

Ancient of Days

Ancient of Days is a name for God in the Book of Daniel: in the original Aramaic *atik yomin* אֲתִיק יוֹמִין; in the Septuagint *palaios hēmeron* (παλαιὸς ἡμερῶν); and in the Vulgate *antiquus dierum*.

The title "Ancient of Days" has been used as a source of inspiration in art and music, denoting the creator's aspects of eternity combined with perfection. William Blake's watercolour and relief etching entitled *The Ancient of Days* is one such example.



The Ancient of Days (1794)
Watercolor etching by William Blake

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Judaism

This term appears three times in the Book of Daniel (7:9, 13, 22),^[1] and is used in the sense of God being eternal.^[2]

I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.

— Daniel 7:9

Kabbalah

In the Zohar, the seminal document of Kabbalah that emerged in 13th-century Spain, there is mention of the Ancient of Ancients, and the Holy Ancient One – Atika Kadisha, variably interpreted as synonymous with the En Sof, the unmanifested Godhead. The Ancient of Days is the manifestation of the Ancient of Ancients within Creation. It refers to the most primary ("ancient") source of creation in the divine will Keter ("Crown").

Whenever Judgment looms and the forehead of the Impatient One is revealed, the Forehead of the Ancient of Ancients is revealed; Judgment subsides and is not executed.

— Idra Rabba, Zohar 3:136b

In 16th-century Lurianic Kabbalah, *Atik Yomin* is systemised as the uppermost *Partzuf* (Divine "Countenance/Configuration") in the rectification of the World of Atzilut ("Emanation") after the "Shattering of the sephirot Vessels". Keter of Atzilut acts as the guiding Divine motivation in creation, developing into two *partzufim*, *Atik Yomin* (Ancient of Days) and *Arich Anpin* ("Long Visage/Infinitely Patient One"). *Atik Yomin* is the inner *partzuf* of Keter, synonymous with Divine Delight, that enclothes within and motivates *Arich Anpin*, the outer *partzuf* of Keter, synonymous with Divine Will. *Arich Anpin* is said to extend down all levels of Creation in ever more concealed mode as the divine substratum of everything. The Zohar goes into great detail describing the White Head of God and ultimately the emanation of its anthropomorphic personality or attributes.^[3] In the descending realms explained by Luria, the

Gulgalta ("Skull"-Keter Will) within *Arich Anpin* enclothes the Chesed (Kindness) of *Atik Yomin*, becoming the origin of the lights of the world of *Atzilut*; the *Mocha Stima'ah* ("Concealed Brain"-Chokhmah Wisdom) within *Arich Anpin* enclothes the Gevurah (Severity) of *Atik Yomin*, becoming the origin of the vessels of the world of *Atzilut*.^[4] The *Dikna* ("Beard") of *Arich Anpin* constricts the infinite light originating from *Atik Yomin* in 13 channels of rectification to lower, relatively finite reality.^[5] The Merkabah text Re' uyot Yehezkel identifies the Ancient of Days as Metatron.^[6]

Christianity

In Eastern Orthodox Christian hymns and icons, the Ancient of Days is sometimes identified with God the Father or occasionally the Holy Spirit; but most properly, in accordance with Orthodox theology he is identified with God the Son, or Jesus. Most of the eastern church fathers who comment on the passage in Daniel (7:9-10, 13-14) interpreted the elderly figure as a prophetic revelation of the son before his physical incarnation.^[7] As such, Eastern Christian art will sometimes portray Jesus Christ as an old man, the Ancient of Days, to show symbolically that he existed from all eternity, and sometimes as a young man, or wise baby, to portray him as he was incarnate. This iconography emerged in the 6th century, mostly in the Eastern Empire with elderly images, although usually not properly or specifically identified as "the Ancient of Days."^[8] The first images of the Ancient of Days, so named with an inscription, were developed by iconographers in different manuscripts, the earliest of which are dated to the 11th century. The images in these manuscripts included the inscription "Jesus Christ, Ancient of Days," confirming that this was a way to identify Christ as pre-eternal with the God the Father.^[9] Indeed, later, it was declared by the Russian Orthodox Church at the Great Synod of Moscow in 1667 that the Ancient of Days was the Son and not the Father.^[10]



The Ancient of Days a 14th-century fresco from Ubisi, Georgia.

In the Western Church similar figures usually represent only God the Father. Building his argument upon the Daniel passage, Thomas Aquinas recalls that some bring forward the objection that the Ancient of Days matches the Person of the Father, without necessarily agreeing with this statement himself.^[11]

In the hymn "Immortal, Invisible, God only Wise", the last two lines of the first verse read:

*Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great Name we praise.*

Daniel 7:13-14 says, "I kept on beholding in the visions of the night, and, see there! with the clouds of the heavens someone like a son of man happened to be coming; and to the Ancient of Days he gained access, and they brought him up close even before that One. And to him there were given rulership and dignity and kingdom, that the peoples, national groups and languages should all serve even him. His rulership is an indefinitely lasting rulership that will not pass away, and his kingdom one that will not be brought to ruin." From a Christian perspective, this may be understood to be describing the Ancient of Days [God the Father] bestowing rulership upon the Son of Man [God the Son, Jesus], a separate entity. Among ancient Christian pseudepigrapha, one Book of Enoch states that he who is called "Son of man," who existed before the worlds were, is seen by Enoch in company with the "Ancient of Days"^[12]

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints, the title *Ancient of Days* belongs to Adam, the oldest and earliest man, who is also identified with the archangel Michael.^{[13][14]}

Notes

1. "Daniel 7" (<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Daniel%207;&version=9>) BibleGateway.com (KJV).

Retrieved 21 January 2008.

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3. "Glossary entry for Ancient of Days" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20070702115508/http://www.sfu.ca/~hayward/van/glossary/ancient.html>) Archived from the original on 2007-07-02 Retrieved 2007-07-02
4. [1] (<http://www.inner.org/worlds/mocha.htm>) Rectification in Keter of Atzilut from inner.org
5. [2] (<http://www.inner.org/worlds/dikna.htm>) Rectification in Keter of Atzilut from inner.org
6. Nathaniel Deutsch (1999). *Guardians of the Gate: Angelic Vice-regency in the Late Antiquity* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=yhfMea8gTu4C&pg=PA34&dq=Merkabah+mysticism+Metatron&hl=en&sa=X&ei=FI4WU67dNK78yAGhj4HABQ&ved=0CC8Q6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=Daniel%20&f=false>) BRILL. pp. 45–47. Retrieved 5 March 2014.
7. McKay, Gretchen K. (1999). "'The Eastern Christian Exegetical Tradition of Daniel's Vision of the Ancient of Days'" (http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_early_christian_studies/summary/v007/7.1mckay.html). *Journal of Early Christian Studies*
8. Cartlidge and Elliott, 69-72
9. The manuscripts that include an image of the Ancient of Days are discussed in the unpublished dissertation by Gretchen Krehling McKay "Imaging the Divine: A Study of the Representations of the Ancient of Days in Byzantine Manuscripts," University of Virginia, 1997.
10. The Tome of the Great Council of Moscow (1666-1667 A.D.), Ch. 2, 43-45; tr Hierodeacon Lev Puhalo, *Canadian Orthodox Missionary Journal*
11. Summa Theologica III.59.1 obj 2, ad 2
12. "Book of Enoch" (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/deane/pseudepig.iv.html>). *Pseudepigrapha: An Account of Certain Apocryphal Sacred Writings of the Jews and Early Christians* Christian Classics Ethereal Library Retrieved 2 July 2011.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 27:11 (<http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/27.11?lang=eng#10>)
14. Millet, Robert L. (February 1998), "The Man Adam" (<http://lds.org/liahona/1998/02/the-man-adam?lang=eng>) *Liahona*

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 - *The Sorceress* by Michael Scott, Delacorte Press, 2009, ISBN 978-0-385-73529-2
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