sense, they would


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


97 Pirge R. El. 4 and Rab. Cant 3.10.4. See the discussion in Hall, “Living Creatures,” 610-611; and Beale, Revelation, 329.

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

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

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

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

The Broader Context of Ezekiel’s Iridescent Imagery

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

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

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

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

1 Timothy 6:16 begins by saying of God: “It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light [φῶς οἰκῶν ἀπρόστιτον], whom no one has ever seen or can see [ὅν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων οὐδε ἰδεῖν δύναται].” The latter part of this portion of the verse clarifies the earlier part—i.e., no one has ever seen or can see God because he dwells in unapproachable light. This reminds one of the imagery in Ps 104:2, where the psalmist describes God as “wrapped in light as with a garment [υἱὸς θεοῦ ῥαίῳ ηόν ἐστιν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων οὐδε ἰδεῖν δύναται].” Such references to God’s dwelling in light (implicit or explicit) are more numerous than the few in Ezekiel and Revelation that describe him surrounded by a rainbow or rainbow-like brightness.103

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

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

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

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

104 Notice how Luke also describes the overall scene in terms of the disciples seeing Jesus’ glory (9:32: εἶδον τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ).
contains another finely detailed vision of the throne of God. But it might be misleading to simply look in 1 En. 14 for rainbow-imagery. 1 Enoch 14:21-22 states: “And no angel was able to enter this house, or to look on his face, by reason of its splendour and glory; and no flesh was able to look on him. A blazing fire encircled him, and a great fire stood in front of him.” What surrounds the One on the throne is a blazing fire—not a rainbow-like radiance.

One can see, however, how this blazing fire in 1 Enoch could be understood to be iridescent or rainbow-like in appearance. In 1 En. 71:2, part of the Similitudes of Enoch, the seer sees “two streams of fire, and the light of that fire shone like hyacinth.” The color “hyacinth” in Ethiopic is yäknet, and this term translates the Greek ὠάκυνθος, itself a term we have already seen and one that typically translates the Hebrew רֹאש (generally, blueish- or violet-colored purple, but spanning heliotrope to green as well) in the OT.

Thus, in 1 Enoch, the fire the seer sees looks like a shade of purple. All of this suggests that the “fire” that one runs across several times as surrounding or associated with the divine throne may well have been viewed or interpreted, at times, in terms of many colors—thus like the rainbow. This makes sense from a phenomenological standpoint, since fire does appear at times

105 Text quoted from Black, Book of Enoch, 33.
106 Text quoted from ibid., 67.
107 Black (ibid., 251, n. 2) associates ὠάκυνθος with the term רֹאש (“lapis lazuli”) in Ezek 28:13.
108 “רֹאש,” HALOT 4:1733.
110 In the OT, ὠάκυνθος occurs only in Rev 21:20, where it is a name of one of the precious or semiprecious foundation stones of the New Jerusalem. It is typically translated as “jacinth” (cf. NASB, NIV, NRSV), but the NJB is one that translates it as “sapphire.” The related word ὠάκυνθιος is found in the NT only in Rev 9:17 and describes a color ranging from dark blue to dark red that is associated with fire and brimstone (cf. in the OT Exod 25:5; 26:4, 14; 28:31; 35:7, 23; 36:29, 28 [MT 39:22, 31]; etc.). There John refers to fire and brimstone again almost immediately (9:17; 9:18), but he associates the latter references with smoke instead of hyacinth.
111 Cf. also the Apoc. Ab. 18:13: “And above the wheels was the throne which I had seen. And it was covered with fire and the fire encircled it round about, and an indescribable light surrounded the fiery crowd” (trans. Rubinkiewicz, “Apocalypse of Abraham,” in Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 1:698). Christopher Rowland states that this text reflects Ezek 1:27b in its description of the fire and the surrounding brightness (“The Influence of the First Chapter of Ezekiel on Jewish and Early Christian Literature,” Ph.D. dissertation, Christ’s College Cambridge, 1974, 46). Consequently, it appears the author of the Apocalypse of Abraham felt free to describe the Ezekielic rainbow-like radiance as fire.
to have flames of purple, blue, violet, red, yellow, green, and/or orange.\footnote{13}

It is possible to trace a trajectory of interpretation of Ezek 1 that implicitly or explicitly relates the iridescence of the rainbow with the glowing, multicolored nature of fire. First, it is at this point that we can pick up the second occurrence of יִּירָנ in Ezekiel, found in 1:13, that we have delayed exploring until now. There Ezekiel describes the fire that exists within the living creatures: “In the middle of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; the fire was bright [יָאָרָת], and lightning issued from the fire.” Daniel I. Block sees the comparison of the יִירָנ to the rainbow in 1:28 as suggesting that this particular term describes “polychromatic splendor” not only in 1:28, but “throughout this account”—that is, throughout Ezek 1.\footnote{14} Block’s conclusion would confirm the iridescent nature of 1:4, as we have already seen. But it also points to the iridescent nature of the יִירָנ in 1:13 as well, and Block, in fact, describes the flames there as displaying a “mesmerizing variation in color.”\footnote{15} Thus, while the rainbow-like iridescence shows up explicitly at 1:27-28, it also shows up implicitly at 1:4 and 1:13.\footnote{16}

Second, 4QBerakhot (4Q286-290) is another liturgical text found at Qumran that draws its inspiration and language from Leviticus, Deuteronomy, the Community Rule (1QS), and the Damascus Document (CD), while sharing a similar approach to exegeting Ezek 1 as the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and showing similarities to parts of Revelation.\footnote{17} In 4QBerakhot i 1-3, the broken text describes the heavenly temple via a merkabah vision:\footnote{18}

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{113}One interpretation of the fabrication of the tabernacle menorah was that it took place by a miracle: God took white, red, green, and black fire and fashioned the candlestick (see Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews, trans. by Paul Radin [Philadelphia: JPS, 1947], 3:219, referring to Tanh. B. III, 28-29 [ed. Buber; Wilna, 1885]).
\item \footnote{114}Block, The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24, 105. Here “polychromatic splendor” would better approximate the gleaming or glistening nature of iridescence than a less complex and more subdued “polychromatism.”
\item \footnote{115}Ibid.
\item \footnote{116}Cf. Brownlee, who observes the use of יִירָנ in reference to the dawn in Isa 60:3 and concludes that the fire was “many hued” (Ezekiel 1-19, 12). Prov 4:18 also describes dawn in terms of the יִירָנ: “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn [יָאָרָת], which shines brighter and brighter until full day.” See also Isa 4:5, which describes the “brightness of a flaming fire [יָאָרָת]” (NASB).
\item \footnote{117}Cf. the late Jewish mystical interpretation of Ezek 1 found in Hekhalot Zutarti (“The Lesser [Book of Celestial] Palaces”), §353 in Schäfer’s Hekhalot synopsis, where the living creatures are described as having an appearance “like the appearance of the rainbow in the cloud” (quoted from Halperin, Faqs, 388). This is intriguing in light of the fact that the fire in the midst of the living creatures in 1:13 is described in terms of the יִירָנ that one also finds in 1:28 in comparison with the rainbow.
\item \footnote{118}Merkabah material derives from the OT: “The merkabah appears to play the role
\end{itemize}
Line 1] their [ ] and [ mjh ] their engraved forms [ 
Line 2] their [ ] their splendid s[tr]uctures [ 
Line 3] [walls of] their glorious [hal]ls, their wondrous doors [ 

Immediately following these lines is the following:\textsuperscript{119}

Line 4] their. [ ] , angels of fire and spirits of cloud . [ 
Line 5 bright\textsuperscript{}ness of the brocaded spirits of the holiest ho[l]ness

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{119}Text from ibid.

\textsuperscript{120}Nitzan, "4QBerakhot (4Q286-290)," 643.

\textsuperscript{121}Ibid., 643-644.

\textsuperscript{122}Davila notes that it also shows a strong relationship to earlier apocalyptic and Gnostic works (Liturgical Works, 43-47).

\textsuperscript{123}Schäfer, §371a (quoted from Morray-Jones, A Transparent Illusion, 176; cf. p. 213). Morray-Jones notes that the image of mixed colors reminds one of the multicolored temple veils described in Chronicles, Philo, and Josephus (ibid., 213).
rainbow resembles all the appearance of fire all around it."\(^{124}\)

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

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

In the case of the throne-room visions, such as found in Ezekiel, the visionaries grasped at what was familiar to describe what was not familiar. Sometimes they saw a rainbow-like radiance, other times a blazing fire,\(^{128}\) and at

\(^{124}\)Schäfer, §487 (quoted from Halperin, Faces, 539). Here again the fiery flames have a glowing, multicolored nature.

\(^{125}\)Text quoted from Cohen, The Sh"ur Qomah, 41.

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

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

\(^{128}\)Did the gold, blue, purple, and scarlet colors that adorned the high priest's garments and the tabernacle veils suggest the blazing fires of heaven (or vice versa)? For instance, the inner veil prevented access to the Most Holy Place, while in 1 En. 14:21-22 the blazing fire prevented access to the One on the throne. Cf. Meredith G. Kline, who indicates that such bright reds, blues, and gold colors gave a fiery effect: "Artist [sic] could
other times simply a brilliant light. In other words, and with particular regard to this study, the rainbow-like radiance was one of several ways in which visionaries described the brilliant—and variegated—light of the heavenly throne room.

Conclusion

Iridescent imagery is both explicit and implicit in Ezekiel. One finds explicit imagery only once, in reference to the rainbow around the throne (1:27-28). But it also appears implicitly in the description of the radiance elsewhere (cf. 1:4, 10:3-4, and included in 43:2). The question of whether iridescent imagery stands behind the LXX (and Peshitta?) text of Ezek 9, while intriguing and possible, is conjectural and cannot be compellingly demonstrated. The absence of explicit or implicit iridescent imagery in reference to descriptions of the throne room of God indicates nothing more than that the rainbow was but one of the several ways in which the visionaries saw and/or described the brilliant radiance that surrounded God. Moreover, references to fire in heaven or in the heavenly temple could well be more or less equivalent to the rainbow imagery scarcely do more with an earthly palette in a cold medium to produce the effect of fiery light” (Images of the Spirit, Baker Biblical Monograph [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980], 43).

129See Kline’s comprehensive summary of biblical light imagery in ibid., 18. Kline implicitly ties the “beauty” aspect of the rainbow with the appearance of the high priest’s garments (ibid., 42-43), which were designed for “glory and for beauty” (Exod 28:2, NASB).

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

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

130See, e.g., Dan 7:9-11.
of Ezekiel, since fire could be understood in terms of bright, shifting colors as well (e.g., Ezek 1:13). Focusing on explicit iridescent imagery in contrast or distinction to other light imagery (e.g., fire imagery), however, makes one unable to adequately explain the apparent paucity of such iridescent imagery in both the OT and the NT.

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

131 Halperin, Faces, 250.
132 Ibid.