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This issue is dedicated to the memory of
Prof. Gerald J. Blidstein
1938-2020

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Foreword

It is with great pride that we present the second issue of the new annual journal, *Jewish Thought*, sponsored by the Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. This issue is devoted to the topic of esotericism in Jewish thought. It consists of 22 articles – 16 in Hebrew and 6 in English. Many of the contributions are based on lectures on this topic given at the international conference in Jewish thought, sponsored by the center in May 2019. The head of the organizing committee was Prof. Oded Israeli, who was invited to be a guest editor of this issue.

As in the case of the journal's initial issue on faith and heresy in Jewish thought, which can be accessed at the following link: <https://in.bgu.ac.il/en/humsos/goldsteingoren/Pages/Journal.aspx>, most of the articles in this issue were written by established scholars, while some were written by young scholars who are at the beginning of their scholarly career. All articles that were submitted underwent a rigorous selection process involving at least two reviewers.

In the course of working on this issue we learnt with great sorrow of the untimely passing of two participants in the conference who had wished to submit articles. The first was Dr. Tsippi Kauffman from Bar-Ilan University, an expert in Hassidic thought, whose research focused on the Hassidic religious experience and its kabbalistic context. Tsippi's Hebrew talk at the conference, 'The Mystical-Ethical Model: On Ethics as the Secret Stratum in Hassidism' can be accessed at the following link: <https://youtu.be/zHdgawH7CpI>. The second was Prof. Ada Rapoport-Albert from University College London. Ada was a scholar of international renown in the field of Jewish thought. Her particular expertise was on the history of Sabbateanism and early Hassidism, with her focus being on topics involving gender. Her talk in Hebrew, 'Jacob Frank's "Massa Dumah" (The Burden of Silence)', can be accessed at the following link: <https://youtu.be/DbDSPqjjJBE>.

At the conference, a special session was devoted to the editor-in-chief of this journal, Prof. Haim Kreisel, on the occasion of his retirement from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Three of his former students delivered papers at the session: Dr. David Ben-Zazon,

Dr. Doron Forte and Prof. George Kohler. All three of them have articles in the current issue based on the themes of their papers.

Close to the end of the process of preparing this issue for publication we were informed of the death of our esteemed colleague Prof. Gerald J. Blidstein. Prof. Blidstein was a member the Israel Academy of the Sciences and the 2006 Israel Prize laureate in the category of Jewish thought. Prof. Blidstein specialized in rabbinic thought, both legal and midrashic, in all periods, with a particular emphasis on the thought of Maimonides. He was a model scholar, an excellent teacher and first-rate mentor for the many doctoral students who completed their dissertations under his supervision. He was also the ideal colleague, always ready to help all who turned to him in any way he could. He was an inspiration to all of us, and without doubt the heart of the Goldstein-Goren Department for Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. In addition, He was the founding head of the Goldstein-Goren International Center for Jewish Thought. His presence is sorely missed by all members of the department, and we are sure by all who knew him. It is only fitting that we devote this issue to his memory.

The editors

From Technique to Consciousness: Notes on the Development of Esoteric Writing in Twelfth-Century Jewish Thought

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Abstract

During the twelfth century, Jewish thinkers began using an esoteric technique in their writing, concealing their views under a textual cover. In fact, they created two meanings for the text: one overt and one covert. The article argues that they did so unreflectively at first, without signs of awareness. A consciousness of esoteric writing took shape during the twelfth century and the article shows how, with this growing awareness, concealment techniques became richer.

Should a theological or philosophical text written within a religious context necessarily be consistent? Should it be free of contradictions? Certainly not, and especially when it deals with issues the thinker considers abstract, loaded, touching on the most delicate questions of true faith and transcending easily understandable matters. The contradictions of authors who have produced outstanding works may be assumed to be deliberate rather than due to negligence since, from these writers' perspective, they are directly concerned with immortality or, God forbid, with annihilation and disappearance. These are issues that determine whether humans will reach communion with God or be rejected and estranged. Tensions and sensitivities prevalent in the religious world only further ambiguous writing.

In this article, I examine strains and inconsistencies deliberately used by considering several techniques of inconsistencies and intentional contradictions in twelfth-century Jewish thought, particularly in the writings of Judah Halevi and Maimonides. I intend to show how esoteric writing moved from the reality of a work based on contradictions to one that explicitly details its own contradictory nature. In other words, I want to show how esoteric writing shifted from practice to consciousness. I will first remark briefly on the characteristics of esoteric writing in the Middle Ages.

Introduction

Findings of studies on esoteric writing in medieval Jewish thought enable us to re-examine this literary and philosophical issue from a more mature and even reflective perspective. It may now be possible to present the elements of esoteric writing as reflecting a consciousness and then examine to what extent this consciousness is evident not only in discussions on metaphysics or the pinnacle of faith but also in those focusing on the actual use of an esoteric style. I will detail below a series of methodological rules that further understanding of esoteric writing in the Middle Ages.

Characteristics

Deliberately inconsistent writing is one instance of layered writing, whose features I have detailed elsewhere as follows:

- 1) The text has more than one meaning or connotation.
- 2) The text has an “external” meaning,” which appears suited to it at first glance, and an “inner” meaning or meanings.
- 3) The text includes explicit declarations about, or hints at, the inner meaning or meanings. At least in the former case, the text is “reflective,” that is, aware of its many meanings. When declarations or hints are present, the reader assumes that the author intentionally attempted to point to the esoteric layer and endorsed a “dual” style of writing.
- 4) If an explicit declaration or hints to inner meanings are present, the text has an “encoded meaning.” In the absence of declarations or hints about an inner meaning, the text has a “hidden meaning.”
- 5) An act of interpretation and explication of the text’s inner meaning or meanings is required.
- 6) The reader grasps the text’s “external” meaning immediately and intuitively. The reader’s standing, interests, and so forth can be analyzed, but this analysis is reflective, whereas exposing the inner

meaning requires the reader to “correspond with” or engage in a dialogue with the text.¹

In this article, I deal with the development of a consciousness of esoteric writing in twelfth-century medieval thought, and specifically with two important thinkers who set paradigms for such writing — Judah Halevi and Maimonides. Scholars have already dealt in depth with the connection between these two thinkers,² and I will now attempt to examine additional links that developed in the wake of their writing style.

Why relate to a text as a source of secrets to begin with? The reasons for displays of inconsistencies in a medieval text are the following:

1) Reasons rooted in the text’s image

How did exegetes view the holy texts that they interpreted — Torah, Midrash, and Aggadah? Many related to the text as a secret code. In their view, divine revelation or rabbinic intuitions yielded texts that, in and by themselves, demand an interactive reader. The giver of the Torah, as it were, expected its recipients to go on interpreting its secrets. The heavenly source was important; Aristotle’s writings, for example, were not always perceived as secret codes.

2) Realistic reasons

a) The contents are contingent on a type of experience (intellectual or mystical) that cannot be described consistently such as for example a visionary or ecstatic experience. The

1 Dov Schwartz, “Multilayered Writing: Preliminary Notes,” in *Reflections on Booklore: Studies Presented to Prof. Avidov Lipsker*, ed. Yigal Schwartz et. al (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2020), 523–43 [Heb]. See also Arthur M. Melzer, *Philosophy between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

2 Howard Kreisel, “Judah Halevi’s Influence on Maimonides: A Preliminary Appraisal,” *Maimonidean Studies* 2 (1991): 95–121; Daniel J. Lasker, “Love of God and Sanctification of the Name According to Rabbi Judah Halevi and Maimonides,” in *By the Well: Studies in Jewish Philosophy and Halakhic Thought Presented to Gerald J. Blidstein*, ed. Uri Ehrlich, Howard Kreisel, and Daniel J. Lasker (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2008), 293–302 [Heb]; Dov Schwartz, *Clash of Paradigms: Medieval Science and Jewish Theology* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2018), ch. 3 [Heb].

thinker then conveys his impressions in conflicting or contradictory modes.

b) Agnosticism. Writers sometimes contradict themselves because they remain undecided or skeptical, as evident in the suggestion of various approaches without a true attempt to combine them or prioritize them.

3) Didactic reasons

c) Systematic study is inappropriate in some fields, which require a dialectic perspective that is at times built as thesis-antithesis. One instance is the theory of negative attributes.³

d) There are realms of knowledge that are intrinsically difficult because they require a previous background in a specific area such as, for example, the sciences. Authors, therefore, contradict themselves so that those lacking the appropriate background will keep away from the work.

4) Political Reasons

e) The contents themselves are not necessarily hard to grasp but are liable to be perceived as potentially threatening to religious belief. Authors, therefore, contradict themselves —

i) To avoid being perceived as committed to some assumption and thereby endangering themselves.

ii) To preclude harming the faith of naïve individuals.

In the twelfth century, and probably already in the eleventh (at least in the thought of R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol),⁴ works were written that do not read as consistent treatises due to their contradictions and incongruities. This topic has been discussed at length; I intend to examine the stance that their authors adopted toward these writings, as clarified below.

3 See J. A. Buijs, "The Negative Theology of Maimonides and Aquinas," *Review of Metaphysics* 41 (1988): 723–38.

4 See Dov Schwartz, *Contradiction and Concealment in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2002), ch. 1 [Heb].

Esoteric Consciousness

The concept of esoteric consciousness refers to the author confronting his own self, his work, and his style, and then evaluating them. This consciousness conveys the author's self-reflection. The subject turns her thoughts and ideas into an object and, in some cases, even criticizes it. The question that concerns me in this article is whether a consciousness of esoteric writing did indeed develop in the twelfth century. Were thinkers aware of their conceptual and literary activity? I will argue that they were. True, not all of them displayed a reflective consciousness. Judah Halevi wrote in an esoteric style but he was not reflective and did not discuss the goals and efficacy of esoteric writing. Medieval commentaries of *The Kuzari* written in Provence in the circle of disciples of R. Shlomo b. Menachem (Prat Maimon) did not relate to it as an esoteric work either.⁵ There was no esoteric interpretive tradition of *The Kuzari*, then. As for R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol's exegesis of Scripture, only remnants of it are available; therefore, we do not know for sure whether it was a reflective work. By contrast, the works of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra and of Maimonides attest to them as esoteric thinkers. They consciously related to themselves as adopting an esoteric style, meaning that they developed an esoteric consciousness.⁶ Their medieval commentators also related to them as writers of esoteric texts and, in this way, they created a tradition of esoteric interpretation.

I open with Abraham ibn Ezra. In the introduction to his biblical commentary, this enigmatic thinker noted five hermeneutical approaches. In the third one, he describes commentators who adopt secrets that the texts cover up, that is, allegorical interpretation. He does not relate to himself, but rather hints at concrete figures or actual models of esoteric exegesis:

5 See Dov Schwarz, *Commentary on the Kuzari: Hesheq Shelomo by R. Shlomo ben Yehuda of Lunel – Annotated Critical Edition* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2007), Introduction [Heb].

6 See Dov Schwartz, "The Philosophical Interpretation of Ibn Ezra's Fourteenth Century Commentary on the Torah," *Alei Sefer* 18 (1995-1996): 71-114 [Heb]; Howard Kreisel, Editor-in-Chief, *Five Early Commentators on R. Abraham Ibn Ezra: The Earliest Supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra's Torah Commentary* (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev, 2017) [Heb].

The third approach is the way of darkness and gloom. It lies outside of the circle. This is the approach of those who invent secret explanations for everything in Scripture. They believe that the laws and statutes of the Torah are riddles. I will not expend much time answering them for, “they are people who do err in their heart” (Psalms 95:10). The fact of the matter is that the laws of the Torah do not disagree with what is right. They are correct in one thing, viz., that every precept, be it minor or major, must be weighed in the scale of one’s heart wherein the Eternal has planted some of his wisdom. Thus if there appears something in the Torah that is intellectually impossible to accept or contrary to the evidence of our senses, then we must search for a hidden meaning [*sod*]. This is so because intelligence is the basis [*yesod*] of the Torah.⁷ The Torah was not given to ignoramuses. Man’s intelligence is the angel which mediates between him and his God. Thus anything in the Torah which does not contradict reason we must explain literally, take as it is written, and believe that it is so. We should not grope walls as the blind do, and interpret verses according to our subjective needs. Why should we turn what is evident into mysteries? Now if there are places with two meanings both of which are clearly true, one referring to the body and the other to the mind such as “circumcision of the flesh,” and “uncircumcised of heart,” and if there is a secret meaning to the tree of life, they are to be taken literally as well. Now if anyone cannot accept what I have said, if he be wise let him open his eyes. In nature, too, we find things that serve more than one purpose, such as the nostrils, the tongue, and the legs that serve two purposes.⁸

7 Ibn Ezra used *sod* and *yesod* in the title of his book on the reasons for the commandments, *Yesod Mora ve-Sod Torah*. These two terms are linked in the opening of the poem by Solomon Ibn Gabirol, “*Lekha hevion ha-`oz ha-sod ve-ha-yesod*.” For an English translation, see *A Crown for the King*, trans. David R. Slavitt (New York/ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2: “Yours is the secret of secrets: your love of creation, the yearning of all the forms for material being, your love, that is, of your creatures, of us.”

8 *Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Pentateuch*, trans. H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver (New York: Menorah, 1988), “Introduction,” 10–11 (including references for the Scriptural interpolations). See also Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible: Abraham Ibn Ezra’s Introduction to the Torah*, London/New York: Routledge/Curzon, 2003), 158–62.

In this passage, Ibn Ezra refers directly to Christians as having interpreted the religious law allegorically.⁹ Their flaw is being a multitude, that is, ignorant. And yet, allegorical interpretation, which seeks secrets in the text, is not flawed per se so long as it is based on reason. Furthermore, the implication of Ibn Ezra's claim is that rationalist exegesis is possible so long as it does not hinder the authority of the divine command and focuses on the reasons for the commandments. Ibn Ezra further added that reason (*sekhel*) is comparable to an angel who somehow mediates between humans and God. He is thereby hinting at the existence of an esoteric tradition of interpretation that Christians had distorted. As we know, Ibn Ezra himself authored a book dealing with the mysteries underlying the reasons for the commandments (*Yesod Mora*).

Maimonides adopted a similar approach. Not only in the introduction to *The Guide of the Perplexed* but already in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Maimonides deals openly and at length with the esoteric style and its hermeneutical significance. In the introduction to *Pereq Heleq*, he notes that the wise speak in riddles. In the introduction to *The Guide of the Perplexed*, he notes, particularly regarding physics and metaphysics, "For this reason, all the Sages possessing knowledge of God the Lord, knowers of the truth, when they aimed at teaching something of this subject matter, spoke of it only in parables and riddles."¹⁰ As shown below, Maimonides adopted the comparison of rationality with an angel linking God and humans.

In the introduction to *Pereq Heleq*, Maimonides refers to three approaches or classes vis-à-vis rabbinic parables.¹¹ The first are the multitude who believe in aggadot literally, out of admiration for the sages. The second — made up of those who engage in experiential fields (medicine or astrology) — believe in aggadot literally and present their authors as primitive. Maimonides refers to them angrily as "an accursed class."¹² The third class is made up of those who believe in the depth dimension intimated in Aggadah and adopt the

9 Ibid., 159.

10 Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 8 (henceforth *Guide*).

11 For other aspects in the description of the classes, see, for example, Sara Klein-Braslavy, *King Solomon and Philosophical Esotericism in the Thought of Maimonides* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996), 155–57 [Heb].

12 J. Abelson, "Maimonides on the Jewish Creed," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 19 (1906), 36 (English translation of Maimonides' introduction to *Pereq Heleq*).

esoteric style. As for the emergence of esoteric consciousness in Maimonides' early texts and its relationship with the *Guide*, two remarks are in place:

1) Between sage and perfect sage.

The description of the esoteric discourse's meaning to the perfect sage involves a latent tension. On the one hand, the esoteric discourse is a characteristic of one who has attained or is close to attaining optimal perfection. This discourse, then, is a condition of his being one of the "great savants," such as King Solomon, "the wisest of men,"¹³ who wrote the Book of Proverbs. On the other hand, the esoteric discourse is a necessary component for all those involved in intellectual pursuits, "for the theme of the speech of men of learning consists entirely in matters of the highest import. But they are put in the form of riddle and parable."¹⁴ The esoteric component of the sciences follows from their very nature and, therefore, engaging in them inevitably brings with it the style as well. The necessity of an esoteric component in every sage, however, is not unequivocal. Maimonides probably held that only perfect sages truly understand the esoteric style and adopt it often. Should he say so explicitly, however, he would lead everyone else to desist from dealing with *aggadot* and he did not wish to hinder the lively concern with the rabbinic endeavor.

2) Between negation and tolerance.

Let us reconsider the description of the classes. Whereas the introduction to *Pereq Heleq* presents the second class in entirely negative terms and sharply criticizes its members, the introduction to the *Guide* brings a parallel (though not entirely overlapping) list of the classes and displays a more tolerant attitude toward the second one: "He can take the speeches in question [rabbinic homilies] in their external sense and, in so doing, think ill of their author and regard him as an ignoramus — in this there nothing that would upset the foundations of belief."¹⁵ Maimonides is referring here to "a perfect man of virtue," that is, to a wise man, whereas in the introduction to *Pereq Heleq*, the reference is to one who is wise in his own perception.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 37.

15 *Guide*, "Introduction to the First Part," 10.

If only they trained themselves in knowledge so as to know how necessary it is to use the appropriate speech in theology and in like subjects which are common to both the uneducated and the cultured, and to understand also the practical portion of philosophy, it would then be clear to them whether the Sages¹⁶ were really men of wisdom or no, and the significance of their assertions would be comprehensible to them.¹⁷

In both descriptions, the second class refers to individuals who disparage the rabbinic sages, claiming that they had not been perfect in their knowledge of the sciences. The descriptions differ, however, in their portrayal of the members of this class. In the introduction to *Pereq Heleq*, they have experimental interests and do not deal at all with the theoretical sciences. By contrast, in the *Guide*, Maimonides emphasized that one who is involved in the theoretical sciences, even when mistaken in the interpretation of rabbinic aggadot, can be tolerated since he is at least a learned person and may be directed to the suitable course.

These two comments attest to the presence of an esoteric consciousness in Maimonides already in his youth, meaning that the style and the concealment were for him deliberate pursuits worthy of discussion, imitation, and application. This consciousness is powerfully revealed in the introduction to the *Guide* and woven into the description of this work's purpose.¹⁸ I discuss this consciousness below in greater detail and will now briefly present the attitudes that emerged in the study.

The Political Dimension

Scholars have dealt with esoteric writing in the medieval era mainly in political terms, and the thinker most associated with this perspective was Leo Strauss. His conservative political approach led him to conclude that modern theories could also be applied to the

16 Meaning rabbinic sages [*Haza*]. This term appears in Hebrew in the original version, as opposed to *cUlamā'*, which translates the next appearance of the term *hakhamim*.

17 Abelson, "Jewish Creed," 36.

18 See Schwartz, *Clash of Paradigms*, 135–44.

Middle Ages.¹⁹ Strauss argued that the secret hidden in the writings of medieval thinkers who followed Platonic tradition was political in nature. According to these thinkers, the proper political regime was that of the city, and this regime was tied to the faith of the multitude and to the modes of its presentation by spiritual leaders. Shlomo Pines continued and radicalized this approach, which was criticized by scholars such as Herbert A. Davidson.²⁰ The nature of the contradictions in the *Guide* and their meaning have occupied many.²¹ Aviezer Ravitzky presented a comprehensive discussion of these hermeneutical approaches and claimed that, for medieval sages, the secret of the *Guide* was the pinnacle of the sciences whereas for the scholars mentioned the secret is the presentation of revelation as a “noble myth.”²²

I argued that Strauss’ approach has two directions although apparently he took only one into account. The disputes about the sciences that took place during the thirteenth century show that rationalists can be no less extreme and zealous than conservatives and, therefore, writing that challenges the authority of scientists can don an esoteric cover.²³ In fact, Strauss himself pointed to such a principle. When he claimed that *The Guide of the Perplexed* is a Kalām work, he should have foreseen the warranted implication — Maimonides attacked the Kalām and distanced himself from them so as not to be identified by his rationalist colleagues as a theologian.

19 See Raimondo Cubeddu, *Leo Strauss e la filosofia politica moderna* (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1983); Heinrich Meyer, *Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, und ‘Die Begriff des Politischen’: Zu einem Dialog unter Abwesenden* (Stuttgart/Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 1988); Shadia B. Drury, *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss* (New York: Macmillan, 1988); Alan Udoff, ed., *Leo Strauss’s Thought: Toward a Critical Engagement* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rinner, 1991)

20 See Shlomo Pines, “The Limitations of Human Knowledge according to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 2, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 82–102; Herbert A. Davidson, “Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge,” *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1992/1993): 49–103.

21 See, for example, Marvin Fox, *Interpreting Maimonides: Studies in Methodology, Metaphysics, and Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 47–90.

22 Aviezer Ravitzky, “The Secrets of the *The Guide of the Perplexed*: Between the Thirteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *Studies in Maimonides*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 181.

23 Schwartz, *Contradiction and Concealment*, Introduction.

Maimonides actually presented a “philosophical Kalām” contrary to the Muslim one.

Strauss began to deal with the diverse techniques of esoteric writing in his seminal work “Persecution and the Art of Writing.”²⁴ He pointed to inconsistencies and contradictions and to the use of approaches pinned on logical arguments in order to confuse the lay reader. The question is whether Strauss exhausted the variety of esoteric techniques and, moreover, to what extent he interpreted them successfully. I turn now to additional techniques adopted in the twelfth century in attempts to conceal the author’s true view.

Alternatives

The Kuzari is an esoteric work, as attested by the author’s vague allusion that “the wise will understand” featuring in *The Kuzari*’s frame story, as well as from explicit contradictions and inconsistencies within the book.²⁵ Besides the use of direct contradictions that I have pointed out elsewhere,²⁶ I claim that Judah Halevi used unique models of contradictions that are not found in the work of other twelfth-century authors, possibly attesting to his awareness of the radical potential of contradictions and inconsistencies.

Between Pantheism and Philosophy

A unique model of contradictions used by Halevi was to point to, as it were, two equivalent alternatives. Further on in the discussion, however, we learn that he endorsed only one of them. I showed Halevi’s use of this technique when dealing with the sin of the golden

24 Leo Strauss, “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” *Social Research* 8 (1941): 488–504.

25 See, for example, Shlomo Pines, “Note sur la doctrine de la prophétie et la réhabilitation de la matière dans le Kuzari,” *Mélanges de Philosophie et de Littérature Juives* 1-2 (1956-57): 253–60; Yohanan Silman, *Philosopher and Prophet: Judah Halevi, The Kuzari, and the Evolution of His Thought*, trans. Lenn J. Schramm (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995); idem, “The Literary Aspect of the Kuzari,” *Daat* 32-33 (1994): 53-65 [Heb]. See also Aryeh Leo Motzkin, “On Yehuda Halevi’s ‘Kuzari’ as a Platonic Dialogue,” *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 28 (1978): 209–19 [Heb].

26 See Dov Schwartz, *Messianism in Medieval Jewish Thought*, trans. Batya Stein (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2017), 42–56.

calf, where he presented two possible explanations — one astrological and the other that viewed it as a holy object with special qualities. According to Halevi's younger contemporary, Abraham Ibn Ezra, both these models function in the *Urim and Thummim* (the stones in the breastplate of the High Priest). Later in the discussion, however, Halevi determines that the calf was built following the astrologers' counsel. The holy object theory, claiming that the calf reflected the survival anxieties of the desert dwellers, is more easily defensible than astrology, all the more so since the latter is deterministic. Clearly, then, Halevi endorsed the astrological option.²⁷

Esoteric Writing and Polemic

I have argued that the esoteric drive behind Halevi's writing follows from the placement of *The Kuzari* under the rubric of polemical literature.²⁸ The polemic was against idolatry and against the Western religions, but was directed mainly against philosophy and rationalism as a tool of religious verification. Esoteric writing strengthens the model that Judah Halevi wishes to protect. I present here a further example of the alternatives model from *The Kuzari* IV: 3 and will examine its polemical implications. On the one hand, in the discussion on the attributes that opens Part Two of *The Kuzari*, Halevi presents a model of negative attributes. On the other hand, in the discussion that opens Part Four, Halevi presents experience and the intuitive approach or, in brief, prophecy, as successful paths to the divinity.²⁹ Halevi thereby managed to reject rationality as a tool for understanding the attributes, that is, to show that rationality has no positive attainments while revelation does create a connection between humans and God. The intermediate discussions, pointing to the uniqueness of the Jewish people and its Torah, were thus meant

27 *The Kuzari*, I: 96–97, 67–70. See Dov Schwartz, *Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, trans. David Louvish and Batya Stein (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 1–9.

28 See notes 25–26 above.

29 On the difference between the theory of attributes in these two parts of *The Kuzari*, see David Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre in der jüdischen Religionsphilosophie des Mittelalters von Saadja bis Maimuni* (Gotha: F. A. Perthes, 1877), 165 ff.

to prepare the ground for a perception of prophecy as knowledge of the divine.³⁰

In the discussions in Part Four, Halevi again presents two alternatives relating directly to the attributes:

If we reflect on the attributes [*al-ṣṣafāt*] which are essential whether they be taken in metaphorical or real sense) such as: living, omniscient, almighty, omnipotent, guiding, arranging, giving everything its due, wise and just, we shall find nothing resembling God more closely than the rational soul — in other words, the perfect human being.³¹

Halevi adopted here the model of God's five positive attributes (unity, life, power, knowledge, and unlikeness) that had already appeared in the second treatise of Saadia Gaon's *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. Halevi replaced unity and unlikeness with will and providence, and also added justice.

The positive attributes were presented in Halevi's approach as two alternatives — real or metaphorical. At the beginning of Part Two, as noted, Halevi showed that only negative attributes are valid regarding divine power and, therefore, he could not have argued that the positive attributes are perceived as real (*ḥaqīqah*). Only in this way, however, could he point to reason's failure to establish the foundations of faith and that it attains only negation. Clearly, then, the positive attributes are stated only metaphorically. So why did he present these as two legitimate alternatives? First, he could not present the positive attributes as the only option since that would undermine the polemical claim about reason's weakness. Second, Halevi wanted to show that accepting revelation immediately dismisses the rationalist threat and the positive attributes can then be included, even if only as an identical representation of the divine essence.

We find, then, that the technique of alternatives accompanies the esoteric discussion in *The Kuzari* and the esoteric model is also part

30 I deal with this question at length (except for the alternatives model) in *Concealment and Contradiction*, 62–67.

31 Judah Halevi, *The Kuzari*, trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld (New York: Schocken, 1964), IV: 3, 209. In the original version — Judah Halevi, *Al-Kitāb Al-Khazarī*, ed. D. Z. Baneth and H. Ben-Shammai (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 156, lns. 16–19.

of the book's literary style through a tendentious presentation of hierarchies.

Connecting Chapters

The most outstanding representative of esoteric writing in the twelfth century was Maimonides, and not only because of his unique genius. Apparently, the *Guide* became the paradigm of esoteric writing also due to the consciousness it developed. Maimonides explicitly notes the method he used in this work in the introduction to the book; despite the various interpretations of the concealment methods detailed in it, this remains a masterpiece of esoteric writing. I will now review several aspects in the introduction to the *Guide* in order to highlight the esoteric consciousness. The main discussion, however, will focus on Maimonides' presentation of a speaker and rhetorician using an esoteric style.

The Importance of the Style

In the introduction, Maimonides examined the verse “apples of gold in settings [*maskiyyoth*] of silver” (Proverbs 25:11), and expanded at length on the “settings” and on the “silver.” He thus clarified to the reader that the concealing cover is extremely important and the external meaning “contains wisdom that is useful in many respects.”³²

32 *Guide*, “Introduction to the First Part,” 12. Maimonides then focused on methods of concealment at the expense of contents in his well-known illustration from Jacob's ladder (“In this text, the word ‘ladder’ indicates one subject; the words ‘set up on the earth’ indicate a second subject; the words ‘and the top of it reached to heaven’ indicate a third subject ...” and so forth). Whereas in the introduction he notes the symbols without paying any attention to their meaning, in the text of the *Guide* he considers the meaning of the ladder at length. In other words, he clarifies that the introduction deals solely with the esoteric method, and that is the concern of esoteric consciousness. On Jacob's ladder, see, for example, Sara Klein-Braslavy, “Maimonides' Commentary on Jacob's Dream of the Ladder,” in *Moshe Schwarcz Memorial Volume [Bar-Ilan Annual 22–23]*, ed. Moshe Hallamish (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1987), 329–49 [Heb]; Dov Schwartz, “The Separate Intellects and Maimonides' Argumentation,” in *Between Rashi*

He never mentions the “gold.” The focus on the method is thus crucial, indeed the center of the discussion. The method is revealed as consciousness. Maimonides strongly emphasizes this determination, seemingly contradicting the “Instruction with Respect to this Treatise” at the end of the introduction, where he writes:

I adjure — by God may He be exalted! — every reader of this Treatise of mine not to comment upon a single word of it and not to explain to another anything in it save that which has been explained and commented upon in the words of the famous Sages of our Law who preceded me. But whatever he understands from this Treatise of those things that have not been said by any of our famous Sages other than myself should not be explained to another; nor should he hasten to refute me, for that which he understood me to say might be contrary to my intention. He thus would harm me in return for my having wanted to benefit him and would “repay evil for good” ...³³

God, may He be exalted, knows that I have never ceased to be exceedingly apprehensive about setting down those things that I wish to set down in this treatise. For they are concealed things; none of them has been set down in any book — written in the religious community — in these times of Exile ... How then can I now innovate and set them down?³⁴

One of the issues the scholarship considers is Maimonides’ attitude to the Jewish thought that preceded him and, in fact, his “thundering silence” regarding constitutive works of Andalusian thought such as *Meqor Hayyim (Fons Vitae)* by Ibn Gabirol, *The Kuzari* by Judah Halevi, and Ibn Ezra’s exegetical endeavor and his book *Yesod Mora*.³⁵ These statements, however, are mutually contradictory. In the first passage from “Instruction with Respect to this Treatise,” Maimonides argues that there is a tradition of Jewish thought, and the issues where he continues his predecessors can be studied and taught. In the second

and Maimonides, ed. Ephraim Kanarfogel and Moshe Sokolow (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2010), 59–92.

33 *Guide*, “Introduction with Respect to the Treatise,” 15.

34 *Ibid.*, 16.

35 See above, note 2. Shlomo Pines addresses this question in his “Translator’s Introduction,” which deals with the philosophical sources of Maimonides.

passage, however, Maimonides notes that all he writes in the “Instruction” are “concealed things” lacking any tradition of thought. Regardless of whether the secrets of the sages were lost in the ordeals of exile or some still remained, Maimonides clearly acknowledges in the first passage an Andalusian tradition of interpreting secrets, which he denies in the second.

This contradiction can be better understood in light of the *Guide*’s aims as attested by its author. The book has a “negative” goal — to warn about the Kalām and to draw a distinction between theological and philosophical truth — and a “positive” one — to decipher prophetic parables and deal with the secrets of the Torah and the sciences requiring concealment (physics and metaphysics).³⁶ The first passage, dealing with a tradition of thought, relates to the negation of the Kalām. In twelfth-century pre-Maimonidean Jewish thought, we find Aristotelian inclinations. By contrast, the second passage relates to the secrets of the Torah; Maimonides sees himself as a pioneer in this regard and, indeed, as initiating a tradition. He related to Andalusian thought, then, as a constructive trend in its abdication of Muslim theological thought patterns, but held that they had not truly initiated a proper tradition of thought. Obviously, this was not a consciousness of self-innovation *ex nihilo*. Maimonides certainly held that the secrets had been conveyed by the rabbinic sages but, until the *Guide*, no proper tradition of decoding had emerged and he traced a path for the *Guide* to follow.

The introduction in which Maimonides numbered the causes of contradictions definitely reflects the esoteric consciousness. At times, the impression is that Maimonides himself strove for a consciousness anticipating the modern one. For example, a precise examination will find that the significant difference between the sixth and seventh contradiction is that the sixth has no awareness of concealment and is therefore mistaken, whereas the seventh does show awareness of the need to hide these matters from the multitude.

Nevertheless, Maimonides exposed his esoteric consciousness not only in the introduction to the *Guide* but also throughout the book, which singles out this work from other esoteric writings. This is the topic of the discussion that follows.

36 See Schwartz, *Clash of Paradigms*, 135–44.

Consciousness

Maimonides presented in the *Guide* a rare description of the use of esoterism and even pointed to the contents that were hidden. He clearly describes how a biblical figure (Elihu) uses a concealment technique. Maimonides, as it were, is an “outside” onlooker, and he describes the ways this biblical figure hid its contents. This is a distinctly reflective portrayal of esoteric writing that enables us to trace the concealment techniques used in the *Guide*.

Maimonides ascribed esoterism to the biblical figure Elihu. Various scholars have tracked the meaning of Satan in Maimonides’s commentary on Job. Abraham Nuriel clashed with Sara Klein-Braslavy on the question of whether the esoteric method includes the figure of Satan.³⁷ He suggested identifying the first Satan (who appears in the first chapter of Job) with chance, and the second Satan with privation.³⁸ Nuriel appears to have been right since Maimonides argued that the first Satan, unlike the second, has permanence. This permanence means that “they [the sons of God] exist as subject to His order in what He wills.”³⁹ Hence, the first Satan is concerned with chance (such as blindness or congenital leprosy), which cannot be corrected. The second Satan is concerned with privation, which can be corrected since it is a “positive” component of existence and, due to it, the object moves toward perfection. Other scholars have focused on Job as a parable and on the identification of the various characters,⁴⁰ but not on the esoteric consciousness that Maimonides affords us a glimpse of here.

37 See Sara Klein-Braslavy, “Identification of Nahash and Smael in the Guide of the Perplexed,” *Daat* 10 (1983), 12 [Heb]; Avraham Nuriel, *Concealed and Revealed in Medieval Philosophy* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000), 114 [Heb]. See also Shalom Rosenberg, “Job Was a Parable: Philosophy and Literary Interpretation,” in *Studies in Bible and Education in Honor of Prof. Moshe Arendt*, ed. Dov Rappel (Jerusalem: Touro College, 1996), 146–58 [Heb].

38 Nuriel, *Concealed and Revealed*, 115–16.

39 *Guide*, III: 22, 488.

40 See, for example, Joel Laks, “The Enigma of Job: Maimonides and the Moderns,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1964): 345–64; Leonard S. Kravitz, “Maimonides and Job: An Inquiry as to the Method of the *Moreh*,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 38 (1967): 149–58; Hanna Kasher, “Job’s Image and Opinions in Maimonides,” *Daat* 15 (1985): 81–87; Mordechai Cohen, “The Literal Interpretation of a Philosopher: Maimonides’ Literary Approach to the Book of Job and Its Place in the History of Biblical Exegesis,” *Shnaton: Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 15 (2005): 213–64 [Heb].

Esoterism as consciousness seems to emerge in Elihu's speech. This time, esoterism is not only textual but also rhetorical and, paradoxically, is open — Maimonides describes a speech recorded in the Book of Job, a speech marked by esoteric dimensions:

Thereupon another opinion supervenes, namely, the one attributed to Elihu. Hence, he is considered by them as superior. For it is mentioned that he was the youngest among them in point of age and the most perfect among them in knowledge. He started to reprove Job and to tax him with ignorance because of his having manifested his self-esteem and because of his not being able to understand how misfortunes could have befallen him though he performed good deeds. For he had expiated at length on the goodness of his actions. He also described the opinions of [Job's] three friends on providence as senile drivel; and made extraordinary speeches that are full of enigmas, in such a way that if someone considers his discourse, he wonders and thinks that he does not in any respect make an addition to what was said by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, but merely repeats the different terms and with amplifications the notions contained in their speeches. For he does not go beyond blaming Job, ascribing the attributes of justice to God, describing His wonders in the universe, and stating that He, may He be exalted, does not care either for the obedience of those who obey or for the disobedience of those who disobey. Now all these notions had been expressed by his companions. However, when you consider the matter, the additional notion that he introduced will become clear to you; this notion is the one that is intended; it had not occurred before to one of the others. Together with that notion, however, he says all they have said, just as each of all the others — namely, Job and his three friends — repeats, as I have mentioned to you, the notion expressed by another among them. This is done in order to hide the notion that is peculiar to the opinion of each individual, so that at first it occurs to the multitude that all the interlocutors are agreed upon the selfsame opinion; however, this is not so.⁴¹

41 *Guide*, III: 23, 494–95.

The sage, then, is also a rhetorician; he expands on details known to everyone to obscure and conceal his innovations. Outwardly, he is like the other speakers. Closer scrutiny, however, will reveal the difference — his words hide other contents. Elihu is unlike the other speakers. They represent the views of the multitude whereas he represents the view of the most perfect in knowledge, as Maimonides describes him at the opening of this passage. In the introduction to *Pereq Heleq*, as noted, Maimonides claimed that the sage speaks in parables, meaning he does not disclose his views and hides them under a cover. Since the speakers in the Book of Job represent the views on providence that were suggested in Chapter 17, as Maimonides explicitly mentions there, then these views — including the one in the Torah — do not reflect the view of the sage.

The advantage in this description of Maimonides, as noted, is that he himself hints to the secret matters that Elihu tried to conceal from the listeners who represent the multitude. True, he did not expressly refer to them and left room for the understanding reader to hypothesize but at least pointed to the direction of the concealment. The two secret matters are:

1) “That which he expresses parabolically when he speaks of the intercession of an angel” (according to Job 33:23). The angel, by way of a parable, saves humans from distress, and Charles Touati has already noted that most medieval exegetes identified the angel with reason.⁴²

2) “He also makes an addition — prior to speaking of this notion — by beginning to describe the how of prophecy.” Elihu, then, hinted that prophecy, which is tied to the perfection of reason, also implies providence over prophets, “proportionate to their degree in prophecy.”⁴³

42 Charles Touati, “Les deux théories de Maïmonide sur la Providence,” in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altmann on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Sigfried Stein and Raphael Loewe (London/Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1979), 337. See also Charles M. Raffel, “Providence as Consequent upon the Intellect: Maimonides' Theory of Providence,” *AJS Review* 12 (1987): 25–72.

43 *Guide*, III:18, 475; Touati, “Les deux théories,” 337.

So what is Elihu's view according to Maimonides? In order to answer this question, a re-examination of the views on providence presented in the *Guide* III:17-18 is required. Maimonides noted that he would cite five opinions on providence but a further review reveals seven, and it is the addition of these two that is at the focus of esoteric writing. The table below presents the views formulated in Chapter 17 and their parallels in Chapter 23:

	Opinion	Book of Job	Content
1	Epicurus	---	There is no providence; all is chance
2	Aristotle	Job (explicitly)	Personal providence over separate intellects and spheres. In the sub-lunar world, there is providence only over species.
3	Ash ^c ariyya	Zophar (explicitly)	Everything is predetermined and there is no room for choice ("He has willed this"). ⁴⁴
4	Mu ^c tazila ⁴⁵	Bildad (explicitly)	Everything is subject to a rigorous weighing of reward and punishment ["wisdom"], if not in this world, then in the world to come.

44 *Guide* III: 17, 467.

45 Maimonides added to the Muctazila "some of the later Gaonim, may their memory be blessed," intending Saadia Gaon by this reference. Maimonides' view on this approach of the Muctazila is conveyed in the method of connecting chapters. Only in the *Guide* III: 24, when he deals with the concept of the trial, does Maimonides clarify that a view that delays reward and punishment to the world to come entails "injustice." He does not explain why he considers the approach of the Muctazila morally flawed, but the answer seems clear. Maimonides had already noted in his early writings and in the *Code* that only the intellect remains after death, meaning that all that endures is the scientific knowledge the individual has accumulated. If so, the Muctazila behave immorally and delude the faith community with vain promises. On immortality in Maimonides' thought and its sources, see, for example, Dov Schwartz, "Avicenna and Maimonides on Immortality: A Comparative Study," in *Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish Relations*, ed. Ronald L. Nettler (Chur: Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers 1995), 185–97; Sarah Stroumsa, "True Felicity: Paradise in the Thought of Avicenna and Maimonides," *Medieval Encounters* 4 (1998): 51–77; Amira Eran, "Al-Ghazali and Maimonides on the World to Come and Spiritual Pleasures," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 8:2 (2001): 137–66.

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5	Torah	Eliphaz (explicitly)	Humans have choice and animals have will. Human actions are subject to a rigorous weighing of reward and punishment, including reward in the world to come [“the Mu ^t azila also hold this opinion”]. ⁴⁶
6	Maimonides (Chapter 17) ⁴⁷	---	Providence over humans only because they, by definition, have reason while providence over animals is only over species. Humans have choice. Their actions are subject to a rigorous weighing of reward and punishment.
7	Maimonides (Chapter 18)	Elihu (hinted)	Providence over humans is proportionate to the level of their reason.

Henceforth, then, it can be stated that Elihu’s view resembles that of Maimonides (7) in the *Guide* III: 18. The angel notes that providence depends on human reason. Maimonides presents here the acquisition of rational knowledge as actual providence, as salvation when in distress. Salvation, however, is only relevant regarding the supreme apprehensions or intellectual communion, “However, this does not continue always, there being no continuous intercession going on forever.”⁴⁸

Elihu’s speech, as noted, is a kind of laboratory allowing a glimpse into the ways and contents of concealment. And yet, although Elihu has acquired knowledge, his speech includes only sublunar phenomena. Maimonides refers to the following verses:

46 *Guide* III: 17, 468.

47 This view is conveyed ambiguously. On the one hand, Maimonides states “As for my own belief with regard to this fundamental principle, I mean divine providence, it is as I shall set it forth to you.” On the other hand, he then proceeds to rely on “what has clearly appeared as the intention of the book of God and of the books of our prophets.” And then goes on: “This opinion, which I believe, is less disgraceful than the preceding opinions and nearer than they to intellectual reasoning” (*Guide* III, 17, 471). In any event, the will of animals does not appear in the Torah opinion and, therefore, the distinction is in the reward to animals, which is not part of the Torah opinion.

48 *Guide*, III: 23, 495.

In a moment they die; at midnight the people are shaken and pass away, and the mighty are taken away by no human hand. For his eyes are upon the ways of a man, and he sees all his steps. There is no gloom or deep darkness where evildoers may hide themselves. For he has not appointed a time for any man to go before God in judgment. He shatters the mighty without investigation, and sets others in their place.⁴⁹

Maimonides comments on them:

Thereupon he [Elihu] begins to confirm this opinion and to make clear its method by describing many natural circumstances, such as his describing thunder, lightning, rain, and the blowing of the winds. He combines this with many subjects belonging to the circumstances of animals — I mean an outbreak of pestilence referred to in his dictum, “In a moment they die...” the occurrence of great wars referred to in his dictum, “He shatters the mighty...” and many other such circumstances.⁵⁰

Maimonides sought to emphasize that Elihu’s discourse related only to meteorology but not to the spheres and certainly not to the separate intellects. He limited Elihu’s discourse solely to sublunar events, for two reasons. The first is that the sage does not share supralunar knowledge with the multitude because they are incapable of grasping it. Job’s companions are not counted among the wise, and therefore Elihu insistently concentrated on secrets that can be talked about. The second reason is that Maimonides wanted to hint that the discourse on providence is not a component of the scientific worldview. It makes no statement about developments in the universe in general but only about the material world.

Maimonides then turned to show that the fact that Job sided with Aristotle does not mean he was a philosopher or a scientist like Aristotle. Quite the contrary, Job’s knowledge was confined to the material world up to the sphere of the moon and, therefore, his grasp was limited. Job needed Elihu to gain access to the way of truth. Note that Maimonides answered here two questions touching on God’s answer to Job out of the whirlwind, that is, to Job’s prophecy:

49 Job 34: 20–24.

50 *Guide*, III: 23, 495–96.

1) What was the divine answer to Job? How did this answer relate to his circumstances and to the issue of providence at stake here?

2) What is the relationship between God's revelation and the speeches of Job's companions? Ostensibly, Job's prophecy is entirely detached from the discourse and the considerations on providence that were considered in the course of the *Guide* up to that point.

To answer these two questions, consider Maimonides' exegesis of God's revelation to Job out of the whirlwind:

Similarly you will find that in the prophetic revelation that came to Job and through which his error in everything that he had imagined became clear to him, there is no going beyond the description of natural matters — namely, description of the elements or description of the meteorological phenomena⁵¹ or description of the natures of the various species of animals, but of nothing else. For what is mentioned therein in the way of a description of the firmaments and the heavens and Orion and the Pleiades occur because of their influence upon the atmosphere;⁵² for He draws his attention only to what is beneath the sphere of the moon. Elihu too derives his warnings from various species of animals.⁵³ For he says, “He teacheth us from the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wise from the fowls of heaven.” In this speech He dwells at the greatest length on a description of Leviathan, who is a combination of corporeal properties divided between the animals that walk, swim, and fly.⁵⁴ The purpose of all these things is to show that our intellects do not reach the point of apprehending how these natural things that exist in the world of generation and corruption are produced in time and of conceiving how the existence of the natural force within them has originated them. They are not things that resemble what we make. How then can we wish that His governance of, and providence for, them, may He be exalted, should resemble our governance of, and providence for, the things we do govern and

51 Meaning the atmosphere.

52 Not the constellations in the spheres.

53 Meaning that not only Job dealt with sublunar beings but so did Elihu.

54 Leviathan then, is not a monster or some exceptional animal but a generic term for animal features.

provide for? Rather is it obligatory to stop at this point and to believe that nothing is hidden from Him, may He be exalted. As Elihu here says: “For His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” But the notion of His providence is not the same as the notion of our providence; nor is the notion of His governance of the things created by Him the same as the notion of our governance of that which we govern. The two notions are not comprised in one definition, contrary to what is thought by all those who are confused,⁵⁵ and there is nothing in common between the two except the name alone. In the same way, our act does not resemble His act; and the two are not comprised in one and the same definition. Just as natural acts differ from those of craftsmanship, so do the divine governance of, the divine providence for, and the divine purpose with regard to, those natural matters differ from our human governance of, providence for, and purpose with regard to, the things we govern, we provide for, and we purpose. This is the object of the Book of Job as a whole.⁵⁶

We can now answer the questions that Maimonides implicitly poses in the discussion. First, Maimonides found a common denominator between God’s revelation out of the whirlwind and Elihu’s speech: both deal with knowledge in general and with knowledge of the sublunar world in particular, clarifying the connection between Job and Elihu as well as the answer to Job. Divine providence differs from human providence, and they only share a name. Why? Because divine providence depends on the acquisition of knowledge, whereas human providence is rooted in action and deeds. Maimonides intimated this when he noted that the difference between divine and human providence is equivalent to the difference between natural acts and those of craftsmanship, since providence based on knowledge is natural whereas human providence is rooted in action.

The discussion on Job, then, is a classic example of the connection of chapters. The issue of providence cannot be understood

55 *Tahayyara*, in *Dalālat al-Ḥa’irīn*, ed. Salomon Munk and Issachar Yoel (Jerusalem: Yunovits, 1931), 360, ln. 20. This is one of the places where Maimonides points to the perplexity he hints at in the book’s title.

56 *Guide*, III: 23, 496–97.

solely from Chapters 17 and 18. We must proceed to Chapter 23, compare the chapters, and then grasp Maimonides' view. Only a move like that will clarify that Maimonides indeed rejected "the view of our Torah" since the view of Eliphaz was perceived as equivalent to that of the multitude and Elihu's true view was perceived as opposed to that of Eliphaz.

The question now is why Maimonides presented two views in his own name when, clearly, his true view is formulated only in Chapter 18. That, however, is an issue for separate discussion, but connecting chapters appears to me as less significant than Maimonides' analysis of Elihu's speech. This reflective analysis of esoteric writing clearly points to the ways of concealment according to Maimonides himself.

Conclusion

Maimonides was well aware of writing and the discourse it evokes. In that sense, he was among the first rationalists to adopt a reflective approach to the style of writing. In this article, I attempted to show that Maimonides was aware of the esoteric consciousness. Its inklings, found in the writings of Judah Halevi and Ibn Ezra, became a consciousness in Maimonides. The discussion on providence and Job is a classic model not only of a reflective esoteric consciousness but also of a method of connecting chapters that is mentioned in the introduction to the *Guide*. Only from Chapters 22-23 in Part III of the *Guide* can we understand Chapters 17-18. We can then understand that the view of the Torah in Chapter 17 is not the correct view, and in Chapter 23 it is clear that this view is also immoral. In any event, Maimonides powerfully strove to an esoteric consciousness on this matter, without precedent in the thought of Judah Halevi and Ibn Ezra. In this sense, esoteric writing in the twelfth century proceeds from an esoteric technique to an esoteric consciousness.

Translated from the Hebrew by Batya Stein.

Abraham Ibn Ezra's "Secrets" in the Early and Later Torah Commentaries

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Abstract

In this article, I compare Ibn Ezra's treatment of two esoteric doctrines in his early commentary to Genesis and Exodus, written in Lucca, and his later commentary on these books, written in Rouen. The first doctrine is the nature of the biblical angels, and the second is the rational soul and its ultimate end. The article opens with a brief account of Ibn Ezra's composition of the commentary on the Torah and the approach he adopts, and moves on to describe the changes in his approach in his later commentary on the books of Genesis and Exodus. It then presents an outline of the topics on which Ibn Ezra alludes to secret doctrines and the philosophical background of some of his secrets, before turning to a detailed analysis of the two topics under consideration. I argue that while Ibn Ezra expands upon some of these secrets in his later commentaries, only readers adept in the sciences and philosophy can truly appreciate them. This is even more true regarding the readers of his earlier commentaries. Yet Ibn Ezra elaborated on some of the secrets in his later commentaries not because the Jewish intellectual elite of Northern France were more familiar with the scientific and philosophical background of the secrets than the Italian Jewish intellectual elite, enabling them to better appreciate his exposition. Rather, he did so because he wished to prod his readers in the Christian world to study the sciences and philosophy, and he saw that the succinct hints he had provided in his first commentary were not sufficient to accomplish this goal.

A

Abraham Ibn Ezra wrote his magisterial commentary on the Torah, *Sefer ha-Yashar*, in the Italian city of Lucca between 1142 and 1145. He had already completed a number of treatises in Rome after leaving Spain in 1140. These included commentaries on Ecclesiastes, Esther, Job and Lamentations, a translation with notes on Judah Hayyuj's three grammatical treatises, and his own grammatical treatise, *Sefer*

Moznayim. While in Lucca, he completed still other biblical commentaries (on Minor Prophets, Ruth and Isaiah), grammatical works (*Sefer ha-Yesod*, *Sefat Yeter* and a defense of R. Saadiah Gaon), astronomical works (*Luḥot* and *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Luḥot*) and a treatise on mathematics (*Sefer ha-Mispar*). A number of additional commentaries may have been completed there, if not already in Rome, including his commentary on Song of Songs and his early commentaries on Daniel and Psalms. It also appears that in this period he wrote commentaries on some books of the early prophets, such as Joshua and Samuel, which are now lost.¹

In the introduction to *Sefer ha-Yashar*, in rhymed prose, Ibn Ezra sets forth and critiques four approaches to interpreting the Torah, before going on to indicate a fifth approach, the one that he will adopt in his commentary:

The fifth path is the one upon which my commentary is based, and in my eyes is the right one in the presence of God, Whom alone I fear. I will not be partial [to any previous commentator in the interpretation] of Torah, but to the utmost of my ability shall diligently seek out the grammar of each word, and afterwards explain it to the best of my understanding.²

- 1 An excellent catalogue of Ibn Ezra's treatises, with the dates and places of their composition, as well as a list of editions and secondary literature, can be found in Shlomo Sela and Gad Freudenthal, "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Scholarly Writings: A Chronological Listing," *Aleph* 6 (2006): 13–55. Ibn Ezra alludes to a commentary he wrote on the Book of Joshua in his commentary on Deuteronomy 32:4, and on the Book of Samuel in his commentary on Genesis 31:19 and Deuteronomy 6:16. Judah L. Fleischer published a series of articles in Hebrew on Ibn Ezra's wanderings around Western Europe. For an English summary of these wanderings, see Irene Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible: Abraham Ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 1–21.
- 2 All the translations in this study are mine unless noted otherwise. I have used Asher Weiser's edition of Ibn Ezra's Torah commentary (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1976) as the basis for my translation, though I have consulted also with the edition of Ibn Ezra's commentary in Menahem Cohen's edition of *Mikra'ot Gedolot Haketer*, Genesis and Exodus (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1997–2007). For this particular passage I consulted also the translation of Lancaster, *Deconstructing the Bible*, 171; and that of H. Norman Strickman and Arthur Silver, *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch: Genesis* (New York: Menorah Publishing Company, 1988), 11.

Though Ibn Ezra concentrated on discovering the plain meaning of the text, he accepted the view that the words of the Torah often hold multiple levels of meaning.³ For Ibn Ezra, the Torah addresses itself primarily to the masses and frames its presentation accordingly, but some of its verses also contain an esoteric level that the enlightened are able to discern. In some places, both the literal and esoteric meanings are true. In others, the literal meaning is false (as in the case of all corporeal descriptions of the Deity) and serves to educate the masses in a manner consistent with their comprehension. This is true not only of the Torah, according to Ibn Ezra, but also of the other books of the Bible. Some of the rabbinic homilies (*midrashim*) on the Torah also contain an esoteric level. In the case of these homilies, the esoteric meaning alone is the true intended meaning, as Ibn Ezra notes in the introduction while critiquing the fourth path, namely, the homiletical one: "There is a *derash* [a homiletical explanation of a passage in the Torah] that is the opposite of a *derash*, and it contains a secret which is not explicit." Among the examples adduced by him is the homily that the Torah preceded the world by two thousand years (Genesis Rabbah 1.1). Ibn Ezra's commentary, however, is rarely concerned with the Torah's esoteric level or the esoteric meaning of the rabbinic homilies, though it does not avoid this level completely. Throughout his commentary, Ibn Ezra makes occasional mention of these secrets and offers some hints as to their nature, often in a succinct manner.

During 1155-1157, Ibn Ezra returned to writing commentaries on the Torah in Rouen in Northern France. The previous five years he had spent in Southern France, primarily in the city of Narbonne, where he worked for the most part on astrological treatises. In his revised commentary on Genesis, Ibn Ezra experimented with a different form of presentation, separating his comments on the literal meaning of the words of the verses from a more general commentary on the matters discussed in the verses. Only the commentary up to the middle of the third portion, *Lekh Lekha*, survived, and the remainder was lost at an early date.⁴ The introduction to his revised

3 As he notes at the end of the introduction, the Torah has seventy faces.

4 For this reason, this commentary is known as *Shitah Aheret* (a Different Method). This commentary was almost completely unknown in the Middle Ages. Abraham Weiser published it in his edition of Abraham Ibn Ezra's commentary on Genesis. For a description of this later commentary, see Uriel

commentary also survived. There he repeats the circle analogy to describe the four historical approaches to the exegesis of the Torah and their strengths and shortcomings, and the fifth one that he will adopt in his commentary. He again alludes to the Torah's secrets in discussing the fourth path, that of homiletical interpretations, but with notable differences. This time he discusses the path entirely in the context of the homilies of the Talmudic sages rather than including post-Talmudic homilists. Absent also is any critique of this path.⁵ He maintains that even the Talmudic homilies which are not at the center of the circle but around it "at times only appear to be outside, and the secret is in its midst." Ibn Ezra subsequently explains that the words of the Sages that appear to contradict reason contain secrets "by way of parables and riddles, which not all the listeners will understand, but to the men of speculation (*ba'alei ha-meḥqar*) will be known." He brings as examples the homily that seven things were created before the creation of the world, among them the Temple and Israel (Pesahim 54a). Another homily states that five things God thought to create while two He actually created, namely, the Torah and the Throne of Glory (*Yalqut Shimoni*, Jeremiah 17, no. 298). He adds, "the sagacious ones (*anshei ha-tushiyah*) bring proofs that wisdom is the first world of all existents. The Torah is the wisdom of the faith, for it is the source of all hidden knowledge." While Ibn Ezra's reference to "wisdom" would certainly be obscure to most of his readers, those who are acquainted with the beginning of Genesis Rabbah will understand that he is referring to the supernal Wisdom, an apparent reference to the Logos. More important, they will understand the reference to *anshei ha-tushiyah* (as well as the previous reference to *ba'alei ha-meḥqar*) as subtly signaling an agreement between the views of the Sages and that of the philosophers on this issue.⁶ Only those acquainted with medieval philosophy, however,

Simon, "R. Abraham Ibn Ezra: The Short Commentary on the Torah, The Long Commentary on Genesis and Exodus, and Fragments of the Oral Commentary on Genesis" [Hebrew], in Cohen ed., *Mikra'ot Gedolot Haketer*, Exodus, Part 1, 10–22.

- 5 This perhaps was due in part to his sensitivity to the fact that his immediate readers included the rabbinic scholars of Northern France.
- 6 His early commentary on the Torah contains only one reference to the "men of speculation" or "sagacious ones", and it is in reference to a geographical matter (Genesis 35:2). He also speaks of the "way of sagacity" (*derekh ha-tushiyah*) in his commentary on Genesis 1:1, in reference to the connection in Hebrew between language and lips (*safah*).

will understand that he is referring either to the supernal Universal Intellect (in Neoplatonic thought) or to the Separate Intellects (in Aristotelian thought). This point will be explored in more detail below.

We possess in full Ibn Ezra's revised commentary on Exodus, written in Rouen. There he reverted back to the format of a single presentation, as in his earlier Torah commentary. This commentary replaced the earlier commentary on Exodus in most of the surviving manuscripts of Ibn Ezra's Torah commentary. Almost all of the supercommentaries were written on this version of the commentary.⁷ It is this version that is to be found in the earliest printing of Ibn Ezra's commentary in *Miqra'ot Gedolot*, and in all subsequent printings to the present day.⁸ Perhaps his most important innovation in the later version of the Exodus commentary is that of the long discourses he introduces in a number of places, containing discussions of esoteric matters. At least some of the secrets dealt with in a very succinct manner in the earlier version are elaborated upon in the later commentary. As for the other books of the Torah, we know of no commentaries on them that were written in this period.

To complete the picture, we have a commentary on the last portion of Genesis that Ibn Ezra's student Joseph of Maudeville is said to have heard from him in London and written down. This has led some scholars to assume that Ibn Ezra composed yet a third commentary on Genesis, though in this case it appears that the commentary was an oral one. Further complicating matters is the fact that fragments containing comments ascribed to Ibn Ezra on other

7 The most important exception is the supercommentary of R. Joseph ben Eliezer the Spaniard (*Zofnat Pane'ah*), written in Jerusalem towards the end of the fourteenth century, which he based on the earlier commentary on Exodus. R. Joseph encountered this commentary only after leaving Spain. After studying it, he reached the conclusion that the later commentary on Exodus was compiled by Ibn Ezra's students. See David Herzog, *Joseph Bonfils Šophnath Paneah* (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1911), 181. All the earliest supercommentaries written until the middle of the fourteenth century, however, are based on the later commentary on Exodus, though some on occasion make reference also to the earlier commentary. The situation in Spain in the latter half of the fourteenth century is more complex. Some of the supercommentaries belonging to this period, such as those of Samuel Ibn Zarza and Samuel Ibn Motot, were written on both commentaries. See Simon, "R. Abraham Ibn Ezra: The Short Commentary on the Torah," (above, note 4), 10.

8 More recent editions, such as that of Mossad Harav Kook (*Torat Hayyim*) and Menahem Cohen's edition of *Miqra'ot Qedolot HaKeter*, include both versions.

passages of the Torah have been found which do not correspond to what he wrote in the existent commentaries.⁹

B

A perusal of Ibn Ezra's secrets reveals that they deal with the following topics: the nature of God and the divine names, the nature of angels and their different categories, the creation and structure of the world, the human soul and its final perfection, the Garden of Eden, prophecy, miracles, reasons for the commandments, rabbinic homilies, and verses that contain information that it does not appear Moses could have written. From Ibn Ezra's hints as to what these secrets are, it appears that the keys to unraveling them are to be found in three areas of knowledge: Arabic Neoplatonic-Aristotelian philosophy, astronomy/astrology, and mathematics. The first area is critical for understanding the Deity and the divine names, the nature of the angels, the human soul and its perfection, the creation story, the Garden of Eden story, prophecy, miracles, and some of the secrets contained in the rabbinic homilies. Astronomy/astrology (as well as climatology and other occult sciences) hold the key to discerning the reasons for some of the more perplexing commandments (particularly those involving the Tabernacle), as well as some of the stories recorded in the Torah (such as the flood story). It is also important for helping one to understand some of the secrets of a more philosophical nature, such as the nature of the angels. The mathematical sciences are important for understanding the Tetragrammaton, as well as some of the secrets connected to astronomy. Additionally, the secret of the apparent anachronisms in the Torah suggests the beginning of lower biblical criticism. In short, the content of most of Ibn Ezra's secrets appears to be based on knowledge possessed by any adept in philosophy and the sciences, rather than some Jewish esoteric lore known only to select initiates. Thus, it seems that such content was treated as secret because of the religious problems that their full exposure would have caused for many of Ibn Ezra's more traditionally minded readers, as well as the attacks it would have brought upon the author. By hinting that many

9 See for example Ibn Ezra's comment on Leviticus 23:15 published by Michael Friedlander, *Essays on the Writings of Abraham Ibn Ezra* (London: Society of Hebrew Literature, 1877), 69–71.

of the commandments in the Torah are rooted in naturalistic considerations, and that nature also holds the key to understanding many of the events the Torah records (including aspects of the creation story, which he restricts to the creation of the earth), Ibn Ezra appears to be limiting God's miraculous power and immediate involvement in human affairs. Hence, there is a need to at least partially conceal this point. This is not unlike the motive ascribed to Maimonides by some of his medieval commentators, especially Joseph Kaspi and Moses Narboni, for concealing many of his views in the *Guide of the Perplexed*. Ibn Ezra, however, was far less interested than Maimonides in the esoteric level of Scripture, despite its significance.

An additional possible motivation for not revealing at least some of the secrets in detail is the amount of scientific and philosophical background information required for readers to understand them. It should be noted that when Ibn Ezra wrote his commentaries, it does not appear that even educated Jews in Italy, and certainly in Northern France, had much knowledge of science and philosophy, in contrast to their educated coreligionists in the Arabic-speaking world. Most of the scientific and philosophical literature in this period was available only in Arabic. The translation movement of Arabic treatises into Hebrew, as well as into Latin, was still in its infancy.¹⁰ Ibn Ezra certainly was aware that his potential readers did not possess the intellectual ability to apprehend the secrets to which he was alluding, and which could not be supplied within a biblical commentary.¹¹ It is thus possible that by identifying a certain matter as a secret or indicating that (only) the wise man will understand his allusions (*vehamaskil yavin*), Ibn Ezra was goading his readers to investigate the matter further and attain the requisite knowledge, rather than simply

10 For an overview of the translation movement of Arabic scientific and philosophical texts into Hebrew, see Mauro Zonta, "Medieval Hebrew Translations of Philosophical and Scientific Texts: A Chronological Table," in *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*, ed. Gad Freudenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 17–73; see also in the same volume Gad Freudenthal, "Arabic and Latin Cultures as Resources for the Hebrew Translation Movement: Comparative Considerations Both Quantitative and Qualitative," 74–105. For an overview of the translation movement of Arabic scientific and philosophical texts into Latin, see Anna Akosy, "Arabic Texts: Philosophy, Latin Translations of," in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), internet edition.

11 Ibn Ezra notes this point explicitly in his later commentary on Exodus 28:6. See also his commentary on Ecclesiastes 7:3.

hiding its content.¹² If true, this would help to account for Ibn Ezra's detailed astronomical/astrological treatises in Hebrew, as well as mathematical ones, which would serve as textbooks for his elite readers, insofar as so many of his secrets belong to these areas. In a crucial sense this is analogous to his treatises on grammar, which helped his readers to understand the heart of his biblical commentaries, with their focus on the plain meaning of the text.

C

In this article, I take a close look at how Ibn Ezra's approach to some of these secrets changed between his earlier, shorter commentaries on Genesis and Exodus and his later, longer commentary on Exodus, as well as the surviving section of his later commentary on Genesis. The introductions to the earlier and later commentaries on Genesis, as well as the glosses on the first two portions of this book in both commentaries, contain many of Ibn Ezra's allusions to the secrets of the Torah. Scattered throughout the two commentaries on Exodus are even more allusions to secrets. This provides us with many examples of the secrets that Ibn Ezra deals with in both his earlier and later commentaries. As already noted, he elaborates on some of these secrets in his later commentary, thus raising the question of his motivation for so doing.¹³ This is the case, for example, in his

- 12 In this area (as well as in many others) Ibn Ezra foreshadowed Maimonides. When the latter agreed to cooperate with his Hebrew translator of the *Guide*, Samuel Ibn Tibbon, he knew that the intended audience of the translation had almost no knowledge of the philosophy that stood at the foundation of his treatise. Instead of reconciling philosophy and Scripture for his readers acquainted with both areas of knowledge (with the resultant perplexity that this acquaintance brought about), which was the original intent of the treatise, the *Guide* became a catalyst for attaining knowledge of philosophy and science by way of Hebrew translations of the Arabic treatises in these areas. In other words, its immediate new purpose was to guide its readers to the perplexity that resulted from delving into knowledge of philosophy, prior to resolving it. Ibn Ezra's allusions to philosophical/scientific secrets underlying the text of the Torah may well have been intended for the same purpose.
- 13 From the Middle Ages to the present, there have been numerous interpretations of various secrets of Ibn Ezra. In contemporary scholarly literature there have also been studies devoted to presenting a broader look at Ibn Ezra's esotericism in the context of esoteric writing in Jewish thought in general; see in particular Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation:*

commentaries on the creation story (particularly Genesis 1:1), the meaning of the Tetragrammaton and other names of God (Exodus 3:13 in his earlier commentary and 3:15 in his later one), and the nature of the revelation to Moses in the cleft of the rock (Exodus 33:18 in the earlier commentary and 33:21 in the later one). Rather than analyzing and comparing the commentaries on these or other passages (such as his two different allegorical treatments of the Garden of Eden story), I here focus solely on two of his secrets that clearly allude to philosophical conceptions. The first is the secret of the angels and the second is the secret of the rational soul and its final perfection.¹⁴

The precise philosophical sources underlying Ibn Ezra's understanding of these secrets are not easy to uncover.¹⁵ The author

Esotericism in Jewish Thought and its Philosophical Implications (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 34–43. Few studies up to now have been devoted to a comparison between the early and later commentaries in regard to Ibn Ezra's secrets. Such a comparison in regard to the reasons for the commandments was made by Shaul Regev, "'Ta'amei Ha-Mitzvot' in E. Avraham Ibn Ezra's Commentary: Secrets," in *Abraham Ibn Ezra and His Age*, ed. Fernando Esteban (Madrid: Asociación Española de Orientalistas, 1990), 233–40. Regev criticizes Michael Friedlander's conclusion that the early commentary was written for philosophers, so that there was no need to expand upon these secrets, while the later commentary was written for Talmudists, hence the need for elaboration. In Regev's view, the opposite is the case. The later commentary was written for philosophers; hence, it was more explicit and detailed in its exposition. My own view is closer to that of Friedlander, at least in regard to the later commentary, as I will argue at the end of the article. Unfortunately, Ibn Ezra's most radical secret, involving verses not written by Moses, does not appear at all in either commentary on Exodus, and the fragment of the later commentary on Genesis does not reach the verse where he appears to allude to this secret in his early commentary (Genesis 12:6). Thus, we have no way of knowing how he approached this secret in his later commentary.

14 For an earlier treatment of both these topics in Ibn Ezra's philosophy, see Joseph Cohen, *The Philosophy of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra* [Hebrew] (Rishon LeZion, 1996), 94–106, 286–93.

15 For a study of Ibn Ezra's thought in light of his possible philosophical sources, see Cohen, *op. cit.* and Hermann Greive, *Studien zum jüdischen Neuplatonismus: Die religionsphilosophie des Abraham Ibn Ezra* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973). See also Elliot Wolfson, "God, the Demiurge and the Intellect: On the Usage of the Word *Kol* in Abraham Ibn Ezra," *REJ* 149 (1990): 77–111. I am indebted to Dov Schwartz for sharing with me his forthcoming article, "R. Abraham Ibn Ezra the Philosopher: A Study of his Theory of Intellect [Hebrew]," which will be published by Bar-Ilan University Press in a collection of essays on Ibn Ezra that he is editing. In this article he not only carefully analyzes Ibn Ezra's theory of the intellect and

had some knowledge of Avicenna's thought.¹⁶ He also mentions Ibn Gabirol as an expert in the nature of the human soul.¹⁷ Moreover, he was in all probability acquainted with a popularized version of Alfarabi's worldview (together with aspects of Ibn Bajja's thought), such as the one that can be found at the beginning of the treatise *The Book of the Kuzari*, written by his contemporary and friend Judah Halevi.¹⁸ Whether Ibn Ezra was entirely consistent or precise in his philosophical thought is also not clear from his scattered references to philosophical ideas.¹⁹ Nonetheless, he clearly alludes to certain basic philosophical conceptions in his treatment of these secrets.

The Secret of the Angels

What is striking about Ibn Ezra's early commentaries on Genesis and Exodus is that only in his discussion on Exodus 23:21 does he explicitly label the nature of the angels as a 'secret.' This is significant insofar as one can read most of his comments on angels prior to this point as following the traditional view of angels as heavenly beings who occasionally are sent by God to earth on certain divine missions. Sometimes they appear to human beings and speak to them while they are awake. At other times, they appear to them in their dreams. In general, Ibn Ezra labeled angels as God's intermediaries or messengers. He notes already in his early commentary on Genesis 1:1 that all of God's actions are by means of angels, and that he will further elaborate upon this notion when he deals with the secret of the divine Name in the passage *for my Name is in him* (Exodus 23:21).

the human soul, but also the possible sources that were available to him directly or indirectly in developing his theory. In many cases, these sources were unknown to his later commentators.

16 This is clearly seen from his poetic paraphrase of Avicenna's *Hayy Ibn Yaqtan* entitled *Ḥai ben Meqiz* which he wrote while still in Spain. See Israel Levin, *Abraham Ibn Ezra Reader* (Tel Aviv: Israel Matz Hebrew Classics, 1985), 121–32.

17 *Shitah Aḥeret* on Genesis 3:21.

18 Ibn Ezra cites comments by Halevi throughout his commentary, apparently all based on oral discussions with him. Nowhere, however, does he mention the *Kuzari*, which apparently never reached him in his wanderings. Nevertheless, it is plausible to assume that the views of the philosophers presented by Halevi were known also to Ibn Ezra, given his interest in philosophy.

19 For a discussion of this issue, see Howard Kreisel, "On the Term *Kol* in Abraham Ibn Ezra: A Reappraisal," *REJ* 153 (1994): 29–39. See also the studies cited above in note 14.

Thus, while God's Name is said to allude to a secret doctrine, there is no explicit indication that a secret doctrine underlies the nature of the angels themselves, let alone that philosophy holds the key to understanding it.

That is not to say that, prior to his commentary on Exodus 23:21, Ibn Ezra offers no hints to a secret doctrine regarding angels. In the same passage on the first verse of the Torah, he polemicizes against the view of R. Saadiah Gaon that human beings are superior to the angels, and maintains that the angels are not composed of fire or air. This leaves the reader wondering what, in fact, angels are composed of. Later on in his early commentary on Genesis 32:23, which deals with the angel that wrestled with Jacob, Ibn Ezra explicitly alludes to a secret as to the identity of this particular angel, a secret that he indicates he will partially reveal in his exegesis on Exodus 23:21, in which he discusses God's Name.

Insofar as Ibn Ezra maintains that the Hebrew term for angel, *mal'akh*, refers to a messenger or an intermediary, he does not always interpret the term in the Torah as a heavenly being. For example, he notes in his commentary on Genesis 18:13 that "angels" may refer to prophets, and appears to favor the interpretation he brings in the name of "others" that the three angels that appeared to Abraham were in fact other prophets.²⁰ Ibn Ezra himself employs the term "angel" in this more general sense when he indicates in his first introduction to his commentary that "the angel between the person and his Lord is his intellect."

What, then, is the secret of the angels *qua* supernal beings that we may learn from Ibn Ezra's earlier commentaries? In his commentary on Genesis 1:2, he refers to heaven as the "World to Come," which he equates with the world of the angels, as opposed to the earth, which is a world of generation and corruption. This appears to indicate that the angels are eternal beings. In his commentary on Genesis 1:26, *The Lord said: Let us make the human being in our image (beẓalmenū) like our likeness (kidmutenū)*, he indicates that God has no likeness (*demūt*) and that the image (*zelem*) of God refers to the angel. For Ibn Ezra, this means that God created the human being with a

20 Compare, however, his early commentary on Exodus 3:7.

rational soul (*neshamah*),²¹ which does not die and is not corporeal. His remarks on this verse leave the perceptive reader wondering how to understand the various angels who are seen by humans in subsequent passages of the Torah, and which appear to have some kind of physical form. In his commentary on Genesis 3:25, he labels the cherubs (*kerūvim*), "the known angels," without further elaboration. In regard to the angel who wrestled with Jacob and wounded him, and hence appears to have possessed a body, Ibn Ezra promises an explanation in his commentary on Exodus, as indicated above.

Ibn Ezra's early commentary on Exodus sheds further light on his view of angels. In his commentary on Exodus 3:7, he ascribes the speech to Moses at the burning bush to an angel who acts by virtue of God's command, and hence is called by the name of God. In this context, he also refers to the angels that were with the patriarchs, guiding and protecting them by the command of God. He further indicates that the reference to God as "Lord of Lords" (*Elohei ha-Elohim*) is in the role of ruler of the angels. In his commentary on Exodus 3:13, Ibn Ezra reiterates the tie between the secret of the Name and the angels that appeared to Abraham and the one that wrestled with Jacob, while adding another cryptic hint as to the nature of this secret: "The power of the Name discloses signs to the receiver and produces bodies."

Slightly less cryptic is Ibn Ezra's comment on Exodus 15:11: "*BaElim*, the name of the angels who are movers; *Benei* (children of) *Elim*, they are the stars. This secret is hinted in [the portion] *VeEleh Shemot*," an apparent reference to his commentary on Exodus 3:7. To one with knowledge of Aristotelian philosophy, the "movers" would be understood as referring to the Separate Intellects who are the Movers of the spheres. These beings are incorporeal and eternal, which helps explain Ibn Ezra's previous allusions to the nature of the angels. Still not evident, however, is how such beings can appear to the patriarchs, speak to them, guide them, and protect them. It should be noted that while Ibn Ezra extolls the greatness of the angels and indicates their role as guardians, he at the same time rejects the notion that God delegated the task of governing the entire world to a

21 For a study of this term in Ibn Ezra, see Schwartz, "R. Abraham Ibn Ezra the Philosopher" (above, note 15). Ibn Ezra uses this term to refer specifically to the rational part of the soul, or to the intellect. It should be noted that he rarely employs the term "intellect" (*sekhel*) in his writings.

special angel, an apparent reference to the doctrine of the Logos. He writes in his commentary on Exodus 20:1: "Do not believe those who say that the Angel of the Glory was appointed to be in charge of the world."²²

Ibn Ezra's cryptic allusions to the nature of the angels find further elucidation when he finally explains the meaning of the phrase *for my Name is in Him* (Exodus 23:21). In his commentary on the previous verse, he reiterates many of his earlier remarks regarding the angels and adds a number of additional crucial details. He again attacks R. Saadiah for maintaining that human beings are superior to the angels, and notes that human beings are similar to the angels on high only by virtue of their rational soul (*neshamah*). He also distinguishes between the angels, on occasion referred to as *Elohim*, and the stars, which are known as *Benei Elohim*. He indicates that "the angels stand in the Throne of Glory and do not die, for they conjoin with God and are close to Him." In a previous comment on this verse, Ibn Ezra hints to the identity of the "Throne of Glory" in the context of proving the superiority of the angels to human beings. He notes that even the corporeal entities immediately beneath the angels are superior to human beings, citing Psalms 8:4: *I behold Your heaven the work of Your Fingers*. Ibn Ezra explains: "[...] For the heaven (*shamayim*) and the heaven of heaven (*shemei ha-shamayim*) with the Throne of Glory are ten." The other seven entities he omits here are clearly the moon, sun and five known planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn), leaving open the question of the identity of the "heaven," "heaven of heaven" and "Throne of Glory." To understand this reference, knowledge of medieval astronomy is necessary. I shall return to this problem below.

Ibn Ezra opens his commentary on Exodus 23:21 as follows:

Now I will explain to you the secret of the noble and awesome Name and the secret of the angels by way of a parable of the light of the soul (*nefesh*) that is emitted from the eye. Know that the eye has seven layers, the innermost one being the white speck. Light is not a body, and the light of the soul requires an

22 On this point Ibn Ezra appears to be in implicit agreement with R. Saadiah, who rejects the doctrine of the Logos as an intermediary in the governance of the entire world. For a discussion of this issue in R. Saadiah's thought, see Howard Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), 57–90 (esp. 81–83).

additional external light. If you have the ability to comprehend how the eye sees numerous and strange forms at once, and how heaven is encompassed by a white speck, you will begin to understand. Look to the sun, for the visible light is from it. It is the agent [of light], and it itself does not lack [light]. There are also demonstrative proofs that the light of the moon is from the sun, for it does not have any light in itself. God alone is without any other, and the angels are by virtue of God (*vehamal'akhim hem ba-shem*). They are not corporeal at all, only the stars are bodies for them. For this reason the Hebrews said: *The angel of God appeared to Gideon* (Judges 6:12), and afterwards said: *God said to him go with this power* (ibid, 12). When the soul (*nefesh*) is focused on the Glory, there will be created for it pictures, forms and visions by the command of God (*be-devar HaShem*). The meaning of: *God [the Tetragrammaton] is His Name* (Exodus 15:3), is that it is the Glory that receives the Glory. This is also the meaning of *My Name is in him*.

We can see from this passage that while Ibn Ezra expands upon the secret of the angels, the secret nevertheless remains hidden. His explanation itself requires an explanation. The reader once again is told explicitly that the angels are not at all corporeal and that they partake of the power of God, without further elucidation. The relation between the angels and the stars is slightly elaborated upon, with the stars being treated as bodies to the angels, though the two remain separate entities. This relation nonetheless remains obscure. The parable of the light of the soul, the eye and the external light adds little to the understanding of one who lacks knowledge of the science of sight. The nature of the pictures, forms and visions created for the soul of the prophet is not explained at all. The "Glory" appears to refer both to God's power and to the angel that receives this power; hence the angel is at times referred to as God. Nothing else, however, is added to this enigmatic picture of the nature of angels. In short, Ibn Ezra provides his more perceptive readers with a philosophical-scientific direction to understand this secret, but little more.

The remainder of his early commentary on Exodus contains a few more opaque references to the nature of the angels. In his explanation of the Tabernacle, Ibn Ezra compares it to the *macrocosmos* (the world) and the *microcosmos* (the human being). The cherubs in the Tabernacle are likened to the angels in the *macrocosmos*

and to the thoughts of human beings in the *microcosmos* (Exodus 25:7). In his commentary on Exodus 33:12, he explains that the angel that was meant to accompany Moses is not Michael, of which it is said *My Name is in Him* and which Israel was told to obey. Hence, we are given here the name of a specific angel who is said to lead Israel, but no further information regarding this angel or the one meant to accompany Moses.

Ibn Ezra's commentary on the remaining three books of the Torah does not add anything to this subject, though it touches upon other secrets. Two other biblical commentaries written during Ibn Ezra's sojourn in Italy are pertinent to our topic, inasmuch as Ibn Ezra cites verses from these biblical books in discussing the angels — namely, his first commentary on Psalms and his first commentary on Daniel. Unfortunately, only the very beginning of the former survived, and the early commentary on Daniel, which survived in full, adds little to our understanding of this secret. Ibn Ezra deals with Michael in a number of passages of his commentary. He is the ministering angel of Israel, and is also referred to as the “great angel.” Yet the nature of this angel remains unknown, as Ibn Ezra only vaguely alludes to its tie to astronomy/astrology.²³

Ibn Ezra did offer some clarification regarding the secret of the angels when he wrote his later commentaries on Genesis and Exodus. Interestingly, in the same period he also wrote longer commentaries on both Psalms and Daniel. In his commentary on the first verse on Genesis, he expanded upon his polemic against R. Saadiah, who considered human beings as nobler than the angels. Ibn Ezra again treated the name *Elohim* as a reference to the angels and *Benei Elohim* as a reference to the stars. He then adds:

The Movers of the spheres are noble and permanent, lack nothing and do not perish. This is true based on the demonstrative proofs of the wise men of speculation (*hokhmei ha-meḥqar*).

This quote is significant not only because already at the very beginning of his commentary Ibn Ezra identifies the angels as the Movers of the spheres, but because he also explicitly indicates that

23 See Ibn Ezra, *Short Commentary on Daniel*, 10:20-21 (Daniel Mondschein ed. [Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1977], 231).

the "wise men of speculation," an apparent reference to the philosophers, provide the proofs for the nature of these Movers. From the outset, then, readers — even those unacquainted with the notion of "Movers of the spheres" — are informed that the angels should not be understood in accordance with the popular traditional view.

In his commentary on the first verse, Ibn Ezra reiterates the view that the angels are not corporeal, and that they are intermediaries by means of which God acts in the world. He identifies them as "true forms" (*zūrot emet*), a further allusion to their incorporeality, though it is doubtful that any of his readers would understand his use of the philosophical term "form" in this context. In addition, he refers to a significant argument among the "men of speculation," in which some say that the Torah and the Throne of Glory are continuously created by God and have no beginning in time nor will they perish, while others claim that they are created at the moment that God deemed it proper to create them.²⁴ Ibn Ezra does not explain to what precisely the "Torah" and the "Throne of Glory" refer. In light of the fact that he restricts the creation story to the sublunar world, it would appear that the "Torah" refers to the incorporeal angels, and the "Throne of Glory" to the heavenly spheres.²⁵

Ibn Ezra's later commentary on Exodus provides further information on the angels. Perhaps the most important passage is the lengthy one on Exodus 3:15, which concludes with the division of the existents into three parts or "worlds." After describing the sublunar world, and then the world of the planets, which includes the five planets, the sun and moon and the sphere of the stars, Ibn Ezra continues:

The supernal world is the world of the holy angels, which are incorporeal, and are not in bodies like the human rational soul. Their ranks are beyond the intellects of their lowly counterparts [i.e., human beings]. This entire world is noble and permanent. It

24 The former position is that of the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophers, while the latter position is that of the Islamic theologians, which Ibn Ezra appears to have included among the "men of speculation."

25 As noted above, in the introduction to the long commentary, Ibn Ezra brings the rabbinic *midrash* concerning the creation of the Torah and the Throne of Glory prior to the creation of the world. He already drew there a connection between the views of the philosophers and those of the rabbinic sages on this issue.

does not change at all, only its existence is not by virtue of itself but solely by virtue of God the noble. The human rational soul is of their class [variant, is from their light] and receives supernal power at the time the person is created in accordance with the order of the planets [...].²⁶

One acquainted with Aristotelian philosophy would identify the angels on the basis of this passage with the Separate Intellects.²⁷ Certainly in the following century, with the proliferation of Maimonides' works, particularly the *Book of Knowledge* and *Guide of the Perplexed*, Ibn Ezra's allusions became much more comprehensible. In speaking of the human soul, Ibn Ezra clearly adds an astrological dimension to his discussion which Maimonides rejects. This dimension is also absent in Ibn Ezra's most prominent philosophical sources. The question remains how capable Ibn Ezra's early readers were of understanding his description of the highest level of existents, lacking as they did all philosophical literature pertaining to this area. At any rate, what they could ascertain from Ibn Ezra's remarks regarding the angels is that he does not accept the popular conception of them.

The similarity between the rational soul (*neshamah*) and the angels, particularly the point that neither type of entity is visible, is reiterated in the commentary on Exodus 4:14, as is the angels' role as God's intermediaries. Moses is said to have attained a rank comparable to that of the angels. Ibn Ezra is dealing here with the strange story in which it appears that an angel is sent to kill Moses for not circumcising his son Eliezer, and, even after reading this commentary, one is left wondering about the nature of the angel.

The continuation of Ibn Ezra's commentary both illuminates and obfuscates his view on angels. In his commentary on Exodus 6:3, while explaining the divine name *El Shadai*, he writes:

26 Cf. Strickman and Silver (above, note 2), 90.

27 In his earlier commentary on Exodus 23:21, Ibn Ezra indicated that the stars are bodies to the angels. One need not, however, see these two views of the angels as contradictory. On one hand, the Separate Intellects that serve as the Movers of the spheres are completely incorporeal and independent existents; hence they are not "in bodies," unlike the souls of the spheres or the human soul. On the other hand, each stands in relation to a particular sphere; hence, in this sense, the planets are "bodies for them."

Its meaning is: the vanquisher of the supernal orders [of the heavenly bodies]. The order is not destroyed, only that one who conjoins with His Name knows that there will be created for him good that is not in accordance with the [the determination of the] heavenly order. For this reason, Jacob said: *The angel who redeems me from all evil* (Genesis 48:16) — that was destined to come upon me. This is the secret of the entire Torah as I shall later explain.

The redeeming angel is not identified in this passage. In the commentary on Exodus 14:19, Ibn Ezra identifies the angel of God which accompanies Israel as they leave Egypt as the "great prince (*sar*)" who travels in the cloud but is not the cloud itself. This comment, however, hardly elucidates the nature of this being, who is not visible, yet travels in a body and serves as God's messenger to lead and safeguard Israel.

Readers would certainly have expected some clarification about angels when they got to Ibn Ezra's commentary on the phrase *for my Name is in him* (Exodus 23:21). But the explanation they receive is even more bare-bones than the one Ibn Ezra provided in his earlier commentary on Exodus. After bringing a series of verses in which God sends angels, he concludes with verses from the Book of Daniel:

In the Book of Daniel: *the prince of Greece and the prince of Persia* (see Daniel 10:20); *except for Michael your prince* (ibid. 10:21). He is the one called the "great" for he is more glorified than many others. It is also written about him: *One of the first princes came to aid me* (ibid. 10:13), which means, in rank, like: *who occupied the first place in the kingdom* (Esther 1:14). This angel is Michael.

As to the identity of these heavenly "princes," Ibn Ezra provides a further comment in his commentary on Exodus 33:21 in discussing Moses' prophecy in the cleft of the rock:

The One has no figure (*temunah*), and He encompasses in a general manner all figures, for from Him they are derived. The supernal bodies, which are the luminaries and stars, have no front or back, as is true for the supernal human rational soul, and the supernal servants, and the most supernal One. The length of the line is between two points. The point closest to the Agent is

the prince of the countenance and the prince of the power, and the other point is the end of the power.

Again, one sees that without prior knowledge of the philosophical ontology underlying Ibn Ezra's approach, the identity of the "prince of the countenance" remains completely obscure.²⁸

Ibn Ezra's second commentary on Daniel, also written in this period, does somewhat flesh out our knowledge of his approach to angels. It appears that Ibn Ezra scattered hints to deciphering his secrets in different works, with the expectation that his elite readers would read them all and connect the pieces, so to speak. Certainly, by mentioning Michael in his commentary on Exodus 23:20 as the angel in which the Name of God is in him and that aids Israel, but saying little more, Ibn Ezra is encouraging his more astute and curious readers to turn to his commentary on Daniel for further elucidation.

His later commentary on Daniel, from the same period, sheds more light on his hints regarding the angels, but still falls far short of providing a clear explanation of the philosophical/astronomical model he has in mind. In his lengthy exegesis on Daniel 10:21, Ibn Ezra deals with some of the principal angels, as well as offering a tripartite division of all existents. His division here, however, differs from the one he provides on Exodus 3:15:

[...] The One, Who is prior to the numbers [lit., numerical calculation, *ha-ḥeshbon*], is from one perspective the cause of all numbers. From another perspective He is all numbers, without increase or diminution. He is not subject to multiplication or division, and is the cause of both. This, the One, is the first world, in opposition to the worlds following Him. This world is not corporeal and is called "the Vision of the Glory of the Supernal Name." It does not change in essence or in order, and has no time or place. The noble Name is in its midst. The second world is the middle one. It contains the rational souls (*neshamot*) of the true forms without bodies, also the rational souls in bodies, and they are for us innumerable, also bodies *qua* bodies. All of them are

28 This is not to say that even with philosophical knowledge the identity of this angel is clarified. Given both Neoplatonic and Aristotelian motifs in Ibn Ezra's thought, one can identify this angel in various ways, either as the Universal Intellect in Ibn Gabirol's philosophy, or as the first of the Separate Intellects, the Mover of the outermost sphere, in the thought of Alfarabi and Avicenna.

noble for they have no opposites, nor [are they subject to] permutation and change in their essence, only by way of accident in the order of their motions. This world is called the "Holy Sanctuary," and is the heaven of heaven [*shemei ha-shamayim*]. The Throne of Glory is there, and Michael and Gabriel are there [...].

In this passage, the second world combines the first two worlds found in the commentary on Exodus 3:15. The first world here consists of God, Who in the enumeration in Exodus is treated as more exalted than the first world. The angels here are "true forms" without bodies, a description Ibn Ezra brings in his exegesis on the first verse of Genesis in his later commentary, and which apparently refers to the Separate Intellects that serve as the Movers of the spheres. The "rational souls in bodies" refers to the souls of the spheres. The "heaven of heaven" appears here as a collective term for all the existents of this world. Why Ibn Ezra here lumped together the incorporeal existents with the spheres, in contrast to the clear demarcation he draws between them elsewhere, is far from clear. One possibility is that since the incorporeal existents stand in direct relation to each of the spheres as their Movers, he reasoned that they should be linked together as belonging to the same strata of existents. Perhaps God here is treated as one of the worlds rather than completely separate from them in order to underline the perspective of His immanence in all reality. In the continuation of Ibn Ezra's description of the second world, he identifies its subdivisions: angels (the incorporeal Movers of the spheres), armies (the heavenly spheres), servants (the planets), and the two luminaries (sun and moon). The third world is the sublunar world, culminating in the human being, whose rational soul "is tied to the supernal rational souls." Towards the end of the passage, he asserts that "the prince of Persia is the one in charge of the great conjunction or the middle one, and Daniel mentioned the one in charge by the term 'the angel'." He goes on to state that just as there are those which are in charge of nations, there are those in charge of individuals. Ibn Ezra thereby understands the angels not only in terms of the philosophical worldview positing incorporeal Movers of the heavens to explain the different movements of the spheres, but also in terms of their astrological influences on different groups and individuals. The great and middle conjunctions usually refer to the conjunctions of Saturn

and Jupiter (the great conjunction occurs every 960 years and the middle conjunction every 240 years). This helps us understand better the identity of the angels Michael and Gabriel. Michael, the Great Prince, could perhaps be identified with the highest of the planets, Saturn, who indeed, according to Ibn Ezra's *Beginning of Wisdom*, has dominion over the Jews.²⁹ In any case, Ibn Ezra clearly alludes to an astrological dimension in his view of the angels.³⁰

As we have seen, in some of his comments, Ibn Ezra connects the problem of the identity of the angels to the problem of the identity of the Throne of Glory.³¹ It would appear that on this issue, however, he was not consistent in his writings. He uses the term to designate either the angels collectively or the heavenly spheres collectively, or as a reference to the outermost sphere. For example, in his early commentary on Exodus 23:20, he indicates that "the angels stand in the Throne of Glory," which would indicate that the term refers collectively to them. He continues by placing the Throne of Glory on the tenth and highest level of existents, above the "heaven of heaven." Yet in his commentary on Deuteronomy on 32:8, written in the same period, he says: "The form of Jacob is engraved in the Throne of Glory, and this is a great secret." This remark is best understood as referring to the outermost sphere. In bringing rabbinic homilies that distinguish between the Torah and Throne of Glory in the introduction to his later commentary on Genesis, he appears to see the Throne of Glory as a reference to the heavenly spheres. This interpretation is reinforced by his later commentary on Exodus 3:15, in which he states that, "[...] so it is with the nine spheres, which are noble, permanent bodies. The tenth, which is holy, is called thus because its power is in the entire Throne of Glory. It is the strong one [or: the one that encompasses, *ha-taqif*], and all the bodies it encompasses."

29 See Shlomo Sela, *Ibn Ezra's Introductions to Astrology* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 149. For an in-depth discussion of Ibn Ezra's astronomical and astrological views, see Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). For the problem of the precise identification of the angel Michael, see Kreisel, "On the Term *Kol* in Abraham Ibn Ezra" (above, note 19): 57–61.

30 See also Ibn Ezra's commentary on Daniel 7:14 (as well as 12:1). There, too, he refers to Michael and to the angels in general, and clearly alludes to astrology in understanding their activities.

31 For a discussion of this issue see Kreisel, "On the Term *Kol* in Abraham Ibn Ezra": 61–66.

Other passages in Ibn Ezra's commentaries suggest a different identification of the Throne of Glory. In his later commentary on Psalms 8:4, he writes as follows:

Know that seven abodes belong to the luminous bodies [i.e., sun and moon] and the five planets. The eighth belongs to the great army, and the ninth to the sphere of the constellations that go from East to West. The tenth is the Throne of Glory. For this reason, he wrote: *Your ten Fingers*, for they are ten.

Ibn Ezra clearly alludes here to a certain astronomical picture of the world, though his allusion is not without ambiguity. The Throne of Glory clearly is not a collective term for the spheres. However, does it refer to the level of the incorporeal existents, or to the outermost sphere which has no stars? In the Ptolemaic system, with which Ibn Ezra and his peers were familiar, the eighth sphere is the sphere of the fixed stars (including the twelve constellations of the Zodiac), and the ninth is the outermost sphere having no star at all, which moves from East to West. This picture was adopted also by the leading philosophers prior to Ibn Ezra — most notably, Alfarabi and Avicenna — and became the basis for their metaphysical systems. Moreover, this picture of the heavens underlies Ibn Ezra's own poetic paraphrase of Avicenna's *Hayy Ibn Yaqtan* — *Ḥai ben Meqiz*,³² as well as his later commentary on Exodus 20:14. Thus the Throne of Glory would appear to refer to the world of the angels. This interpretation also fits in nicely with his remark on Exodus 23:20 that the angels stand in the Throne of Glory. Yet this interpretation is not without its problems. As opposed to his later commentary on Exodus 20:14, in which the ninth sphere is a starless one moving from East to West, in his commentary on Psalms, written in the same period, Ibn Ezra appears to view the ninth sphere as one which contains the twelve constellations, as distinct from the sphere of the other stars, and rotating from East to West. He thus seems to waver between different astronomical models. That the Throne of Glory in fact refers to a celestial sphere is supported by the continuation of his commentary on Psalms 93:2, in which the earth is said to be situated in the center of the cosmos, with the Throne of Glory serving as the circumference —

32 See Levin, *Abraham Ibn Ezra Reader* (above, note 14), 121–32. This is also the model adopted by Solomon Ibn Gabirol in his poem *Keter Malkhūt*.

a clear indication that the Throne of Glory represents the uppermost sphere. Further complicating the picture is his commentary on Psalms 148:2, in which *heaven* and *heaven of heavens* refer to the levels of the earth's atmosphere rather than the uppermost spheres. In his commentary on Psalms 102:25, on the other hand, *heaven of heaven* is labeled the place of origin of the rational soul (*neshamah*), to where it returns, which would indicate that it refers to the world of the incorporeal beings and not to a celestial sphere at all. One thus finds that Ibn Ezra is not consistent in the use of his biblical imagery in depicting the heavenly spheres, or even in the astronomic model he adopts. At any rate, he could hardly have expected the Jewish readers of his Hebrew commentaries to have the requisite knowledge of these astronomic debates, and his commentary on Psalms does little to remedy this situation.

It is not the point of my study to reconstruct Ibn Ezra's precise views on the nature of the angels. Rather, it is to show that only a reader possessing basic philosophical and astronomical/astrological knowledge could be expected to appreciate his approach to this topic, whether in his early commentary or even his later one. While he provides more allusions to his philosophical and astronomical/astrological views in his later commentary, they remain just that, allusions. I find no evidence that the immediate audiences of Ibn Ezra's commentaries in this period had the basic knowledge to fully appreciate his allusions. This is not to say that one who possesses knowledge of these sciences could easily reconstruct the precise identity of the angels in accordance with the structure of the supernal world underlying Ibn Ezra's approach. Even for such an individual, Ibn Ezra's precise views remain ambiguous.³³ There are profound differences between Neoplatonic and Aristotelian ontological views. More often than not, Ibn Ezra's general allusions to the supernal world can be interpreted in accordance with either approach. In addition, his astronomical views on the structure of the heavenly spheres appear to have undergone changes, and his astrological references are not always clear. Yet one matter is evident concerning all of Ibn Ezra's allusions, those in his early commentaries as well as those in his later ones: it is only through the use of philosophy coupled with astronomy/astrology that one may understand these secrets —

33 See above, notes 14 and 15.

and he expected his more astute readers to understand this point and pursue it.

The Secret of the Rational Soul

As we have seen in the discussion above, Ibn Ezra often compares the rank of the rational soul to that of the angels, thereby closely linking the two subjects. The critical difference between them is that the rational soul is found accompanying a body, while the angels themselves are completely devoid of a body, though each has a relation to a celestial sphere. Already in his early commentary on Genesis 1:26, he interprets "the image (*zelem*) of God" as referring to the angel and to the rational soul (*neshamah*) that does not die. The capacity of the individual for immortality is repeated in his commentary on Genesis 3:24, and in a more veiled manner in his commentary on Genesis 5:24. In his early commentary on Exodus 23:20, he stresses the inferiority of human beings to the angels and stars, while noting their similarity to the angels only in regard to the rational soul. The incorporeal nature of the rational soul is indicated by Ibn Ezra in his commentary on Exodus 19:20. Finally, in a cryptic statement in his commentary on Numbers 20:8, Ibn Ezra maintains that "when the part knows everything [or: the All], it conjoins (*daveq*) with the All, and creates in everything signs and wonders." While the rational soul is not explicitly mentioned here, Ibn Ezra ties the prophet's miracle-working ability to the level of knowledge attained by the soul and its reaching the state of conjunction.³⁴

Taken together, these references hardly provide the reader with more than a glimpse of Ibn Ezra's approach to the nature of the rational soul, its conjunction with God, and the characteristics of its immortal state. In the later commentaries, the tie between the rational soul and the angels is elaborated upon, as are other characteristics of the soul. He concludes his later commentary on Genesis 3:21 by noting: "The rational soul which knows the supernal knowledge [or: knows the supernal intellect, or: knows knowledge of the Supernal – *yode'a da'at elyon*] stands with the Throne of Glory and

34 For a discussion of Ibn Ezra's approach to miracles, see Aviezer Ravitsky, "The Anthropological Theory of Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 231–72.

takes pleasure in the great and awesome Name." In the later commentary on Exodus 3:15, where Ibn Ezra divides the existents below the Deity into three levels or "worlds," he treats human beings as the most noble of existents in the lowest level. The highest level is that of the angels, which, unlike human beings, are neither corporeal nor attached to bodies. He then adds that:

The rational soul of the human being belongs to their [i.e., the angels'] species, and receives a supernal power in accordance with the order of the servants [i.e., the planets], each servant as against the great army [i.e., the constellations], at the time of his [i.e., the human being's] creation. If the rational soul becomes wise, it will attain the secret of the angels, and will be able to receive a great power from a supernal power that is received by way of the light of the angels. Then it will be conjoined with the noble Name. This is [the meaning of] what Jacob vowed: *And God [the Tetragrammaton] shall be my Lord* (Genesis 28:21), for he isolated himself all the days of his life in order to conjoin with the Name in accordance with his capacity [...] The "sons of the prophets" used to isolate themselves, so that perhaps they will receive power each in accordance with his capacity. With this Name signs and wonders are created.

The connection between knowledge, conjunction with God and miracles reappears in Ibn Ezra's commentary on Exodus 6:3. Here again, he remarks that the human soul is more exalted than the middle world of the stars. The wise soul "knows the acts of God — the ones without intermediary and the ones by way of an intermediary — abandons the desires of the lower world, and isolates itself to conjoin with the noble Name." At that point, God changes the influences of the order so as to aid the individual. Ibn Ezra goes on to say that the strength of the conjunction determines the magnitude of the miracles that one can perform (or that are performed on one's behalf). Moses reached a higher level of conjunction than that of the patriarchs; hence, he is said to have known God "face to face" and was able to perform miracles that the patriarchs were incapable of.³⁵

35 The conjunction of Moses with God is mentioned by Ibn Ezra also in his commentary on Exodus 19:19.

In his commentary on Exodus 33:21, Ibn Ezra expands slightly on some of these ideas in his discussion of the revelation to Moses in the cleft of the rock:

[...] Moses was able to understand and see in his mind's [lit., heart's] eye how the creatures are attached to the Creator [*Yozer Bereishit*], termed the Back (*Ahorayyim*). There is no power in a created being to know this by way of the Glory. This is the meaning of: *For no man can see Me and live* (Exodus 33:20), for the soul of a person is found with the body. After the death of the enlightened one (*ha-masqil*), his rational soul reaches a lofty level, one that it does not reach during the person's lifetime. Moses became a universal being, hence God said: *I will know you by name* (Exodus 33:12), for he alone knew the particulars and their parts in a universal way [...] Hence it is written in *Shi'ur Qomah* that God creates all bodies and all that is more noble than the body. Inferior to the body is the accident. R. Ishmael said: "Everyone who knows the measure of the Creator [*Yozer Bereishit*] is assured of attaining the next world."

Ibn Ezra continues the passage by listing the fixed astrological influences on all that happens in this world. As the stars and planets remain completely unchanging in their motions and influences, worshipping them achieves nothing. He then asserts that human beings nevertheless can escape their evil decrees — namely, by prophetic foreknowledge that enables one to take steps to avoid impending catastrophes caused by the influences of the stars. Neither the motions nor the influences of the stars change, but appropriate human action allows one to avoid their negative effects. In this manner, the observance of the Torah, too, by means of the actions it commands, enables Israel to remove themselves from negative astrological influences.³⁶

Taking into account all these comments on the soul, the question remains: what could have Ibn Ezra's early readers, apparently lacking

36 Other ideas regarding the soul mentioned by Ibn Ezra in his earlier commentaries are also reiterated in his later ones. For example, the incorporeality of the soul, similar to the angels, is mentioned by Ibn Ezra in the commentary on Exodus 25:40 (see also his commentary on Exodus 4:14). The immortality of the soul, at least of those who are in the category of the "lovers of God," is brought in his exegesis on Exodus 20:6.

all philosophical knowledge, deduce concerning the nature of the soul and its final perfection, and how much clarity regarding this subject does one attain from his later commentaries? Certainly, anyone steeped in Islamic philosophy would be familiar with the view that philosophical/scientific knowledge of all reality, culminating in apprehension of incorporeal reality and of God as cause of all the levels of existence, with this knowledge leads to some form of ontological conjunction with the higher realms, if not with God, and results in the eternal felicity of the immortal soul. Yet how many of Ibn Ezra's readers would appreciate this approach based on his scattered comments alone? The Jewish mystical traditions prior to this period know nothing of ontological conjunction with God or the higher realms, but only the glimpsing of the Deity and the heavenly hosts by some form of heavenly ascent of the soul (*Heikhalot* literature). Power is attained by knowing the secret names of the angels or the limbs of God (*Shi'ur Qomah*). A person can create by knowing the secrets of permutations of the Hebrew letters (*Book of Creation*). Ibn Ezra gives all these traditions a philosophical turn that is not easily understood by those without prior knowledge of Islamic philosophy. Only one acquainted with Avicennian thought could appreciate Ibn Ezra's view of the prophet's miraculous powers as stemming from an all-encompassing knowledge of reality and attainment of conjunction. Those not versed in the philosophical tradition might easily misread his allusions to the philosophical/scientific knowledge that determines one's eternal state, substituting more traditional forms of knowledge in its place. Even the notion of incorporeality of the rational soul (or intellect) to which Ibn Ezra constantly alludes cannot be apprehended by those not steeped in philosophical thought, as this notion is absent from rabbinic thought and earlier Jewish mystical traditions. In short, just as we have seen above regarding the angels, Ibn Ezra provides readers who had no prior knowledge of the philosophical tradition with little more than barely comprehensible allusions to this tradition. Notably, only the astrological dimension of Ibn Ezra's thought is made more explicit in the later commentaries, perhaps because in this case his readers already possessed Talmudic traditions in this area.³⁷

This is not to say that Ibn Ezra's readers in later generations who had philosophical knowledge could easily reconstruct his precise

37 See in particular B.T. Shabbat 156a-b; B.T. Mo'ed Qatan 28a.

views on this subject. As in the case of the angels, the different views found in the Islamic philosophical sources allow for alternate interpretations of his comments. Did Ibn Ezra regard the rational soul as an immortal entity, as maintained by the Neoplatonic philosophers such as Ibn Gabirol (and even Avicenna on this issue), or is it possible to achieve immortality only by attaining an actualized perfect intellect, as maintained by Alfarabi in most of his writings?³⁸ Did the soul originate on high from the World Soul to which it returns (Neoplatonic thought), or is it to be treated as a form attached to matter that in itself has no continuity when the body disintegrates (Aristotelian thought)? Can the individual conjoin with God in some manner (Neoplatonic thought), or only with one of the lower entities, such as the Active Intellect (Aristotelian thought)? While Ibn Ezra certainly appears to lean toward the Neoplatonic tradition, his views remain ambiguous.³⁹ In this case as well, I do not seek to interpret these views, but only to present the philosophical issues with which readers needed to be familiar in order to appreciate Ibn Ezra's comments, even the lengthier ones in his later commentaries.⁴⁰

38 See Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on the Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

39 Even in his later commentary on Psalms, where Ibn Ezra offers some more hints to his position, it still remains unclear. For example, the immortality of the rational soul as such is found in his commentary on Psalms 8:5 (see also commentary on Psalms 49:1). In his commentary on Psalms 22:22, he speaks of the origin of the individual human soul in the "Soul of the All" (*Nishmat ha-Kol*), and that to the All the soul returns with its separation from the body. In his commentary on Psalms 49:16, he even speaks of the supernal human soul conjoining with the "Supernal Soul, which is the Soul of the Heavens." Yet while Ibn Ezra in both these sources may well be referring to the Neoplatonic World Soul, it is not completely clear that this in fact is the case. He appears to use the term *neshamah* as interchangeable with intellect, as when he speaks of the "souls of the angels" (commentary on Psalms 87:7; see also *ibid.* 96:5). Hence, the "Soul of All" or "Soul of Heaven" might refer to the Universal Intellect or to the Active Intellect (see also Psalms 139:18, where he speaks of conjunction with the "Supernal Soul" which results in prophetic visions). Moreover, it appears that only the perfected soul reaches the ultimate state (Psalms 73:24), leading one to wonder about the fate of the other souls.

40 For a study of the issue of the rational soul/intellect in Ibn Ezra's thought, see Schwartz, "R. Abraham Ibn Ezra the Philosopher" (above, note 15). It is interesting to note that Ibn Ezra's most comprehensive treatment of the human soul is found in one of his earliest commentaries, the one on Ecclesiastes, written in Rome in 1140. See in particular his lengthy comment on Ecclesiastes

Conclusion

A comparison between the secret of the angels and the secret of the rational soul in his early and later commentaries on Genesis and Exodus reveals that while Ibn Ezra throws more light on his approach to these topics in his later commentaries, much remains obscure, particularly for readers who lack knowledge in philosophy and science. To be sure, there are topics upon which Ibn Ezra expands much more in his later commentaries, particularly in matters of astronomy (Exodus 12:1), the names of God, especially the Tetragrammaton (Exodus 3:15; 33:21), and some of the secrets associated with the Tabernacle (e.g., Exodus 28:6). Yet in none of these cases is there anything approaching a full and clear exposition. In matters of astronomy, of course, one could hardly expect otherwise, given the vastness of the subject. Ibn Ezra himself notes in his later commentary on Exodus 28:6, while discussing the secret of the *efod* worn by the high priest: "Even if I agreed to reveal this secret [in full], the length of my commentary on this entire book would not suffice for writing it, for one cannot understand it without having studied geometry and the secret of the work of the heavens."

Still, the question remains, why did Ibn Ezra expand on some of his secrets in the later commentaries written in Northern France as opposed to his earlier commentaries written in Italy? Why did he not simply reiterate the brief expositions that characterize his earlier commentaries? This question takes on even greater significance when we consider that the Jews of Northern France showed little inclination towards scientific or philosophical learning in this period. It is thus unlikely that Ibn Ezra elaborated on his secrets because Rouen's readers were better prepared to receive them. Indeed, I would suggest that exactly the opposite is the case. Ibn Ezra expanded on his secrets precisely because his audience did not have enough knowledge to understand them, and were generally disinclined to study science and philosophy or appreciate their value.⁴¹ Hence Ibn Ezra needed to give the elite reader a clearer direction to pursue for understanding the secrets. In other words, Ibn Ezra, like Maimonides after him, understood that if he did not provide his readers with an orientation

7:3. Why Ibn Ezra did not bring a similar exposition on the soul in his later commentaries, or even allude to his commentary here, is perplexing.

41 On this point I tend to agree with Friedlander; see note 13 above.

toward the philosophical and scientific nature of the secrets of the Torah, they would remain ignorant of many profound truths of Torah. At the same time, conscious of the sensibilities of his more traditionally minded readers, Ibn Ezra refrained from revealing too much about these truths, particularly those of a philosophical nature.

What is true of the Jews of Northern France may have been true in Ibn Ezra's view of all the Jews of Western Europe who lived in Christian lands (including Italy, where he wrote his early commentaries). He may have returned to writing commentaries on the Torah precisely because he saw the need to expand upon his earlier commentaries, viewing them as too succinct and oblique, and thus not properly appreciated.⁴² Hence, Ibn Ezra's later commentaries were in part intended to encourage the study of science and philosophy in Western Europe already half a century before the Hebrew translations of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* would serve as the most important catalyst to this end. Moreover, at least when it came to matters of astronomy and astrology, Ibn Ezra himself provided his readers with many of the necessary textbooks in Hebrew for entering the portals of these sciences and better appreciating the secrets of the Torah in these areas.⁴³ Yet in none of his commentaries — in contrast to Maimonides' approach in the *Guide*, at least on some issues — does Ibn Ezra come even close to providing his readers with an explicit exposition of his philosophical views. Over the centuries, this invited numerous supercommentaries attempting to decipher his precise views, which remain elusive to this day.

42 This is true even of many of his grammatical explanations.

43 Many of these treatises have been critically edited with English translation and annotation by Shlomo Sela in the Brill Series: *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Astrological Writings*. In these texts, he certainly did not treat any of this knowledge as esoteric.

The Magical Cosmos of Yohanan Alemanno: Christian and Jewish Magic in the Service of a Kabbalist

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Abstract

Yohanan ben Isaac Alemanno (1435-1505?) was an Italian kabbalist, philosopher and physician. In his less known autograph, Paris, BnF héb. 849, he incorporated contemporary Christian magic sources with kabbalah, providing a practical method to ascend to the upper worlds for gaining prophecy. This article brings together Alemanno's autograph and contemporary magical works, in order to demonstrate a radical change in Alemanno's approach towards demonic magic, and the way he interpreted it using a cosmology he developed. Then, Alemanno's cosmology will be used for reconsidering a concept of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494): The *Triplex Merkabah*.

Introduction

Fifteenth-century Italy was a wonderful place for humanists, particularly those who were close to the Medici circle. With the patronage of the rulers, the court of the Medici served as a cultural crossroads, catalyzing various kinds of collaborations that produced original and translated syncretistic works — not only philosophical and medical, but also magical.¹ This was the case regarding Christian

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1 The philosophical works include, for example, Angelo Poliziano's translations of Plato's *Charmides*, Marsilio Ficino's translations of *Platonis Opera Omnia*, and John Argyropoulos' translations of Aristotle's *Physics* and *Ethics*.

kabbalah, which flourished through the works of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), according to many scholars the first Christian kabbalist.² It was in Florence that Pico met Yohanan ben Isaac Alemanno (1435-1505?), who is widely considered to have been Pico's kabbalah teacher.³ Alemanno was born in Italy to a Spanish mother and a French father. Having been studying in the school of Yehuda Messer Leon, Alemanno was educated not only in medicine and philosophy, but also in kabbalah.⁴ He wrote an extensive commentary on *The Song of Songs*, a work on immortality known as *Hay ha- 'Olamim* (חי העולמים), an unfinished commentary on Genesis known as *Eyne ha- 'Edah* (עיני העדה) and a notebook of miscellaneous quotations and

- 2 See, for example, Gershom Scholem, "The Beginnings of the Christian Kabbalah," in *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters*, ed. Joseph Dan, trans. Debra Prager (Cambridge: Harvard College Library, 1997), 17-51; Moshe Idel, "Jewish Thinkers versus Christian Kabbalah," in *Christliche Kabbala*, ed. Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann (Ostfildern: J. Thorbecke, 2003), 50-52. On Christian Kabbalah in general, see, for example, Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico Della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Joseph L. Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944); Joseph Dan, "The Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin and Its Historical Significance," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 14 (1998): 455-85. There are many more studies on Christian kabbalah, and I will mention others throughout this article.
- 3 The relationship of Alemanno and Pico has been described as a teacher-student relationship by scholars of both Pico and Alemanno. Nevertheless, this might be only partially correct; as Idel noted, Alemanno might also have been a "student" of the "teacher" Pico. See Moshe Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 111.
- 4 As Carpi has found, on February 27, 1470, Alemanno received a doctoral degree in medicine and philosophy from Messer Leon. See Daniel Carpi, "R. Yehuda Messer Leon and his activity as a doctor," *Michael: On the History of the Jews in the Diaspora* 1 (1972): 277-301 [Hebrew]. On biographical details about Alemanno, see Arthur M. Lesley, "The Song of Solomon's Ascents by Yohanan Alemanno: Love and Human Perfection According to a Jewish Colleague of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," (PhD diss., University of California, 1976), 4-11; Yohanan Alemanno, *Hay ha- 'Olamim (L'Immortale): Parte I: la Retorica*, ed. Fabrizio Lelli (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1995), 3-17; Michele Luzzati, "Documenti inediti su Yohanan Alemanno a Firenze (1481 e 1492-1494)," in *La cultura ebraica all'epoca di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, ed. Dora Liscia Bemporad and Ida Zatelli (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1998), 71-84; Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy*, 177-78.

drafts, which have been described as Alemanno's portable library.⁵ As recorded by Alemanno, Pico and Alemanno met in 1488 in Florence, when Pico asked him to write an in-depth commentary on *The Song of Songs*, which was later known under the title *The Desire of Solomon* (חשק שלמה).⁶ This collaboration probably influenced not only the Christian side but also the Jewish one, and it is considered as an important contribution to the development of Christian kabbalah.

In this paper I will discuss the relation between kabbalah and magic, specifically Solomonic magic, in Alemanno's world, as it is described in his autograph Paris, BnF héb. 849 (hereinafter MS Paris 849). This text reveals the usage of contemporary Christian sources by Alemanno and the efforts that Alemanno invested in incorporating such sources in his perception of gaining "the human happiness" (ההצלחה האנושית), that is, prophecy.⁷ By bringing together Alemanno's autograph and contemporary magical works, I hope to demonstrate a radical change in Alemanno's thought concerning his approach toward demonic magic (compared to his earlier works). This change results in a unique approach to kabbalah, while demonstrating a nexus between the contemporary ceremonial magic and the Jewish kabbalist.⁸ By reading what is presumably Alemanno's latest work, I

5 On the commentary of *The Song of Songs*, see Lesley, "The Song of Solomon's Ascents;" Levin, *Heshek Shelomo*. On *Hay ha- 'Olamim*, excerpts of which were published by Lelli; see Alemanno, *Hay ha- 'Olamim*. Arye Rainer has recently submitted a thesis on the commentary of Alemanno on Genesis. See Arye Rainer, "The commentary of R. Yohanan Alemanno, in his book "Eyne Haeda" to the story of creation, as a key to his understanding of the limitations of philosophy," (MA thesis, Bar-Ilan University, 2019) [Hebrew]. A systematic study of Alemanno's notebook has not yet been published.

6 See Joseph Perles, "Les savants juifs à Florence à l'époque de Laurent de Médicis," *Revue des Études Juives* 12 (1886): 245–57. A scholarly edition of *The Desire of Solomon* is now available; see Daphna Levin, *Heshek Shelomo* (Tel Aviv: Idra Publishing, 2019) [Hebrew].

7 See Alemanno's curriculum in the study of Moshe Idel, "The Curriculum of Yohanan Alemanno," *Tarbiz* 48 (1980): 303–31 [Hebrew].

8 Scholem was the first one to identify and review MS Paris 849, but in an extremely short essay in which he mentions the necessity of further study. See Gershom Scholem, "An Unknown Treatise by Yohanan Alemanno," *Kiryat Sefer* 5 (1929): 273–77 [Hebrew]. Several studies discussed MS Paris 849 in specific contexts. First and foremost, Moshe Idel wrote about some themes in MS Paris 849 in his various works. See, for example, Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations;" idem, "The Magical and Theurgical Interpretation of Music in Jewish Texts: Renaissance to Hasidism," *Yuval* 4 (1982): 33–36 [Hebrew]; idem,

will offer a new perspective on some of his ideas, namely, his cosmological and magical thoughts. I will argue that contemporary works of ceremonial magic influenced Alemanno, and that without investigating those sources, one cannot fully comprehend his later work, i.e., MS Paris 849. First, I will present an example of the connection between magic and kabbalah in the circle of Alemanno, but on its Christian side, by Mithridates. Then, I will discuss the cosmology of Alemanno, and the way he interpreted magic using this cosmology. That will lead me to the final discussion, which will address the possible link between Alemanno's cosmology and Pico's *Triplex Merkabah*, a mysterious concept that he mentioned in one of his kabbalistic theses.

Kabbalah and Magic in Fifteenth-Century Italy: The Case of *Shimmushim*

Before moving to Alemanno's work, let me begin with another figure from the same circle. Flavius Mithridates (c.1445-after 1491), alias Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada, was born in Caltabellotta as Samuel, the son of Nissim Bulfarachio, a translator and copyist of works on kabbalah, astrology, and mathematics.⁹ Mithridates himself, who

"The World of Angels in Human Form," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1983): 1-66 [Hebrew]; idem, "Between the Concept of Sephirot as Essence or Instrument in the Renaissance Period," *Italia* 3 (1982): 89-111 [Hebrew]; idem, "The Anthropology of Yohanan Alemanno: Sources and Influences," *Topoi* 7 (1988): 201-20; idem, "Astral Dreams in R. Yohanan Alemanno's Writings," *Accademia: revue de la Société Marsile Ficini* 1 (1999): 111-28; idem, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2005), 181-87; idem, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988): 168, n. 228; idem, *Kabbalah in Italy, 1280-1510: A Survey* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 177-91. Herrmann studied the reception of Hekhalot literature in MS Paris 849. See Klaus Herrmann, "The Reception of Hekhalot Literature in Yohanan Alemanno's Autograph MS Paris 849," in *Studies in Jewish Manuscripts*, ed. Joseph Dan and Klaus Herrmann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 19-88. Rebiger and Schäfer studied and edited the part of *Sefer ha-Razim I* in MS Paris 849. See Bill Rebiger and Peter Schäfer, *Sefer ha-Razim I und II, II: Einleitung, Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 111-14.

9 Angela Scandalio, "Flavio Mitridate maestro di Pico della Mirandola: il cammino della Cabbala, dalla Sicilia all'Italia all'Europa del Rinascimento," *Iberia Judaica*, no. 10 (2018): 139-53. A vast bibliography on Mithridates has been

converted to Christianity around 1466-1467,¹⁰ also worked on the translations of a variety of kabbalistic texts (Abulafian kabbalah, Castilian kabbalah and others), works of Eleazar of Worms,¹¹ astronomical texts,¹² passages from the Quran,¹³ and a fragment from a work of practical kabbalah, *Shimmushei Torah* (the practical usages of the Torah), in which each biblical pericope appears with its “formative utilities in the practical Kabbalah.”¹⁴ *Liber de vocibus*, Mithridates’ translation of “The Book of Voices” (ספר הקולות), contains interpretations of passages of *Shimmush Tehillim* (the practical usages of Psalms).¹⁵ The genre of *Shimmushim* seems to have been popular in fifteenth-century Italy, sometimes in kabbalistic contexts, such as in our case. For example, the ability of Psalms 19 (Vulgate 18) and 24

collected by Andreatta and Campanini. See Michela Andreatta and Saverio Campanini, “Bibliographia Mithridatica II,” in *Flavio Mitridate mediatore fra culture nel contesto dell’ebraismo siciliano del XV secolo*, ed. Mauro Perani and Giacomo Corazzol (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2012), 289–317.

10 Scandaliato, “Flavio Mitridate,” 141.

11 See Saverio Campanini, “El’azar da Worms nelle traduzioni di Flavio Mitridate per Pico della Mirandola,” in *Flavio Mitridate mediatore fra culture nel contesto dell’ebraismo siciliano del XV secolo*, ed. Mauro Perani and Giacomo Corazzol (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2012), 47–79.

12 See Bernard R. Goldstein and José Chabás, “Isaac Ibn Al-Hadib and Flavius Mithridates: The Diffusion of an Iberian Astronomical Tradition in the Late Middle Ages,” *Journal for The History of Astronomy* 37 (2006): 147–72.

13 See Benoît Grévin, “Flavius Mithridate au travail sur le Coran,” in *Flavio Mitridate mediatore fra culture nel contesto dell’ebraismo siciliano del XV secolo*, ed. Mauro Perani and Giacomo Corazzol (Palermo: Officina di Studi Medievali, 2012), 27–46.

14 “Cum utilitatibus operativis in pratica cabale.” Cited from manuscript Cod. Chigi, fol. 360 by Wirszubski, *Pico*, 150 n. 37. The works of Mithridates are currently studied, edited, and published by a joint project of the Institut für Judaistik of the Freie Universität Berlin and the Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento in Florence. Works that already have been published include *The Great Parchment*, *The Book of Bahir*, Recanati’s *Commentary on the Daily Prayers*, Giqatilla’s *Book on Punctuation*, and *The Gate of Heaven*. Some of the works of Mithridates were listed by Wirszubski in Flavius Mithridates, *Sermo De Passione Domini*, ed. Chaim Wirszubski (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities), 49–59. On *Liber Misteriorum Venerabilium*, that is, Mithridates’ translation of *Shimmushei Torah*, see Flavia Buzzetta, “Misteri e prassi cabbalistiche nel Liber misteriorum venerabilium (Shimmushei Torah), ms. Chigi A. VI. 190, ff. 360 r-v,” *Schede medievali* 53 (2015): 53–73. On the Hebrew *Shimmushei Torah*, see Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 138–41.

15 On *Shimmush Tehillim* and an edition of it see Bill Rebigier, *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

(Vulgate 23) to ease the pain of a pregnant woman in labor, mentioned in Mithridates' *Liber de vocibus*, also appears in a fifteenth-century Italian *L'utilità di psalmi di Davit* (The utility of the Psalms of David) in a Milanese manuscript and a Latin *Virtus et utilitas CL Psalmorum David* (The virtue and utility of the one hundred fifty Psalms of David) in a Florentine manuscript.¹⁶

The incorporation of the translated *Shimmushei Torah* with kabbalistic works, and Pico's thesis about the assurance of the divinity of Christ by magic and kabbalah, indicate a strong connection between magic and kabbalah in this circle, a connection that many scholars of Pico have discussed.¹⁷ The fact that such translated *Shimmushim* were copied by Italian scribes who were also engaged with ceremonial magic, as the Milanese and Florentine manuscripts verify, attest that at least on the textual level, works of ceremonial magic and *Shimmushim* were circulated together. The link of magic to kabbalah, which Mithridates seems to allude to by including *Shimmushei Torah* in his translated works, are not exclusive to Mithridates or Pico. In fact, magic (whether *Shimmushim* or

16 On the passage from *Liber de vocibus*, see Flavia Buzzetta, "Aspetti della magia naturalis e della scientia cabalae nel pensiero di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1486-1487)" (PhD diss., Università degli Studi di Palermo, 2011), 510-11. On the use of Psalms 19 (Vulgate 18) to ease the pain of a pregnant woman in labor in the Milanese manuscript and the Florentine equivalent, see Florence Gal, Jean-Patrice Boudet, and Laurence Moulinier-Broggi, *Vedrai Mirabilia: Un Libro Di Magia Del Quattrocento* (Roma: Viella, 2017), 329. Idel argued that Alemanno's perception of the Torah as being a sequence of divine names, a concept that already appeared in Nachmanides' works, is an evolution of the tradition originated in *Shimmushei Torah* and *Shimmush Tehillim*. See Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations," 120-21. On the same concept, see also Moshe Idel, "The Concept of the Torah in Heikhalot Literature and Its Metamorphoses in Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): 23-84, esp. 52-55 [Hebrew]; Mauro Perani, "Il Sefer ha-tagin da manuale masoretico a repertorio esoterico in ambienti cabbalistici dei secc. XIII-XV," in *L'eredità di Salomone: La magia ebraica in Italia e nel Mediterraneo*, ed. Emma Abate (Firenze: Giuntina, 2019), 44-48. On the wide reception of *Shimmush Tehillim*, see Bill Rebigier, "The Editio Princeps of Sefer Šimmuš Tehillim, Sabbioneta 1551," in *L'eredità di Salomone: La magia ebraica in Italia e nel Mediterraneo*, ed. Emma Abate (Firenze: Giuntina, 2019), 169-84.

17 See, for example, Wirszubski, *Pico*, 133-52; Stephen A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486): The Evolution of Traditional, Religious, and Philosophical Systems* (Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1998), 115-32; Sheila J. Rabin, "Pico on Magic and Astrology," in *Pico della Mirandola: New Essays*, ed. M. V. Dougherty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 152-78.

ceremonial magic) and kabbalah played an important role in MS Paris 849 of Yohanan Alemanno, who was engaged with practical magic. As I will suggest, although the question concerning the relation of kabbalah to magic in Alemanno's thought did not escape the attention of scholars, scholarly effort focused on astro-magical and theoretical perspectives, leaving aside any other aspects that should be studied when we are dealing with a Renaissance humanist like Yohanan Alemanno.

Yohanan Alemanno and Solomonic Magic

As Idel noted, the curriculum of Alemanno contains works of magic, in addition to works on philosophy and kabbalah. Some of those magical works are known by scholars of "Solomonic Magic" — by which I refer, generally speaking, to works that focus on methods of summoning and subduing entities, especially demons.¹⁸ In short, it is already known that Alemanno had access to *Liber Razielis* (The Book of Raziel) or *Sefer Raziel*, the *Almandel* (a work that focuses on summoning angels) and a Hebrew (translated) version of the Arabic *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm* (The Aim of the Sage), which is not quite "Solomonic," but had a profound influence on the Solomonic corpus.¹⁹ Besides these,

18 This is, by no means, a clear-cut definition of a corpus. The definition of the Solomonic magic corpus is problematic, and delineating it is beyond the scope of this paper. For a review of this problematic corpus, see Julien Véronèse, "La transmission groupée des textes de magie salomonienne de l'Antiquité au Moyen âge: bilan historiographique, inconnues et pistes de recherche," in *L'antiquité tardive dans les collections médiévales*, ed. Stéphane Gioanni and Benoît Grevin (Rome: École française de Rome, 2008): 193–223. And see Véronèse recent publication, "Solomonic Magic," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. Sophie Page and Catherine Rider, Routledge Histories (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 187–200.

19 On the familiarity of Alemanno with *Sefer Raziel*, the *Almandel*, and the *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm*, see Idel, *Curriculum*, 310–12 and the notes. For the most extensive study on the Hebrew *Sefer Raziel* and the Latin tradition of *Liber Razielis*, see Reimund Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der astrologischen Literatur der Juden* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 187–294. See also François Secret, "Sur quelques traductions du Sefer Razi'el," *Revue des Études Juives* 128 (1969): 223–45; Sophie Page, "Uplifting Souls: The Liber de Essentia Spirituum and the Liber Razielis," in *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 79–112. For a short

Alemanno was also familiar with the *Ars Notoria* in its Hebrew version, *Melekheth Muskhelet* (מלאכת מושכלת), which, as Reimund Leicht noted, Alemanno actually cites in his work.²⁰ Idel suggested that the fact that those magical works are mentioned at the end of Alemanno's gradual study curriculum implies that magic is the apex of Alemanno's thought.²¹ Some evidence in MS Paris 849 shows that Alemanno was deep into demonic and practical magic, suggesting that in his later life, Alemanno underwent a shift towards the practical, willing to incorporate materials that are neither "astral" nor theoretical.²²

review of *Liber Razielis*, see Graziella Federici-Vescovini, *Medioevo magico: La magia tra religione e scienza nei secoli XIII e XIV* (Torino: UTET libreria, 2008), 115–20. As Boudet wrote, *Liber Razielis* claims to give Solomon power, placing him as a new Moses and a *roi magicien*. See Jean-Patrice Boudet, *Entre science et nigromance: Astrologie, divination et magie dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006), 196–97. This obviously influenced Alemanno, who saw himself as a new Moses (more on this below). On the Hebrew translations of the *Ghāyat*, see Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations," 113–14; Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica*, 316–23. On the *Almandel* and the Hebrew texts, see Gal Sofer, "The Hebrew Manuscripts of Maft'e'ah Shelomoh and an Inquiry into the Magic of the Sabbateans," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 32 (2014): 139–40 [Hebrew]. Several Hebrew versions of the *Almandel* exist, which I plan to publish separately. On the Latin traditions of the *Almandel* see the in-depth research of Julien Véronèse, *L'Almandal et l'Almadel latins au Moyen Âge: Introduction et éditions critiques* (Firenze: SISMELE edizioni del Galluzzo, 2012).

20 See Gideon Bohak, "Rabbanite Magical Texts in Karaite Manuscripts," *Karaite Archives* 1 (2013): 28–30; Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica*, 369–70. I would like to thank Prof. Gideon Bohak for these references. For the Latin *Ars Notoria* and the history of this work, see Julien Véronèse, *L'Ars notoria Au Moyen Âge: Introduction et édition critique* (Firenze: SISMELE edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007).

21 Idel, "Curriculum," 318–21. However, according to Idel, Alemanno's magic is an Italian philosophically oriented magic that differs from the Spanish demonic (and practical) one. The Jewish Italian Renaissance authors show, Idel argued, "an intense theoretical interest in magic, but no practice of magic, beyond the understanding of halakah as a potential magical instrument." See Moshe Idel, "Jewish Magic from the Renaissance Period to Early Hasidism," in *Religion, Science, and Magic: In Concert and In Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul V. M. Flesher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 86.

22 In his earlier works, Alemanno seems not to be fond of practical magic. See Levin, *Heshek Shelomo*, 160–61. Levin argued, based on a specific passage in Alemanno's work, that he was against astral magic. However, her reading of Alemanno is partial and she ignores the context — Alemanno stands against astral magic when it results in idolatry. Moreover, it seems that the discourse about magical practices had changed in the circle of Alemanno, focusing on the

Evidence of such change can already be found in his notebook, in which Idel and Garb read the following passage as having an astral meaning:

When he immerses himself in these things, then such a great efflux will come to him that he will be able to cause the spirit of God to descend upon him and hover above him and flutter about him all the day. Not only that, but 'the writing of God, the spirit of the living God' will descend upon the scroll to such a degree that the scroll will give him power to work signs and wonders in the world. And such are the books called 'sagrato' and all the incantations are the secret words which come from evil spirits.²³

Idel identified the word סגראטו in Alemanno's writing as the Italian *segreti*, secrets, and invoke the astral *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm* as a possible source for this idea of drawing emanation to the scroll by the use of divine names.²⁴ Although Alemanno certainly read works of astral magic, e.g. the aforementioned *Ghāyat al-Ḥakīm*, I would like to suggest that in this passage he actually mentions an important textual reference: ספר סגראטו, which I suggest reading as the Italian *sagrato*, from the Latin *sacratus*, sacred. Hence, Alemanno did not get the idea of drawing emanation to the scroll from the astral *Ghāyat*, but rather from a different source that describes the ceremonial act of consecrating a book — a well-known process in the Solomonic magic

quality rather than the legitimacy of a certain practice. See Gal Sofer, "Lover, Son and Prophet: Magic and Kabbalah in the Autobiography of Yohanan Alemanno," *Tarbiz* 86, no. 4 (2019): 694, n. 129 [Hebrew]. The shift from theoretical to practical was not the only shift that Alemanno underwent. For example, he also changed his cosmology and cosmological terms. For the cosmology of Alemanno in *The Desire of Solomon*, see Levin, *Heshek Shelomo*, 51. On the cosmology of Alemanno in MS Paris 849, see below.

23 Translated to English by Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations," 119–120. The origin of this passage is in Bodleian Library MS. Reggio 23, 164r: "וכשיהיה האדם בזמן מרובה עד ישוב החטוף (!) מורגל תקוע ושקוע באלה, הנה ישפע עליו שפע רב עד כי יוכל להוריד על עצמו רוח אלהים מרחפת עליו וחופף עליו כל היום, והיה כאלהים. ולא עוד, אלא שיוכל להוריד על המכתב, מכתב אלהים, רוח אלהים חיים עד יהיה לספר ההוא כח לחדש אותות ומופתים בעולם. וכמו אלה נקראים ספר סגראטו, וכל הלחשים הם דבורים סגראטו מרוחות רעות." This is my transcription, which differs somewhat from Idel's. For Garb's discussion on this passage, which he interpreted as a spiritual state in which "an aura or energetic field surrounds [the magician]," see Jonathan Garb, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004), 176–77 [Hebrew].

24 Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations," 120.

tradition, which “activates” a book so that it will have the ability to perform, especially by binding evil spirits.²⁵ To be more precise, Alemanno mentions here a version of *Liber Sacer*, sometimes known as *Liber Sacratius* or *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, a work from at least the fourteenth century that deals with a practical method not only to gain the *visio beatifica*, but also to summon and command spirits, most commonly regarded as angels — but not exclusively.²⁶ As we will see,

25 This does not mean that the astral idea of drawing emanation to a physical object should not be considered at all, but rather that there is a much clearer context which we should not disregard, because by doing so we are in fact preferring the interpretation over the text itself. The Hebrew use of the word סאגראטור in this specific context (i.e. a consecrated book) can be found in New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary MS. 8114, 36r. There, the demons are asked to swear on ספר סאגראטור so it will have power to fulfill the practitioner’s will. As Véronèse rightly noted, the act of consecration is an element that was borrowed from canonical practices. Or, in the words of Collins, “rituals often mimicked approved ecclesiastical rituals,” probably due to clerical involvement. See Véronèse, “Solomonic Magic,” 196; David J. Collins, “Learned Magic,” in *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. David J. Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 348. The act of consecrating a book for Solomonic magic is at the center of *Liber Consecrationum*. See Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer’s Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 8–10; Boudet, *Entre science et nigromance*, 183–84. It is interesting to see that Alemanno refers to the consecrated book as מכתב אלהים, like the biblical Tablets of the Law. In the Florentine manuscript that was mentioned above, alongside a Latin *Shimmush Tehillim*, there is also a work entitled *De Libro Consecrando* (On the Book which is being Consecrated) that was probably copied by a different scribe. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to mention that in *De Libro Consecrando* the practitioner is instructed to use formulas from the Torah benedictions (ברכות התורה) to consecrate his book: “Et dapoī dica questa beneditione: benedicati dio benedeóto. Benedeóto sei tu dio l'dio nostro re de lo seculo lo quale ha dato a noi lege vera et vita eterna a posta dentro da noi. Benedeóto sei tu dio che desti la lege.” See Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 89, sup. 38, 40r.

26 See the edition made by Gösta Hedegård, *Liber Iuratus Honorii: A Critical Edition of the Latin Version of the Sworn Book of Honorius* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2002). Recently, Peterson published his own edition, which he also translated into English. See Joseph H. Peterson, *The Sworn Book of Honorius: Liber Iuratus Honorii* (Lake Worth, FL: Ibis Press, 2016). On the history of *Liber Iuratus*, see Robert Mathiesen, “A Thirteenth-Century Ritual to Attain the Beatific Vision from the Sworn Book of Honorius of Thebes,” in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 143–62; Katelyn Mesler, “Liber Iuratus Honorii and the Christian Reception of Angel Magic,” in

it is not the only occurrence of *Liber Sacratu*s in Alemanno's works, and in MS Paris 849 it is one of the works that Alemanno used in order to sketch his own system of ceremonial magic, placing the work (*Liber Sacratu*s) as one of the steps in the ladder to human happiness. After this example of a ceremonial magic source in Alemanno's work, to which I will refer below, I will introduce MS Paris 849.

Solomonic Magic in MS Paris 849

MS Paris 849 is known to scholars as “an unknown treatise by Rabbi Yohanan Alemanno,” named after the title of Gershom Scholem's short article on this manuscript, where the great kabbalah scholar identifies it as an autograph of Alemanno.²⁷ In this encyclopedic work, greatly inspired by Dante's *La Divina Commedia*, Alemanno described himself as a wanderer on a journey to other (higher) worlds, guided by his “mother,” who is the personification of the Torah.²⁸ Like Dante and Virgil, the two walk hand in hand through the Infernal demonic world — the world of the elements (עולם היסודות), which corresponds to Dante's *Inferno*; the world of souls (עולם הנפשות), which corresponds to the *Purgatorio*; and the upper divine world, which corresponds to the *Paradiso*. In this journey, Alemanno, the son, learns about magical

Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 113–50; Jean-Patrice Boudet, “Magie théurgique, angéologie et vision béatifique dans le Liber sacratu sive juratu attribué à Honorius de Thèbes,” *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome* 114, no. 2 (2002): 851–90; Federici-Vescovini, *Medioevo Magico*, 142–47; On the British tradition of *Liber Iuratu*s, in which the redactor explicitly differentiates his own system of magic from those of the Jews, see Frank Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 102–13; Claire Fanger, “Covenant and the Divine Name: Revisiting the Liber Iuratu and John of Morigny's Liber Floru,” in *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 192–216. On a possible connection with Jewish sources, see Richard Kieckhefer, “The Devil's Contemplatives: The Liber Iuratu, the Liber Visionu, and Christian Appropriation of Jewish Occultism,” in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 250–65.

27 Scholem, “An Unknown Treatise.”

28 On the connection with *La Divina Commedia* and the personification of the Torah, see Sofer, “Magic and Kabbalah”.

operations and kabbalistic concepts from his “mother” and other figures they encounter, in order to ascend and become a perfect prophet and the leader of the Jewish people.²⁹ The perfect prophet is the one who ascends to the seventh degree of prophecy, which Alemanno described in detail. While the first six are prophecy through dreams, visions, and astrology, the last degree seems quite unique. The seventh degree of prophecy has nothing to do with receiving messages from God, but rather being able to manipulate the physical world as God does:

... For this, it will not be a wonder... and if he would bring the wind, cloud and rain — heavy as flood, in order to destroy, or blessing rain to raise a righteous shoot. And if he will kill a man or a woman by his eyesight... and in whatsoever he does he shall prosper.³⁰

Those abilities are explained by mysterious creatures that obey the prophet:

Because God created creatures that are thinner than thin, [and] the earth is full of them... [and they] won't be seen neither found, but only in the hand of the prophets who enslave them by their tongues, and make wonders by them, [and] everything they thought to do.³¹

After several pages, when the “mother” and her son enter the world of the elements — the lowest demonic world — those mysterious

29 The aspiration of Alemanno to become the leader of the Jewish people is, obviously, a messianic one. On his radical messianic intention, which can only be compared to that of Rabbi Yosef della Reina, see Sofer, “Magic and Kabbalah,” 683–85. About the story of della Reina, see Gershom Scholem, “The Story of R. Joseph Della Reina,” *Zion* 5 (1932): 124–30 [Hebrew]; Joseph Dan, *The Hebrew Story in The Middle Ages* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974), 222–37. Idel considered della Reina a “Spanish” type of magician, i.e. leaning towards practical demonic magic. See Idel, *Jewish Magic*, 94–98.

30 MS Paris 849, 42r: אשר מפני זה לא יפלא... ואם ישיב את הרוח ענן ומטר שוטף כמבול לשחת או גשם נדבות להצמיח צמח צדיק לברכה. ואם המת ימית איש או אשה אם עינו ילטוש לה... וכל אשר יחפוץ יעשה ויצליח.

31 MS Paris 849, 42r: כי ה' ברא בריה דקה מן הדקה המלאה הארץ... אשר לא יראו ולא ימצאו, כי אם ביד הנביאים המעבידים אותם בלשונותם ומפליאים לעשות על ידם כל אשר יזמו במחשבותם.

creatures are identified as demons.³² In this lowest world, the “mother” sent her son to study the ancient wisdom (ההכמה הקדמונה) from the Babylonian *Symqalyrwn* (סימקאלירון), *Dmyaşayl* (דמיאשאיל) and *Zazawt* (זאזאווט), corrupted forms of the Latin Zamecliton, Harimazayl and Zazont. These are figures from *Liber Razielis* that are described there as those who brought the book from Babylon to King Solomon.³³ Placing himself in the shoes of King Solomon, Alemanno invokes not only the king’s authority and the king’s famous wisdom, but also the Solomonic tradition of which he was an enthusiast. Thus, *Symqalyrwn* teaches him some practices against demons from *Liber Razielis*, where Alemanno demonstrates his ability to succinctly incorporate materials into his own work:³⁴

MS Paris 849	Liber Razielis
And you should gather seven	The second herb is Artemisia... and
herbs: the <i>Arthmiza</i> will show	with it you will invoke winds and all

32 See Sofer, “Magic and Kabbalah,” 683–85.

33 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. lat. 1300, 11v: “et nomen principis qui eum michi destinavit dicebatur Zamecliton, et duo sapientes qui eum portaverunt et tradiderunt michi unus ipsorum vocabatur, Harimazayl et alter dicebatur Zazont.” This passage is also appeared in Secret, *Sefer Razi’el*, 229. The only difference of my reading from the one of Secret is the name of Harimazayl, which Secret read Harmazayl. A seventeenth-century Hebrew translation of *Liber Razielis* seems to preserve forms that are closer to the corrupted names in MS Paris 849: *Yeyseyqieyron* (ייסיקיאירון), *Dayymasail* (דאימאסאיל) and *Zazo ֹרִית* (זאזוריט). See New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary MS. 8117, 60r.

34 Alemanno’s editing skills seem to be practically oriented. An example is his short version of the commentary on the forty-two-letter divine name. Alemanno’s version of this text is based on the fourth version of that commentary, which was characterized by Idel, and it is abbreviated and practically oriented. Actually, its form corresponds with magical recipe texts, specifically texts from the *Shimmushim* genre, where the holy names, or the specific Biblical verses, are listed with their properties. See MS Paris 849, 86v–87r. On the fourth version of the commentary on the forty-two-letter divine name (שם מ”ב אותיות), see Moshe Idel, “The Commentaries of Nehemiah Ben Shlomo to the Forty-Two Letter Divine Name,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 14 (2006): 164 [Hebrew]. For a list of manuscripts that preserves the fourth version of the commentary, see Naama Ben-Shachar, “R. Avigdor’s Commentary to the Forty-Letter Divine Name and Its Relation to the Commentaries of R. Nehemiah the Prophet,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 33 (2015): 120–22 n. 58 [Hebrew]. See also the recent publication of Moshe Idel, “On the Genre of Commentaries on the Forty-Two Letter Divine Name and Its Later History,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 42 (2018): 131–91 [Hebrew].

you the aerial spirits that you will call, and anoint a mirror with *Qanbas* so they will be seen as you wish... and when you will eat *Qardamomy* they will be seen to your eyes, and [when you will eat] the *Tsirpolynas* they will appear in clouds far from you.³⁵

the spirits that you will wish, and you will benefit. The third herb is Cannabis... and the virtue of its juice is if you will anoint yourself with it and with juice of *Artemisia*, and you will place yourself in front of a mirror of steel and invoke the spirits, you will see them... the fifth herb is *Cardamom*... and eat it when you will call [the spirits]... the fourteenth herb is called *Serpyllum*... and it makes the spirits to be seen in the clouds of heaven.³⁶

Although *Liber Razielis* is quite dominant in Alemanno's magical system, it is certainly not the only work from which he borrows his magical Solomonic knowledge. When he and his "mother," that is, the Torah, wander in the lowest world, they also learn how to control demons with various ceremonial acts:

To make a big circle from this parchment, to write many names in it and in its circumference... and in its circumference you should write with blood of bat, since it resembles spirits and demons, and [write] the sacred names that begin with *Agla* and end with *Rabur*.³⁷

- 35 MS Paris 849, 46v: ומכל עשב האדמה תקח לך שבעה : את הארטמיזא תקרא רוחות אויריות ויראו לך, ואת מיני הקאנבאש תמשח מראה לטושה בה יראו לצונגך... ואת הקרדמומי באכלך ממנו יולדו לך לעיניך, ואת הצירפוליינש יראו לך בעבים רחוקים ממך.
- 36 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. lat. 1300, 26v-28r: "Secundus herba est artemisia... et cum ista invocabis ventos et omnes spiritus quos volueris et proficies. Tertia herba est canapis... et virtus succi eius est si unexeris te cum ipso et cum succo artemisia et posueris te ante speculum calibis et invocabis spiritus videbis eos... Quinta herba est cardemomum... et istam comede quondam invocaveris... [28r] Quartadecima herba dicitur serpyllum... et facit videri spiritus in nubibus celi..."
- 37 MS Paris 849, 49r: לעשות עגול גדול מקלף זה לכתוב סביבותיו ואל תוכו שמות רבות... ועל סביבותיו יכתב נא מדם העטלף, להדמותו אל רוחות ושדים, את שמות קדושים ראשיתם. The son learns those acts from Adai and Blian, who, as Scholem already noted, are two figures that appear in *Sefer Ha-Tamar* (The Book of the Palm), with which Alemanno was familiar. See Scholem, "An Unknown

This is just a glimpse of an entire ceremony that has been written, in my opinion, under the influence of *Liber Iuratus Honorii* – the aforementioned *Liber Sacer*. In *Liber Iuratus* the magician is instructed to copy the “Seal of God” on a parchment, using bat’s blood as an ink.³⁸ *Liber Iuratus* also refers to the hundred names of God, with the first being Agla and the last Rabur – exactly as mentioned by Alemanno.³⁹ After those instructions, the “mother” and her son came across three angels that are known, again, from *Liber Razielis*: Pantapyrwn, Aqrtwn, and Sndalwn.⁴⁰ Those three angels explain the different elements of

Treatise,” 275; Idel, “Curriculum,” 312 n. 74. However, Adai and Blian’s teaching in MS Paris 849 does not derive from *Sefer Ha-Tamar*, which explicitly rejects their knowledge. See Abu Aflah, *Sefer Ha-Tamar*, ed. Gershom Scholem (Jerusalem: Workmen’s Printing Press, 1926), 6–7. Scholem identifies Blian as the Arabic form of Apollonius but does not recognize Adai. In my opinion, Adai is Idris, who is identified with Hermes. It is important to note that some information attributed to Hermes in *Liber Razielis* can be found in the teaching of Adai and Blian in MS Paris 849, e.g., in folio 48v: ותני נא לו מקנה בושם עץ אלעוד (and give him perfume of al’wd, Costus, Crocus, Musk, *Tymyamy* and blood of Upupa [Hoopoe] to fumigate the house with). Al’wd is the Arabic العود, aloe. See Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1874), 2190. *Tymyamy* is the Latin thymiamia (from the Greek θυμιάμα), which was used in the Vulgate (Exod 25:6) as the equivalent of the Hebrew קטרות, an incense. Cf. *Liber Razielis* in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. lat. 1300, 33v: “dixit hermes quod non est tale subfumigium ad invocandum spiritus sicut ambra et lignum aloes et costus mustus(!) crocus et sanguis hupupe cum thimiamate” (Hermes said that there is no great suffumigation for invoking spirits as amber and aloe wood and fresh Costus, Crocus and blood of Hoopoe with Thimiamate). About Idris as Hermes, see Kevin van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 121–57. About *Sefer Ha-Tamar* and its possible contribution to the Kabbalistic concept of *Maggid*, i.e. an entity that reveal secrets to the Kabbalist, see Shlomo Pines, “Le ‘Sefer ha-Tamar’ et les ‘maggidim’ des kabbalistes,” in *Hommage à Georges Vajda: études d’histoire et de pensée juives*, ed. Gérard Nahon and Charles Touati (Louvain: Peeters, 1980), 333–63. Neither the origin of *Sefer Ha-Tamar* nor its dating are clear. Different speculations have been made concerning this data, however, an updated systematic research of *Sefer Ha-Tamar* remains scholarly desiderata.

38 See Hedegård, *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, 69; Peterson, *The Sworn Book of Honorius*, 72–73.

39 See Hedegård, *Liber Iuratus Honorii*, 112; Peterson, *The Sworn Book of Honorius*, 184–85.

40 The names of the angels suggest that Alemanno consulted an already corrupted Hebrew translation of the Latin (or rather Castilian) version, since the kabbalist who was fascinated by the figure of Metatron would probably recognize his name and avoid its Latinized corrupted form. A Latin manuscript of *Liber*

the ritual and their necessity. For example, the magician is instructed to walk with white shoes or barefoot while summoning demons, for by that he expresses the superiority of the human body over the demonic one, because demons' legs are in the form of birds' legs.⁴¹ The magician should have strong red wine with him, because it will make him braver.⁴² He should also have a wand, so that he can use it to hit the demons if they disobey him.⁴³ These kinds of interpretation of Solomonic ritualistic acts are rare but not entirely new, especially in Italy.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Alemanno not only interpreted *Solomonic* practices, but also incorporated them into his cosmology. As far as *Liber Iuratus* is concerned, Alemanno adopted its aggressive – one might even say *negromantic* – attitude towards angels.⁴⁵ This attitude is expressed in a scene where the “mother” and her son start ascending to the upper worlds.

Razielis clearly shows that Aqrṭwn and Sndalwn are Metatron and Sandalfon. See Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. lat. 1300, 25r: “Pantaseron, Mitaitron, Sandalfon.”

- 41 MS Paris 849, 51r: והמנעלים או לבנים או יחף ילך במלאכתם להכניעם ביופי פעמי האדם עליהם אשר הם כרגלי כל צפור כנף ולא יוכלו לשנותם לעולם.
- 42 MS Paris 849, 51r: ...הבבוק מלא יין טוב רחני עז הכה אדום לשתות בצמא בקראנו אותם... והיין המחזק את הלב ומשמחו ומגבירו ללחום כנגדם ומסיר היגון והאנחה והפחד והרעדה מהלב.
- 43 MS Paris 849, 51v: השבטים להכותם במקל כאתונות הטותם הדרך הישר אם יטו מדרך האתרים.
- 44 See, for example, *De occultis et manifestis* of Antonio da Montolmo, which was studied, edited, and translated by Nicolas Weill-Parot, “Antonio Da Montolmo’s *De Occultis et Manifestis* or *Liber Intelligentiarum*: An Annotated Critical Edition with English Translation and Introduction,” in *Invoking Angels: Theurgic Ideas and Practices, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 219–93.
- 45 Mesler, “Christian Reception,” 134. By *negromantic* I mean that related to *negromancy*. On *negromancy* see Frank Klaassen, “Necromancy,” in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. Sophie Page and Catherine Rider, Routledge Histories (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 201–11. As Mathiesen noted, there is a similarity between one of the operations of *Liber Iuratus* and the methods of the *Clavicula Salomonis* – an explicit demonic work. See Mathiesen, “A Thirteenth-Century Ritual,” 150. It is most probable that the author of *Liber Iuratus*, who was familiar with demonic magic, cast angelic elements into a pre-existing demonic text.

The Cosmology of Alemanno and Pico's Triplex Merkabah

Throughout his work, Alemanno sketches a complex cosmology that, as already mentioned, was inspired by Dante's *La Divina Commedia*. In Alemanno's work, the lowest world is the elemental and demonic world; the middle world is the world of the planets, the zodiac, and the *anima universalis* – the universal soul (הנפש הכוללת); and the upper world contains seven heavens and three separated worlds. The upper is the world of names (עולם השמות), the middle is the world of the Sephirot (עולם הספירות), and the lower is the world of letters (עולם האותיות). Alongside this cosmology, in a later stage of the writing, Alemanno added four “rungs outside the Sephirot” (מדרגות שלא בכלל) (הספירות): the impure Sephirot (ספירות לא טהורות),⁴⁶ sacred names (שמות קדושים), camps of the divine presence (מחנות שכינה), and legions of angels (כתות מלאכים). In the manuscript, these four rungs are placed inside the upper world, but we should keep in mind that they are later additions, as the difference between the first and the second edited version of the outline of the manuscript verifies.⁴⁷ Thus, the reader needs to treat them as miscellaneous materials, which belong to different parts of the cosmology. In the following schematic table, I provide an overview of the structure of the cosmology:

The Upper World (Paradiso)	World of Names	Rungs outside the Sephirot
	World of Sephirot	
	World of Letters	
	Seven Heavens	
The Middle World (Purgatorio)	World of Souls	
The Lower World (Inferno)	Fire	
	Air	
	Water	
	Earth	

46 Alemanno took the system of the left emanation from Moses of Burgos, most probably through Joseph ibn Waqar's work “The Book of Roots,” which was known to Pico in the Latin translation *Liber de Radicibus*, made for him by Mithridates. See Chaim Wirszubski, “Giovanni Pico's Companion to Kabbalistic Symbolism,” in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion: Presented to Gershom G. Scholem*, ed. Efraim Elimelek Urbach (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 352–62; Paul Fenton, “R. Joseph Ibn Waqar's *Sefer Shoreshei Ha-Qabbalah*: A Kabbalistic Lexicon,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 4 (1999): 148–49 [Hebrew].

47 See Sofer, “Magic and Kabbalah,” 686–87.

When the son and his “mother” ascend to the upper world, they start by describing the angelic seven heavens as they appear in *Sefer Ha-Razim* (The Book of Secrets), where each heaven is inhabited by different angels and spirits that can perform different things.⁴⁸ This part also contains materials from works such as the Hebrew version of *Liber Lunae* (The Book of the Moon, ספר הלבנה) — an astro-magical treatise that focuses on the construction of images — and the astral *De viginti quattuor horis* (On the Twenty Four Hours), as well as, again, *Liber Razielis*.⁴⁹ Most of this part is a list of sacred names, some of them described as Meforashim (explicit, מפורשים), corresponding to planets and zodiac signs. For example:

The angels of Saturn are Qpsy 'l [and] Hwzy 'l. The angels of Jupiter are... [the angel] of Aries Hsdy 'l... and there are explicit names above them... the first ŠNMSNNSYNYH...⁵⁰

These kinds of sacred names can act on the physical world, and through a quite simple mechanism Alemanno describes the source of this ability: the top layer of the upper world, that is the world of names, does not contain all the divine names but rather ten specific names, which Alemanno mentions through passages that he cites from Rabbi Yosef Gikatilia's book *Sha'are Ora* (Gates of Light, שערי אורה).⁵¹ Those ten names are the essence (עצמות) of God, and they correspond to the ten Sefirot in the second world that receive the emanation from those names, and in turn affect the world of letters:

The letters are as matter to the ten paths that called ten Sefirot... and the Sefirot are as forms and shapes to the twenty-two letters, so they [the Sefirot] move, revolve, combine and join them [the letters] to [create] different sayings

48 Published by Rebiger and Schäfer, *Sefer ha-Razim I*.

49 Scholem was the first to notice the appearance of *Liber Lunae*. See Scholem, “An Unknown Treatise,” 276. On the Hebrew *Liber Lunae* see Fabrizio Lelli, “Le Versioni Ebraiche Di Un Testo Ermetico: Il Sefer Ha-Levanah,” *Henoch* 12 (1990): 147–64.

50 MS Paris 849, 64r: מלאכי שבתי קפציאל הוויאל. מלאכי צדק... לטלה חסדיאל... יש שמות מפורשים עליהם... ראשון שנמסנסיניה...

51 The work of Gikatilia was translated by Mithridates for Pico. See Mithridates, *Sermo De Passione Domini*, 55–56.

and names and verbs as they wish. And they will be the letters that move the separate intelligences of the different heavens.⁵²

The Sephirot in the second world act on the letters and combine them in order to create different sayings — potent sacred names, such as the names of the separate intelligences, namely, the angels of the seven heavens who rule over the planets and the zodiac. I assume that this exact mechanism stands behind the epistle of Rabbi Isaac of Pisa, who knew Alemanno and was familiar with his teachings.⁵³ In this epistle, which has been identified and studied by Idel, Isaac describes that:

The first part [of Kabbalah] is the sacred names, which are true beings that exist in an absolute existence, [and] which are produced by the power of letters combination of the glorious ten names of the blessed God, that is the ten Sephirot, by the twenty-two letters... and the pure man... will have the power to act with them as he wishes, and to instantly make signs and wonders. And they [the sacred names] all stand in palaces (הכלות), and each has its own angel or specific angels in the world of angels, [and] when the right person will adjure the angel by the name of its superior to do a specific act, it will instantly fulfil his wish. And this is the practical part of the wisdom of Kabbalah.⁵⁴

There are more similarities between Isaac's epistle and Alemanno's works, some of which have already been discussed by Idel. Moreover, the mechanism that Isaac describes sketches the difference between practical kabbalah — which Alemanno named “the practical Sephirotic wisdom” (חכמת הספירה המעשית) — and the theoretical-

52 MS Paris 849, 77r: והספירות... עשר ספירות... והספירות הם כחומר לעשר נתיבות הנקראות עשר ספירות... והספירות הם לכ"ב אותיות כצורות וגשמות להם להניעם ולגלגלם ולצרפם ולחבר מהם אמרות שונות ושמות ופעלים כרצונם. והיו המה לאותיות השכלים הנבדלים לרקיעים המניעים אותם.

53 For an edition and study of this epistle see Moshe Idel, “The Epistle of R. Isaac of Pisa in Its Three Versions(?),” *Kovetz Al-Yad* 10 (1982): 163–214 [Hebrew].

54 The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, Oxford, England Ms. Opp. 576, 434v. Published in Hebrew by Idel, “The Epistle of R. Isaac,” 200–01: החלק הראשון הם השמות הקדושים אשר הם עצמים אמתיים נמצאים מציאות גמור יוצאים מכח צירוף אותיות העשרה שמות הנכבדים מהאל ית' אשר הם עשרה הספירות, באמצעות הכ"ב אותיות... והאיש הטהור... יהיה לו כח לפעול בהם כרצונו ולעשות אותות ומופתים ברגע. וכלם עומדים הכלות הכלות, וכל אחד יש לו מלאך או מלאכים מיוחדים בעולם המלאכים אשר בהיות האדם הראוי לכך משיב המלאך בשם הממונה עליו לעשות פעולה מיוחדת, תכף ימלא שאלתו. וזה הוא החלק המעשי מחכמת הקבלה.

cosmological (“theosophical”) kabbalah, namely, “the theoretical Sephirotic wisdom” (חכמת הספירה העיונית).⁵⁵ The distinction between the practical and theoretical stands also behind the concept of *Ma’aseh Bereshit* (מעשה בראשית) and *Ma’aseh Merkavah* (מעשה מרכבה), when Alemanno states in another work:

Ma’aseh Bereshit is the knowledge of creation, which is known through *Sefer Yetsirah*, and its purpose is to create a world... and everything is by the wisdom of the combining of letters...and *Ma’aseh Merkavah* is the perception of the spiritual world.⁵⁶

In Alemanno’s *The Desire of Solomon*, the distinction between the two seems to be based on the natural versus the divine:

Ma’aseh Bereshit, which is the secret of the creation and the nature of the planets and the nature of the hyle... and *Ma’aseh Merkavah* which is the divine secrets as the separate [intelligences] and the Sephirot.⁵⁷

Overall, it seems that *Ma’aseh Bereshit* focuses on the creation act of nature through the combination of letters, while *Ma’aseh Merkavah* focuses on the spiritual world and its perception. Therefore, the three upper worlds are the *Merkavah*, while the fourth – containing angels and practical methods to use sacred names – corresponds to *Ma’aseh Bereshit*.⁵⁸

While keeping in mind the role of Alemanno’s cosmology in dividing kabbalah, we can now turn to Pico’s definition of kabbalah. When he defined kabbalah in his kabbalistic theses, Pico divided:

55 For a discussion of definitions of Kabbalah in the circles of Alemanno, see Idel, “The Epistle of R. Isaac,” 181–84.

56 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS. héb 270, 1r: מעשה בראשית הוא ידיעת... והכל בחכמת צרוף האותיות... ומעשה היצירה הנודע מספר יצירה ותכליתו לדעת לברא עלם... והכל בחכמת צרוף האותיות... ומעשה מרכבה הוא השגת העולם הרוחני...

57 Levin, *Heshek Shelomo*, 620: מעשה בראשית שהם סודות הבריאה והטבע הגלגלי וטבע ההיולי... ומעשה מרכבה שהם הסודות האלקיות כנבדלים וכספירות.

58 The reliance of the practical *Ma’aseh Bereshit* on the Sephirotic *Ma’aseh Merkavah* is also expressed when Alemanno introduces the name of forty-two (שם מ”ב), explaining that: “The masters of the *Merkavah* combine the letters of [the name of] forty-two, since there is nothing like it for operations and [magical] acts.” (ומגלגלים בעלי המרכבה אותיות של מ”ב כי לפעולות ולגבורות אין כמוהו). See MS Paris 849, 86r.

The speculative part of the Cabala four ways... The first is what I call the science of the revolution of the alphabet... The second, third, and fourth is the triplex Merkabah, corresponding to the three parts of particular philosophy, concerning divine, middle, and sensible natures.⁵⁹

There is no consensus among scholars concerning the term “Triplex Merkabah.” Wirszubski argued that this refers to the triangular forms inside the Sephirotic tree.⁶⁰ Following Yates, Idel argued that this refers to the three worlds — the divine Sephirotic world, the astral world, and the physical world.⁶¹ Farmer, on the other hand, explains that the Triplex Merkabah is the intellectual, animate, and corporeal realms.⁶² I would like to suggest that Pico’s Triplex Merkabah corresponds to Alemanno’s cosmology. We find two parts of kabbalah in Pico’s thesis: the first is the combination of letters, corresponding with Alemanno’s *Ma’aseh Bereshit*, and the second is the philosophical part, which he divided into three. In Alemanno’s cosmology, the spiritual realm, the upper world, actually consists of three worlds, as I mentioned above — the world of names, the world of Sephirot, and the world of letters. Those, for Alemanno, are the *Merkavah*, which he also explains as a threefold ten Sephirot: adopting the idea from Rabbi Yosef Ibn Waqar,⁶³ Alemanno suggests that there are three sets of ten Sephirot. In Alemanno’s work, those three sets are the upper prophetic (נבואיות), the middle intellectual (מחשביות), and the lower visual (מושגות בצפיה) Sephirot. The prophetic Sephirot correspond to the world of names, while the intellectual and visual Sephirot correspond to the world of the Sephirot and the world of letters, respectively:

And [the prophets] did so as the astrologers... who according to them there were two kinds of zodiac — sensible and intellectual. And they [the prophets] thought like that about two kinds of Sephirot — visual and intellectual. And when Moses came... he saw and observed and prophesied that those Sephirot that are

59 Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 521.

60 Wirszubski, *Pico*, 136–38.

61 Idel, “The Epistle of R. Isaac,” 182 n. 118.

62 Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, 520.

63 On Ibn Waqar’s concept, see Moshe Idel, “The Sephirot above the Sephirot,” *Tarbitz* 51 (1982): 11 n. 58; Fenton, “Sefer Shoreshei Ha-Qabbalah,” 160–61.

considered close to the source... and he called them “names,” by the names that refer to the prophetic Sefhirot.⁶⁴

While Pico’s distinction between practical and theoretical kabbalah might not follow Alemanno’s, since his speculative one (*speculatiuam cabalae*) consists of four parts that include the “revolution of the alphabet,” we can notice that he mentions that his Triplex Merkabah correspond to the three natures: the divine, the middle, and the sensible natures. In my opinion, these categories correspond to Alemanno’s set, that is to say, the prophetic (corresponds with Pico’s divine nature), intellectual (corresponds with Pico’s middle nature), and visual (corresponds with Pico’s sensible nature). Assuming this is indeed the case, it is still difficult to decide the direction of the transmission of the Triplex Merkabah concept, especially because we have no evidence that Alemanno and Pico met before 1488.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Alemanno also used his threefold system to describe the way in which the prophet ascends through magical practices in order to see the Merkabah (צפיית המרכבה).⁶⁶

The Key to the Gates of Heaven: Ascending Through Magic

The threefold Sefhirotic system was important to Alemanno, and is far more complex than I have described, since Alemanno used it in different ways and created an elaborate system of correspondences. Such use of the threefold system can be found where the “mother” and her son wish to ascend to the upper world, and two problems emerge in the mind of the son: the first is the ability to ascend, and

64 MS Paris 849, 91v-92r: ועשו כזה כהוברי שמים... והיו לפי דעתם שני מיני מזלות המושגות: בחוש והנודעות במחשבה, וככה גזרו על שני מיני ספירות מושגות בצפיה ומושגות במחשבה. ובבא משה... ראה והביט וחזה כי אלו הספירות הנחשבות הקרובות במעלה אל המקור... וקרא להם שמות בשמות אשר הם מורות על הספירות הנבואיות.

65 Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” 111.

66 Receiving the beatific vision through magical practices is one of the main goals of the practitioner of *Liber Sacratius*. See Boudet, “Magie théurgique, angéologie et vision béatifique.” Alemanno is familiar with practices for ascending to the divine world, or heavens, also through the well-known Hekhalot literature. He incorporated into MS Paris 849 large portions of what is considered to be a part of this literature. See Herrmann, “The Reception of Hekhalot Literature.” For discussions of the Hekhalot literature in the context of the study of Jewish magic see Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 329-338; Yuval Harari, *Jewish Magic before the Rise of Kabbalah* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017), 316-330.

the second is the ability to get into the heavens, since their gates might be closed. The “mother” calms her son, while addressing his concerns:

I will go down with thee to the bottom of the earth, and I will also surely bring thee up to the chiefs of the ten armies above, higher than the highest, and higher than them⁶⁷ are rungs of three tens... and if this gate of the lord will be closed, and will not open, behold, for the key is in my hand: in one edge there are seven teeth, tooth for tooth, and hand for hand [of the key]⁶⁸ will be square and not circle, with three circles upon the top of it.⁶⁹

In this passage, two concepts are introduced — the “three tens” Sephirotic system, which I have already discussed, and the key to the gates of heaven. The “mother” described a specific kind of key with seven teeth (i.e., ridges), a square handle and three circles at its top edge, probably in a triangular shape, given that Alemanno uses the phrase *עגולה משולשת* (might be translated as “triangular circle,” but it probably refers to three circles). The description of the key holds certain meanings, which the “mother” explains:

On seven gates — you are already full of years, from gate to gate, [which] one tooth opens without closing. And if they will not answer you, and will frighten you by their voice, and will defeat you with the light of their faces — behold, I ascend in a triplex way: flesh, spirit, soul, power, will, knowledge. They will look and stare upon these three which I have: my power and flesh will cause them to answer me, my will and spirit will force them to embellish the noise of their voice [to be] like my own voice, my knowledge and soul will bring them to wear mottled, dyed, speckled and grizzled clothes — whatsoever my eyes desire, they [the angels] will not keep from them. But if they will not obey me, I shall call the seasons and command the four winds of

67 Cf. Eccles. 5:8.

68 Cf. Exod. 21:24.

69 MS Paris 849, 55v-56r: ואנכי ארד עמך אל תחתיות ארץ, ואנכי אעלך גם עלה אל שרי צבאות מעלה עשרה גבוה מעל גבוה וגבוהים עליהם מדרגות שלשה עשרות...ואם זה השער לה' יהיה סגור לא יפתח הנה נא בידי מפתח: על צדה האחת שבעה שנים שן תחת שן, ויד תחת יד רבוע יהיה לא עגול, עם עגולה משולשת על ראשה, בה דלתי שחקים נפתח.

heaven to stop pouring rain upon them, and dew of lights... Thus, I will ascend by my hands and feet — watch me and follow.⁷⁰

The “mother” reveals the significance of the key to the gates of heaven and its components. Its seven teeth are representations of achieving the seventh degree of prophecy, which Alemanno claimed he achieved during forty-nine years, spending seven years at each degree since he was thirteen.⁷¹ The first step to open the gates of heaven is, therefore, the seventh degree of prophecy. As we already saw, this degree was described by Alemanno as the ability to manipulate the physical world through subjugating demons. This evidently aggressive approach towards demons seems to be directed also towards angels: the “mother” threatens to call the four seasons and winds of heaven to harm the disobedient angels. In my opinion, this “calling” might frighten the angels only if by “the four seasons and wind,” Alemanno refers either to the names of the different angels and seasons that are listed in *Liber Lunae* or those of *Liber Razielis*, both of which Alemanno knew and quoted extensively in MS Paris 849, as we have already seen. This is also in concordance with the most striking evidence for the treatment of angels as demons, possibly inspired by *Liber Iuratus* — the ascending of the “mother” in a “triplex way” (עולה משולשת).⁷²

Fear is embodied in Solomonic works in different forms, since the act of summoning demons is basically the magician’s invitation for a frightening dialogue between two sides: the human and the demonic. The summoner tries to bind and control the demon, while the latter resists. This rather aggressive dialogue can be described as

70 MS Paris 849, 56r: כי על שבע שערים שבעת שנים, משער לשער שן אחת פותחת ואין סוגר. והיה אם לא יענוך, ובקולם יבהילוך ובאור פניהם יפילוך, הנה אנכי עולה משולשת: בשר רוח נשמה כח חפץ ידיעה. המה יביטו יראו בי את שלשת אלה לי: כחי ובשרי יניעם להשיבני, חפצי ורוחי יכניעם להשיבני שאון קולם כקולי, דעתי ונשמתי יביאם להלביש אותם בגדים שרוקים חמוצים נקודים וברודים, ככל אשר ישאלו עיני לא יאצלו מהם. כי אם בזאת לא ישמעו לי, אל תקופות השנה אקרא ועל ארבע רוחות השמים אצוה מלהמטיר עליהם מטר וטל אורות... ובכך עלה אעלה בידי ורגלי ממני תראה ובא אחרי. I wish to thank Prof. Gideon Bohak for his important note concerning the reading of מלהמטיר. It is probably a reference to Isa. 26:19, where the dew is mentioned as reviving. Thus, stop pouring this dew is a death threat toward the angels.

71 MS Paris 849, 40r.

72 Alemanno changed the biblical phrase עגלה משולשת (a heifer of three years old), to עולה משולשת, which still preserves the original meaning, since עולה also means a sacrifice. I translated עולה משולשת as “ascend in a triplex way,” but other words that preserve the ternary meaning of משולשת might be suitable.

a power struggle — the demon is doing his best to control the Solomonic practitioner, while he makes efforts to control the demon. The “emotional” subduing instrument, the emotion that one uses to control the other in this ritual, is fear. In an unknown Hebrew copy of the *Ydea Salomonis* preserved in the Cairo Genizah,⁷³ the practitioner refers to the demons he summons, addressing each aspect that might be used by them to frighten him:

Come to this circle, appear in front of our eyes peacefully, quietly, without any ugliness and tremble, to fulfill our desire and wishes. Come, and do not delay by any means.⁷⁴

This is also the case in the oldest manuscript of the *Clavicula Salomonis*, where the practitioner addresses the demons:

I exorcise you and command you, do not delay, and come without noise but with all affabilities, and no deformities.⁷⁵

73 The *Ydea Salomonis*, also known as *De quatuor annulis*, exists in two versions, solely in Latin. Thorndike listed four manuscripts of this work. See Lynn Thorndike, “Traditional Medieval Tracts Concerning Engraved Astrological Images,” in *Mélanges Auguste Pelzer: Etudes d’histoire Littéraire et Doctrinale de La Scolastique Médiévale Offertes à Monseigneur Auguste Pelzer* (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l’Université, 1947), 250–51. Another Latin manuscript has been discussed by Boudet and by Véronèse. See Boudet, *Entre Science et Nigromance*, 145–49; Véronèse, “magie salomonienne,” 201. To these five manuscripts I would like to add a Latin manuscript in which I have found another copy of the *Ydea*: Prague, The National Library of the Czech Republic, XIII.F.24, 101r–112r. The *Ydea* in this manuscript seems to share similarities with the one in the Florentine manuscript (Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 89, sup. 38). I would like to express my gratitude to Petra Hofbauerová from the National Library of the Czech Republic for providing me with access to this manuscript. Few Hebrew recensions of the *Ydea Salomonis* have survived. See Gal Sofer, “The Seal of Bileth: Its Position in the Kevitza Literature and the Mafte’ah Shelomoh Cycle” (MA thesis, Ben-Gurion University, 2016), 52–57 [Hebrew].

74 Cambridge, T-S NS 162.89, 1r: ותבאו אל העגולה ה(זא)ת להתראות לפני עינינו בשלוח והשקט בלי שׁ זום כיעור ורעדה להשלים חופצ(ג)ו ומשאלות לבינו באו ולא תאחרו בשום פנין. I would like to thank Prof. Gideon Bohak for his suggestions concerning this fragment. The letter ת ומשאלות was densely written above the line.

75 Amsterdam, Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica 114 (now in a private collection, Coxe. 25), 85: “vos exorciso et vobis impero ut nullam moram faciatis et sine strepitu et absque omni affabili[tate] et sine aliqua deformitate

Alemanno was well aware of this Solomonic approach to demons, and in fact elaborates on it in the lower demonic world:

... to seal your ears when you hear the voice of their thunder [which they make] so you will be thrown down in front of them because of the fearful voice in your ears. And do not hear them, and do not fear them... [and] when you call them, they will come in crooked ways and different and scary forms... look down to the ground, and do not answer them... if you will call them with divine names and courage... they will come with terror and fear, and will answer you with a voice that is loud and clear as the day.⁷⁶

The same aspects that Alemanno addressed in the lowest world while invoking demons are now turned towards angels in the upper world. The “mother” described herself ascending in a “triplex way,” armored with three couples: flesh-power, spirit-will, and soul-knowledge. The triad power-will-knowledge might be a reference to the Christian *potentia, sapientia (or scientia) et voluntas*,⁷⁷ and is used by the “mother” to address three aspects of the dialogue with the unwilling angels: their obedience, which will be achieved by her flesh-power; their terrifying voice, which will be embellished by her will-spirit; and their deformed appearance, which will be tamed by her soul-knowledge. The fact that this triad is described as circles on the top of the key to the gates of heaven, and that the “mother” described herself armored

veniatis.” I would like to thank Dr. Cis van Heertum and Prof. Carlos Gilly, who helped me get access to this manuscript.

76 MS Paris 849, 51v-52r: לאטום אוניך בשמעך קול רעמיהם להפילך לפניהם מקול פחדים ... באזניך ולא תשמע אליהם ולא תירא מהם... בקראך אותם יבאו בארחות עקלקלות ובצורות שונות מהבילות (!) ... הבט נא בארץ ולא תענם... אם תקראם עם שמות אלהיות ואבירות לבכ... יבאו באימה ופחד וישיבו לך בקול רם וברור כיום.

77 It is important to note that Ficino knew, according to Copenhaver, that “the trinity of potentia, sapientia et bonità appears in altered form, with voluntas replacing bonità.” See Brian Copenhaver, “Hermes Theologus: The Siense Mercury and Ficino’s Hermetic Demons,” in *Humanity and Divinity in Renaissance and Reformation: Essays in Honor of Charles Trinkaus*, eds. John O’Malley, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Gerald Christianson (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 172. If Bartolucci is right about the possibility that Alemanno met Ficino in 1481, this might be the pathway of the transmission of this idea. See Guido Bartolucci, *Vera Religio: Marsilio Ficino e La Tradizione Ebraica* (Torino: Paideia, 2017), 79–105. In any event, Levin’s argument that Pico wrote his thesis based on his conversations with Alemanno is, for now, baseless. See Levin, *Heshek Shelomo*, 24 n. 24.

with them *while* she ascends to the upper world, suggest a possible connection with the Merkavah, and more specifically – the triplex Merkabah of Pico.⁷⁸ If I am right, Alemanno created a system of correspondences that can be summarized as follows:

Merkavah	Worlds	Human	Attributes	Angels/Demons
Prophetic Sefhirot	The World of Names	Soul	Knowledge	Appearance
Intellectual Sefhirot	The World of Sefhirot	Spirit	Will	Voice
Visual Sefhirot	The World of Letters	Flesh	Power	Obedience

Epilogue

Alemanno's pairing of contemporary ceremonial magical sources with kabbalistic works enabled him to create a new system of kabbalah – a practical method to ascend to the upper worlds through, among other instruments, ceremonial magic. In his autograph, he created an encyclopedic work that organizes magical practices incorporated with kabbalistic ideas. All of these practices were popular in fifteenth-century Florence among Jews and Christians who sought ancient wisdom: magic and kabbalah. Alemanno, as I mentioned above, explicitly counts Solomonic practices as part of the ancient wisdom (החכמה הקדמונה). Like Pico, who perceived that magic and kabbalah are both play a theological role (by assuring the divinity of Christ), Alemanno saw them as essential to open the gates of heaven. Besides the fact that kabbalah and Solomonic practices share the same ancient origin, in the eyes of Alemanno, the connection between magic and kabbalah in his and in Pico's thought relies on the connection between the first and the second part of kabbalah – the combination of letters and the divine worlds. There are, of course,

78 It is tempting to see the description of the key to the gates of heaven as a representation of the ten Sefhirot – on its top the three upper Sefhirot, and on the bottom edge the seven lower Sefhirot. This, however, is not explicitly mentioned by Alemanno.

differences between Pico's and Alemanno's approaches to magic, as the former condemned demonic magic, while the latter seems to be a supporter of that kind of practice, or at least perceived it as a legitimate practice. Arguably, social context might have contributed to such a difference — Pico was more subject to criticism than Alemanno and was in fact criticized for his unconventional theses. It is also important to note that these two figures modified their approaches from time to time. Pico, for example, changed his approach towards astrology, and Alemanno changed his towards ceremonial magic.

The world of correspondences and “spiritual links” that Alemanno created was not entirely unique. With the help of a kabbalistic theory — heavily influenced both by the Renaissance Neoplatonic revival and by contemporary magical works — he explained magical operations and popular esoteric knowledge. His autograph in MS Paris 849 is, therefore, highly important for the study of the reception of magic among kabbalists, as well as the reception of kabbalistic ideas in Christian kabbalistic circles.

The “Secret of the Creation of the Demons”: A Chapter in an Anonymous Lurianic Treatise Adapted by Moses Zacuto

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Abstract

This article questions the view that R. Moses Zacuto (ReMeZ) focused his kabbalistic efforts strictly on adapting Hayyim Vital’s version of Lurianic kabbalah. In doing so, an unknown Lurianic treatise found in an autograph of Zacuto will be specifically taken into account. The concepts of this treatise are affiliated with the school of Israel Saruq, and some of them resound in Zacuto’s work, in particular *Em la-Binah*. The first part analyzes a chapter on the creation of demons, and addresses the issue of possible sources, which leads to the identification of an Ashkenazi tradition that was also incorporated in Vital’s *Sefer ha-Liqqutim*. The second part discusses one of Zacuto’s glosses on this treatise and the connection to his dictionary of magic names, *Shorshei ha-Shemot*.

Introduction

The kabbalistic writings of Moses Zacuto (ca.1610 Amsterdam–1697 Mantua), who directed for some decades the reception and distribution of Lurianic works in Northern Italy, are strongly bound to his image as a staunch defender of Ḥayyim Vital’s version of Lurianic kabbalah, mainly according to the redaction of Jacob Tsemaḥ.¹ Joseph Avivi described in detail the process of Zacuto’s

* I would like to thank Prof. Gideon Bohak for giving me the opportunity to present a first draft of this article at “The Fourth Workshop for the Study of Ancient Jewish Magic” in Tel Aviv, May 30, 2019. The whole subject is part of a joint project with my colleague, Prof. Yuval Harari, “Encyclopedic Magic: A

choice of manuscripts, indicating the master copies with the meaningful phrase “fine flour” (סולת נקיה), and rejecting other versions of Lurianic kabbalah, in particular the editions of Joseph Solomon del Medigo (*Sefer Novlot Hokhmah*) and Naphtali Bacharach (*Emeq ha-Melekh*).² It comes as a surprise, then, that Zacuto’s own

Synergetic Approach to Rabbi Moses Zacuto’s Sources of Practical and Theoretical Kabbalah,” supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG). The project aims to reevaluate the writings of Moses Zacuto in general, and particularly his works on magic. An edition of *Sefer ha-Sodot* with special consideration of an autograph, The National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, Israel Ms. Heb. 40 615, is being prepared by Prof. Yuval Harari and his team, Dr. Eliezer Baumgarten and Dr. Uri Safrai; the Lurianic treatise in this manuscript, which is the object of the present article, will be edited by Eliezer Baumgarten and myself. I would like to express my gratitude to our colleagues in Israel.

- 1 There is an ongoing debate about the question of how and to what extent Lurianic teachings have been distributed in Europe in the first half of the seventeenth century, see Moshe Idel, “One from a Town, Two from a Clan – The Diffusion of Lurianic Kabbalah and Sabbateanism: A Re-Examination,” *Jewish History* 7 (1993): 79–104; Joseph Avivi, “קבלת האר”י, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 2008), 1033–35; Zeev Gries, “מסורת ושינוי במעבר מכתבי יד לדפוס,” *Alei Sefer* 23/24 (2015): 28, n. 38. On the entanglement of Lurianic kabbalah in Ashkenaz with earlier esoteric lore, see Eliezer Baumgarten, “הערות על דרכי השימוש של ר’ נפתלי בכרך,” *AJS Review* 37, no. 2 (2013): 1–23. I thank Prof. Zeev Gries for his valuable comments.
- 2 Cf. Joseph Avivi, “סולת נקיה נפתו של רבי משה זכות,” *Pe’amim* 96 (2003): 76–79; the redaction of Lurianic manuscripts by Zacuto and his students is summarized in Avivi, “קבלת האר”י, vol. 2, 724–46. On Josef del Medigo’s two volumes *Ta’alumot Hokhmah* (Basel [Hanau] 1629) and *Novlot Hokhmah* (Basel [Hanau] 1631), see Avivi, “קבלת האר”י, vol. 2, 551–55. Concerning Naphtali Bacharach, Avivi “סולת נקיה נפתו,” 79, refers in particular to the order of the *hekhlat* as described in the treatise *Limmudei ha-Beriah*, which was incorporated into *Emeq ha-Melekh* (cf. Joseph Avivi, “כתבי האר”י באיטליה עד שנת ש”פ,” *Alei Sefer* 11 (1984): 95, n. 14; cf. also Isaiah Tishby, “בכתביו ובחייו של אהרון ברכיה ממוריה חקרי קבלה ושלוחותיה, מחקרים,” in idem, *ומקורותיה*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1982), 197, n. 71, but “differs from Vital’s teaching regarding the order of the *hekhlat* and what is described therein” (Avivi, “סולת נקיה נפתו,” 79, n. 73, referring to the printed version of Vital in *Otsrot Hayyim*, Koretz 1783), which is why Zacuto rejected the order given in *Emeq ha-Melekh*, as noted by Gershom Scholem, *כתבי-היד בקבלה הנמצאים בבית הספרים הלאומי והאוניברסיטאי בירושלים*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1930), 152, with reference to Zacuto’s commentary on the Zohar, *Yodei Binah*, Ms. Jerusalem 40 82, fol. 32b. However, this statement should be specified: Zacuto actually wonders

kabbalistic explanations, which are scattered in his commentaries, poems, letters, halakhic writings, dictionaries, and more,³ include a sort of residue or imprint which came out of an intense occupation with ideas pursuant to Israel Saruq’s school of thought.⁴ Though these traces turn up rather inconspicuously, like angelic names would do, they reveal Zacuto’s casual attitude towards terms that would be telling in Saruqian contexts. A good example is “*malbush*,” which appears time and again in his two commentaries on the Zohar. To be sure, as an “aspect” different from the Saruqian perspective, it

“from where” the author of *Emeq ha-Melekh* adapted his arrangement (ולא ידעתי מנין לו, *ibid.* fol. 32a), which differs from the “genuine version of R. Isaac Luria and R. Ḥayyim Vital (והרח”ו).” The particular version of *Limmudei ha-Beriah* used by Naphtali Bacharach – which was apparently based on Ezra of Fano’s copy of the second part of *Hathalat Hokhmah* (cf. Avivi, “קבלת האר”י”, vol. 1, 305-307, vol. 2, 559-560; on this version, see also Ronit Meroz, “אסכולת סרוק: היסטוריה חדשה,” *Shalem* 7 [2001]: 156) – was therefore unknown to Zacuto, his acquaintance with early versions of Lurianic kabbalah circulating in Northern Italy notwithstanding. Elsewhere I shall compare Zacuto’s explanations concerning the *hekhlat* with the *hekhlat* of *malkhut de-beriah* in the last (but fragmentary) chapter (in addition to chapter 113) of the anonymous treatise discussed in the present article (see below) on the one hand, and the traditions of the Saruq school collected by Alexander Katz (for Katz’ redaction see Avivi, “קבלת האר”י”, vol. 1, 440-43) on the other.

- 3 A comprehensive mapping of Zacuto’s works will be carried out by Yuval Harari and his team; the genre of letters and Zacuto’s halakhic writings are being studied by Maximilian de Molière and Dr. Vladislav (Zeev) Slepoy of the German team. For the time being, see the list of Zacuto’s published writings, Yaakov Lattes, “כתביו של רבי משה זכות שבדפוס,” *Pe’amim* 96 (2003): 20–33.
- 4 For research on different branches and topics of this school, see Gershon Scholem, “ישראל סרוק – תלמיד האר”י?” *Zion* 5 (1940): 214–43 (=Daniel Abrams, ed., *קבלת האר”י*, אוסף מאמרים מאת גרשם שלום, [Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2008], 295–329); Moshe Idel, “בין קבלת ירושלים לקבלת ר’ ישראל סרוק (מקורות לתורת ר’ ישראל סרוק) המלבוש של ר’ ישראל סרוק,” *Shalem* 6 (1992): 165–73; Ronit Meroz, “פרוש אנונימי – תלמיד האר”י – עיון מחודש בסוגיה לאדרא רבא הנמנה עם אסכולת סרוק, או: מה בין סרוק וחבריו ובין אירגאס, שפינוזה ואחרים,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 12 (1996): 307–78; eadem, “Contrasting Opinions among the Founders of Saruq’s School,” in *Expérience, Écriture et Théologie dans le Judaïsme et les Religions du Livre*, ed. P. Fenton and R. Goetschel (Paris: Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2000), 191–202; eadem, “אסכולת סרוק”; Sharron Shatil, “The Kabbalah of R. Israel Saruq: A Lurianic-Cordoverian Encounter,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 14, no. 2 (2011): 158–87.

is well known in Vital's *Ets Ḥayyim*.⁵ In fact, it connotes both a midrashic and a magical background,⁶ and, what is more, the Cordoverean idea of what Bracha Sack described as the “dynamical process” of revealing by mantling, to wit “השגת מלבוש.”⁷ But Zacuto even stresses the “secret” of the “world of *malbush*,” implicating the emanation of the Alphabet, suited as א"ל ב"ם at the “center of *malbush*,” and the function of יו"ד האומנת, the formative agent of “wisdom” for improving the world of *Atsilut*, a female expression in line with Moses Cordovero's explanation of *Malkhut* and *Binah*.⁸ These — admittedly unusual — borrowings were integrated specifically into Zacuto's *Em la-Binah*; the raw material of this book is found at the very beginning of Ms. Jerusalem 615, collected but never published by Zacuto himself.⁹

- 5 In the following entry of Jacob Tsemah's dictionary *Erkhei ha-Kinuyyim* (ed. Moshe Zuriel, Jerusalem: Yerid ha-Sefarim, 2006, 377), conceptions found in Cordovero's and Vital's works are condensed in a way that appears to have been taken up again in the Saruqian approach: “Two times the ‘filling’ of the (divine name) א"ל amounts to the same numerical value as אור פני"אל and as השמ"ל (the gematria of both is 378; see Zohar 2:246b), which corresponds to the numerical value of מלבר"ש, since (the *Sefrah*) *Binah* attires male and female.” Cf. *Limmudei Atsilut*, Muncázs 1897, fol. 11a; Joseph del Medigo's *Novlot Ḥokhmah*, Basel (Hanau) 1631, ch. 15; Naphtali Bacharach, *Emeq ha-Melekh* (Jerusalem: Yerid ha-Sefarim, 2003), 151 (*sha'ar* 1:54), and the second chapter (*sod ha-malbush*) of the treatise *Ofanim* to be described below. For Cordovero, see e.g. *Pardes Rimmonim* (Jerusalem: Yerid ha-Sefarim, 2000), 397, col. a (*sha'ar* 24, *pereq* 2), and for Luria, see *Sefer ha-Liqqutim* (Jerusalem: Lifshitz Brothers, 1913), *parashat Tetze, siman* 22, fol. 63c.
- 6 See PesK 22:5, and *Sefer ha-Malbush*, which is referred to in Zacuto's commentary *Yodei Binah* on Zohar 1:75a in the context of Cordovero's explanation of Metatron as Agent Intellect (*sekhel ha-po'el*): “הוא סוד ספר” (ed. Isaac Naḥum, Bithah: Qol Bithah, 2010, 252).
- 7 Bracha Sack, *בשערי הקבלה של רבי משה קורדוביר* (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1995) 68.
- 8 See Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim* (Jerusalem: Yerid ha-Sefarim, 2000), 295, col. a (*sha'ar* 23, *erkhey ha-kinuyyim, pereq* 1, entry “אומנת,” referring to *Binah* in the context of Ruth 4:16); for an adaption in the Saruq-school, see Joseph del Medigo's *Novlot Ḥokhmah*, Basel (Hanau) 1631, chs. 25, 28, 30, and 36. Cf. also the treatise *Ofanim*, chs. 2–5 (the four letters of Alphabet א"ל ב"ם amount to 73 like *ḥokhmah*; יוד האומנת refers to the last *Yod* of the name 63, the second spelling of the Tetragramm, which is the secret of the “lower wisdom” hinted at in Ps 104:24).
- 9 *Em la-Binah* was published first as an appendix of *Sha'arei Binah* by Isaac Tsaba, Saloniki 1813, fol. 63a-104b; concerning the quotations see Ms. Jerusalem 615,

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However, no such concepts have been analyzed in Zacuto’s texts thus far. Toward starting a discussion on that front in the near future, the impact of an anonymous treatise of the Saruq-school embedded in an autograph of Zacuto will be examined here. First, I will focus on the chapter “the secret of the creation of the demons,” which allows some conclusions concerning the sources of the treatise, after which I will highlight one of the scarce marginal notes by Zacuto.

Preliminary Remarks on the Treatise *Ofanim*

The untitled treatise is structured by 121 *ofanim* (“ways”) – which is why it will be called in the following by this name – and each “way”¹⁰ expounds the first verse of the Bible, which appears also as an epigraph at the very beginning of the treatise, while almost all chapters, including the first one, are tagged by subtitles (“secrets”) on the margin. The sequence of chapters follows a hierarchic order, guided by a Lurianic conception of the Saruq school, starting with “the secret of *tsimtsum*,” “the secret of *malbush*,” “the secret of the folding of *malbush*,” etc. Following Ronit Meroz, it is evident from the order of this creation process and the typical *termini technici* that these teachings belong to the third and last stage of the development of the Saruq school in the seventeenth century.¹¹

The earliest of the three known manuscripts is found in The National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, Israel Ms. Heb. 4^o615,¹² written

- fol. 13a. I will discuss *Em la-Binah* and the didactic genre it represents elsewhere. The Saruqian material which is included in Ms. Moscow, Guenzburg 1448, will be part of Yuval Harari’s edition of *Sefer ha-Sodot*.
- 10 The ambiguity of this term (meaning also “wheel”, when pronounced *ofan*, and in particular – based on Ezek. 1:15 – the class of angels active in the lower world) is part of its application in mystical texts, cf. e.g. Abraham Azulay, *Sefer Hessed le-Avraham*, Amsterdam 1685, fol. 29a (*ma’yan* 3, *nahar* 3): ותכף ומיד לאחר שנחרב הבית הקדוש ברוך הוא פתח את החלון והוריד את עולי [עולם] האופנים וצמצם מלכו [מלכות] עולם האופנים בתוך החלון כדי שלא יסגר עוד ולעולם פתח זה לא נסתם כי אם דוקא בשעת החרבן
- 11 See, Meroz, “אסכולה סרוק,” 158, 161; or eadem, “Contrasting Opinions,” 197, cf. in particular the concepts of טהירו עלאה and קיפול המלבוש.
- 12 Fol. 58a-108b. The other two manuscripts, which trace back to the Jerusalem manuscript, are in the Russian State Library, Moscow, Russia Ms. Guenzburg

by Zacuto in 1655,¹³ but all three versions are incomplete, because the last section breaks off in the middle of an explanation of the Four Worlds.¹⁴ Nevertheless, we learn that the author followed a somehow encyclopedic intention, by pooling all kabbalistic secrets with the help of Genesis 1:1, in his words: “אין כוונתי בחיבור הזה רק “לכתוב בקצרה רוב סתרי החכמה האלהית להכליל הכל בפסוקנו הנכבד”.¹⁵ Throughout the treatise the author points repeatedly to his other kabbalistic work, *Sefer Yemin Moshe*¹⁶ — apparently an exegetical work based on Moses Cordovero. However, in light of a short hint towards the end of the treatise, there is reason to believe that this work was written parallel to *Ofanim*, and probably never finished.¹⁷ As a preliminary suggestion for a potential author, I would suggest Moses ben Solomon ha-Levi of Frankfurt, a resident of Zolkiew, who composed the commentary *Yoel Moshe* on Menahem Azaryah Fano’s *Asarah Ma’amarot* (Amsterdam 1649).¹⁸

474, and The Ritman library, Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam, Netherlands Ms. M 473.

- 13 A detailed description of this manuscript and its significance for the evaluation of Zacuto’s writings in the field of practical and theoretical kabbalah will be published by Yuval Harari.
- 14 *Ofen* 121 (titled “the secret of the palaces of *Malkhut ha-Briah*”) parallels the structure of the so-called four worlds (אבי"ע) to four biblical terms related to different parts of the temple (1. Kg 6:5): ‘azarot (the courts), ‘ulam (the porch), *hekhal* (the main hall), *devir* (the inner sanctuary). The explanation does not reach the Holy of Holies, but rather stops within the *hekhal*, which corresponds to the “world of creation,” so at least the expected relation between *devir* and ‘*olam ha-atsilut* is missing. Furthermore, the whole treatise seems to be arranged according to the four worlds; see end of *ofen* 104, fol. 100b, cross heading: טודות עולם הבריאה --- והיצירה והעשיה. Thus, the first part (up to *ofen* 105) was related to ‘*olam ha-atsilut*.
- 15 *Ofen* 42, fol. 73b (“In this treatise I intend to write a plethora of kabbalistic secrets in a nutshell in order to include all in our honored verse [i.e. Gen 1:1]”).
- 16 At least five times: fol. 65a, 65b, 68a, 100a, 102a. The title refers to Isa 63:12. Eliezer Baumgarten suggests that the author refers also to a third work, apparently an interpretation of the Exodus from Egypt.
- 17 See fol. 102a: אם יגזור האל העליון בחיים גם אנחנו נדבר בדברים האלה בספר ימין משה שלנו.
- 18 The first name “Yoel” is an abbreviation and refers to the author’s teacher, R. Judah Aryeh Leib (see Marvin Heller, *The Seventeenth Century Hebrew Book*, vol. 2 [Leiden: Brill, 2011], 661), whose traditions are also included. Not very much is known about Moses ha-Levi, though (but see Idel, “One from a Town,” 87f.). Some evidence is found in the introduction of this commentary, in particular

Despite his trust in the kabbalistic authority of Cordovero, the author of *Ofanim* follows the school of Israel Saruq, thereby adapting traditions that we also find in the works of Joseph del Medigo and Naphtali Bacharach. The basic idea of his approach is at first glance related to that part of Nathan Shapira’s *Megalleh ‘Amuqot* (Kraków 1637) which presents 256 *Ofanim* on Deut. 3:23. In addition, both works make frequent use of numerology and letter permutations, and they quote similar Lurianic sources such as *Kanfei Yona* and *Yonat Elem*, though Shapira ascribes them both to Luria, while the author of *Ofanim* refers to Menachem Azariah da Fano (with the honorific *zikhrono livrakha*) as the author of *Yonat Elem*.¹⁹ In addition, the treatise *Ofanim* applies a systematic-didactic approach, addressing the esteemed reader time and again, and shows acquaintance with Lurianic texts such as *Sha’ar ha-Kavvanot* or *Hathalat ha-Ḥokhmah* and *Limmudei ha-Beriah*.²⁰ By contrast, Nathan Shapira’s homiletic *Megalleh ‘Amuqot* is rather informed by the mystical traditions of medieval Ashkenaz, in particular *Sefer ha-Ḥesheq*, as Agata Paluch has shown.²¹ In *Ofanim*, only one reference applies to the “בעל סודי רוי” (Elazar of Worms),” in the context of specifying the names of the four angels related to the faces of the chariot in the “world of *yetsirah*.”²²

interpretations of Gen 1:1 (which is set as model for “*limud qabbalah*,” cf. *Asarah Ma’amarot*, Amsterdam 1649, *haqdamah*, fol. 5c); references to Moses Galante and Nathan Shapira of Kraków (in *Ofanim* both of them [“Rav Galante,” Ms. Jerusalem 615, fol. 63a, 104b; and *Megalleh Amuqot* on fol. 101b] are among the few references to other kabbalists aside from Cordovero and Menaḥem Azaryah da Fano, but of course the Zoharic writings and “ha-ARI” are often mentioned); the praise of Moses, who corresponds to the *sefirah Tiferet* and to Metatron (*sar ha-panim*); and the hint to *malkhut de-beriah* being the garment (*levush*) of *malkhut* and the “source of souls” (*haqdamah*, fol. 6a).

- 19 E.g. *ofen* 59 (da Fano as author of *Yonat Elem*). Apparently, the author of *Ofanim* used a version of *Kanfei Yona* which originated in the circle of Moses Najara; see the reference to *Kanfei Yona* in *Ofen* 103 that would fit e.g. to Ms. London, British Library, Add. 26969, fol. 66b; on this version, see Avivi, קבלת האר”י, vol. 1, 316, 395.
- 20 See e.g. fol. 65a, 70b, 83b.
- 21 See Paluch, *Megalleh ‘Amuqot: The Enoch-Metatron Tradition in the Kabbalah of Nathan Neta Shapira of Krakow (1585-1633)* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2014), 60–62; 75–79.
- 22 הוֹאֵלִיָּה corresponds to the face of man, מַפְפִּיָּה to the lion, אַמְצִיָּה to the bull, and עַפְפִּימִיָּהֲאֵל to the eagle (fol. 103a).

However, another singular reference is more relevant for the historical setting of *Ofanim*: within the broad range of Lurianic writings belonging to the Saruq school, the phrase אדם קדמון שני (fol. 61a; “the second primeval man”) is exceptional, but found at least in the last chapter (*sha ’ar* 22) of *Emeq ha-Melekh*, written shortly before the violent Chmielnicki upheaval in Ukraine (1648).²³ Unfortunately, the sources Naphtali Bacharach used are not completely known to us.²⁴ But it might be possible to reconstruct the motives and concepts both works share, and thus to trace their common source backwards.

The Sources of “The Secret of the Creation of the Demons”

The first example provides an idea of how Lurianic kabbalah affects the approach to divine names, not in respect of *kawwanot*, but in the context of demonology and magic. The translation of Ms. Jerusalem 615, fol. 67b (*ofen* 27) will be followed by a synoptical reading of the Hebrew text with a parallel in *Sha ’ar ha-Liqqutim*.

<The secret of the creation of the demons.> You shall know: at the time of the destruction,²⁵ the demons have been created, they have been created at sunset, as the Sages said.²⁶ The reason for this is, when the vessels of the points of *Ze ’ir*, who is called sun, as is well known, were broken, it was at his sunset, to be sure. This is the secret of the time between the destruction and the reparation before the balance (*matqala*)²⁷ when the (seventh) day was sanctified, since there are six weekdays

23 Cf. *Emeq ha-Melekh* (Jerusalem, 2003), 1050 (*sha’ar* 22). For the historical background of *Sefer Emeq ha-Melekh*, see Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 70.

24 See the list in Avivi, “קבלת האר”י, vol. 2, 559.

25 *הירבן* implies the destruction of the temple; in Rabbinic literature, there is no connection to *shedim*. But see Abraham Azulay’s *Hesed le-Avraham*, Amsterdam 1685, fol. 29a: “at the time of the destruction the demonic forces [*ha-hitsonim*] were allowed to enter the Land of Israel in order to destroy the temple.”

26 Mishnah Avot 5:6.

27 The term *matqala* (“scales”) refers to Zohar 2:176a (*Sifra di-Tsniuta*); see the comprehensive discussion of the different linguistic meanings of this term in the Zohar by Yehuda Liebes, “פרקים במילון ספר הזהר.” (PhD diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977), 329–32, 334, entry “טיקלא, תקלא”.

The “Secret of the Creation of the Demons”

corresponding to the six ends. After the six days have been destroyed, and Shabbat, that is, the secret of Tiqqun, wanted to arrive, at that time the demons have been created. This is the secret of the verse “it will come like destruction from *Shaddai*,”²⁸ for it is the sixth day which is the secret of *Yesod* called *Shaddai*. At this time the destroying destruction arrives. Furthermore, you know that it is the name *Elohim* which brings forth demons for *Imma* on high, that is to say “one named Eldad, and the other named Medad,”²⁹ and (the letter) *heh* in the middle signifies the milk, as I will explain to you with God’s help.³⁰

Thus Scripture states “it will come like destruction from *Shaddai*,” for in respect of the upper mother there are “bitter clusters.”³¹ This is where the demonic forces are seizing from outside (*aḥizat ha-ḥitsonim mi-baḥuts*), and therefore they are called “other gods” (*elohim aḥerim*),³² because they are attracted by and seize the name *Elohim*, which is the secret of the demons, and they are from outside, that’s why they are called “others,” and you know that the Sages said six things

- 28 Isa. 13:6 (cf. Joel 1:15); cf. Menahem Recanati, *Perush al ha-Torah, lekha lekha* (Jerusalem: Aharon Barzani and son, 2003), 196 (on Zohar 3:119b, referring to the name *El Shaddai*).
- 29 Num. 11:26.
- 30 Referring to the *he* in the middle of the name *Elohim*, which is identified with the “milk”; the promised explanation is given at length in the chapters of *ofanim* 65-70, starting again with the explanation of Eldad and Medad. Similar material can be found among the Lurianic *derushim* in Ms. London, British Library, Or. 10734, fol. 105b-106a (titled “*sod ha-ḥalav*”). Related explanations are found also in Menachem Azaryah Fano, *Qitsur Yonai Elem, ot 22 (Sefer Ma’amrei ha-Ram’a mi-Pano*, vol. 1, Jerusalem: Yishmaḥ Lev-Torat Moshe, 1997, p. 295: סוד החלב הוא שם אהיה שבבינה ... בה' של אלקים יש חלב קל וכבד בשתי דרכים (ומן הה"א שבאמצע יעלה החלב לדרד ימין ולדרד שמאל בבניה יש לה דדים ... ואלו הדדי') and in Joseph del Medigo’s *Ta’alumot Hokhmah*, Basel (Hanau) 1629, fol. 82a (הם בסוד אלהי' וסמנך אלד'ד ומדרד א"ל ד'ד ומ"י ד'ד א"ל ד'ד ימין ומ"י ד'ד שמאל ...). On Zacuto’s version see below, note 41.
- 31 Deut. 32:32, referring to the fruit Adam received from Eve; see Zohar 1:192a, adapting the language of GenR 19:5: “Adam’s wife squeezed grapes for him, bringing death upon him and upon the whole world”; according to LevR 12:1, not only Noah but also the sons of Aaron drank wine of those deathly grapes, the “bitter clusters”; cf. also Zohar 1:73b.
- 32 Exod. 20:3 et passim.

concerning the demons:³³ in regard to three, they are like the ministering angels, and in regard to three like the human beings. The reason is that their reality was caused by an actual point of the vessels of *Ze ʿir*, thus in regard to three things they are like human beings, and since they have been created by subtle elements,³⁴ they are in regard to three things like angels. Behold, this is indicated by our verse *bereshit bara Elohim* (Gen 1:1), meaning “at first,” prior to the world of *Tiqqun*, “Elohim” — that is *Imma* in the secret of the demons, for they are the secret of *Elohim* — “created Elohim,” and the interpretation is: the demons, who are called “other gods,” in keeping with the heaven and with the earth, they are in regard to three things like the ministering angels who dwell in heaven, and in regard to (three) things like human beings who live on earth, and they, too, are created from heaven and from earth, due to the seven kings who died, and this creation happened when the earth was in the state of *tohu wa-vohu*, that is, at the time of nullification.

Though certain passages in the broad range of Lurianic writings deal with the issue of Eldad and Medad, the only text which comes close to the wording and some particular details of *ofen 27* happens to be an Ashkenazi tradition, at the end of a lengthy interpretation on Gen. 36, included in *Sefer ha-Liqqutim*.³⁵ This version is found in Ms. London, British Museum Or. 10555, fol. 208b.³⁶

33 BT Hag 16a; see also *Pardes Rimmonim* (Jerusalem: Yerid ha-Sefarim, 2000), 431, col. a (*sha ʿar 26, pereq 8*).

34 I.e. fire and wind, cf. Moshe ben Naḥman (*Perush ha-Ramban ʿal ha-Torah*, vol. 2, ed. Charles B. Chavel [Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1960], 95f.) and Baḥya ben Asher (*Be ʿur al ha-Torah*, vol. 2, ed. Charles B. Chavel [Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1967], 505f.) on Lev 17:7.

35 Jehuda Zvi Brandwein, ed., *Kol Kitve ha-ARI*, vol. 15 (Jerusalem: unknown publisher, 1988), 108; additional material is found in *Shaʿar ha-Pesuqim* (vol. 7), 170, *Sefer Liqqutei Torah* (vol. 11), 208 (and the parallels noted there relating to *Ets Hayyim* and *Mevo She ʿarim*). See also the various elaborations on Eldad and Medad in Naphtali Bacharach, *Emeq ha-melekh* (Jerusalem: Yerid ha-Sefarim, 2003), 584–87, 642 (*shaʿar 14:43–47, 87*).

36 Avivi, *קבלת האר״י*, vol. 2, 587 refers to the Ashkenazi tradition in this version and the relation to the manuscript Manfred and Anne Lehmann Foundation, New York, NY. USA Ms. D 127 (= F 72683), dated 1634.

ספר הליקוטים פרשת וישלח, פרק לו	אופן כז
<p>כשנשברו הכלים של נקודות ז"א שהוא שמש הנה בין השמשות שלו דהיינו בין השברים נבראו השדים קודם המתקלא של קדושת היום</p>	<p><סוד בריאת השדים> והנה דע לך כי בעת החורבן נבראו השדים שנבראו בין השמשות כאשר חכמים הגידו וטעם הדבר הוא כי הנה כשנשברו הכלים של נקודות זעיר שהוא נקרא שמש כידוע הלא בין השמשות שלו הוא סוד בין עת השברון לעת התיקון קודם המתקלא שאז נתקדש היום</p>
<p>וידוע בסוד אלד"ד ומיד"ד שנתבאר במקומו כי שם אלהים הוא הממציא שדים לאם</p>	<p>כי הלא ימי החול הם ששה כנגד שש הקצוות ואחרי שנשברו שש הימים ורצה לבוא יום השבת שהוא סוד התיקון אז ביני ביני נבראו השדים והוא סוד כשוד משדי יבוא כי ביום הששי שהוא סוד היסוד הנקרא שדי אז בא השוד השודד</p>
<p>שכנגדה בלבד יש אשכלות מרורות, שמהם אחיזת המזיקים מבחוץ כטעם אלהים אחרים</p>	<p>ועוד כבר ידעת כי שם אלהים הוא הממציא שדים לאימא עילאה דהיינו א"ל דד אחד מ"י דד אחר ו"ה שבאמצע הוא החלב כמו שתדע לפניך בעזרת האל ולכן אמר כשד משדי יבוא</p>
<p>ולפי שמציאותם הוא מנקודה ממשית של כלי זעיר יש להם ג' דברים כבני אדם ולפי שנבראו מדקות היסודות יש להם ג' דברים כמלאכי השרת</p>	<p>כי כנגד האם העליונה יש אשכלות מרורות אשר משם אחיזת החצונים מבחוץ ועל כן נקראו אלהים אחרים בעבור שהם נמשכים ואוחזים בשם אלהים הוא סוד השדים ועל שהם מבחוץ לכן נקראים אחרים</p>
<p>וכבר ידעת מה שאמרו חכמים ע"ה על השדים שיש להם ששה דברים שלשה כמלאכי השרת ושלשה כבני אדם והטעם שמציאותם מנקודה ממשית של כלי זעיר על כן יש להם שלשה דברים כבני אדם ומפני שבריאתם מדקות היסודות לכן יש להם שלשה דברים כמלאכי השרת</p>	<p>והנה נרמז בפסוקנו בראשית ברא אלהים ירצה בתחלה קודם עולם התיקון ברא אלהים היא אימא בסוד השדים שהם סוד אלהים את אלהים פי' את השדים הנקראים אלהים אחרים וזה עם השמים ועם הארץ ורצה לומר עם השלשה דברים כמלאכי</p>
	<p>והנה נרמז בפסוקנו בראשית ברא אלהים ירצה בתחלה קודם עולם התיקון ברא אלהים היא אימא בסוד השדים שהם סוד אלהים את אלהים פי' את השדים הנקראים אלהים אחרים וזה עם השמים ועם הארץ ורצה לומר עם השלשה דברים כמלאכי</p>

<p>והנה ה' של אלהים במלואה הוא מקור החלב ששני דדין א"ל מ"י משפיעים אותו למטה עד היסוד... עכ"מ מכתובה אשכנזית</p>	<p>השרת הדרים בשמים ועם הדברים כבני אדם היושבים בארץ וגם נבראו מן השמים ומן הארץ מן שבעה מלכין דמתו³⁷ והבריאה הזאת היתה כאשר הארץ היתה תוהו ובוהו ר"ל בעת הביטול.</p>
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This short paragraph shows some typical characteristics of the treatise *Ofanim*: first, the topic is a secret related to the Lurianic understanding of creation; second, this secret is expounded in a midrashic way, here by playing on the words *shed*, *shod*, *shoded*, *shaddai*; and finally, the paragraph culminates in the interpretation of Genesis 1:1. Aside from rabbinic sources (Mishnah Avot; Bavli Ḥagigah), the salient parallel to Ḥayim Vital's *Sefer ha-Liqqutim* casts light on how the author composed this paragraph. Both texts share some motifs almost verbatim, and *Sefer ha-Liqqutim* complements also an explanation of the milk deriving from the two breasts called "El" and "Mi": both are attached to the letter *heh*, which is sandwiched between "El" and "Mi" in the name *Elohim*, the reference name for the power of judgment. At the end of Vital's text, which elaborates on Genesis 36 in the context of the seven kings of Edom, a short note identifies the Ashkenazi provenance of the quoted tradition: *עד כאן מצאתי מכתובה אשכנזית*, which points to a source that may have been known also to the author of *Ofanim*.

Eldad and Medad, two half-brothers of Moses according to aggadic tradition, do not figure prominently in medieval theoretical or practical kabbalah; to the best of my knowledge, they appear at least in a 15th-century manuscript as reference for the successful

37 On the "death of the seven kings" in zoharic literature, see Avishar Har-Shefi, *השרת הדרים בשמים ועם הדברים כבני אדם: הבריאה וההתגלות בספרות האידרות של הזוהר* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2015); concerning the difference between Cordovero's conception and the Lurianic development, see Esther Liebes, "קורדובירו והאר"י – בחינה מחודשת", in *R. Moshe Cordovero, Ma'yan 'Ein Ya'acov: The Fourth Fountain of the Book 'Elimah*, ed. Bracha Sack (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2009); in Lurianic Kabbalah, see Isaiah Tishby, *תורת הרע והקליפה בקבלת האר"י* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1962), 28–34.

application of a recipe against forgetfulness.³⁸ According to Bavli Sanhedrin 17a, they prophesied the death of Moses, and also concerning Gog and Magog, that is, the evil powers threatening Israel. In addition, they are named among the so-called seven pious men of the world, by which the late Targum Sheni portrays seven branches on the left side of a golden Menorah at the top of king Solomon’s throne, as opposed to seven branches on the right side formed by the seven Patriarchs.³⁹ Such descriptions could have been useful in particular for Lurianic elaborations on creation, when Eldad and Medad are actually for the first time introduced as kabbalistic concepts, as evident in the writings of Hayim Vital and others.⁴⁰ They exemplified the secret of the demons as encapsulated in the divine names *Elohim* and *Shaddai*, and their incorporation within the divine structures, the four spellings of the Tetragrammaton as well as the ten *sefirot*. Naphtali Bacharach, for instance, stresses this idea in *Emeq ha-Melekh* when describing the nursing of the female power: והנה הדדים נקראו שדים וסודם הוא שם שדי (...).⁴¹ שדי בסוד ג' קוים חסד ע"ב גבורה ר"ו ת"ת [תפארת] כ"ו

38 Gideon Bohak, ed., *ספר כשפים יהודי מהמאה ה־ט׳, כתב יד ניו יורק, הספריה הציבורית*, 190 (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2014), 152 [§114]. (לשעבר ששון 56)

39 According to Beate Ego, *Targum Scheni zu Esther: Übersetzung, Kommentar und theologische Deutung* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1996), 24, it can be dated to the seventh to eighth century; see Steven Fine, *The Menorah: From the Bible to Modern Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 67. The list includes the “Patriarchs” Adam, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Job, and on the other side the seven “pious ones,” Levi, Qehat, Amram, Moses, Aaron, Eldad, and Medad, “as well as the prophet Haggai.”

40 See above, notes 30 and 35.

41 Naphtali Bacharach, *Emeq ha-Melekh* (Jerusalem: Yerid ha-Sefarim, 2003), 982 (*sha ʿar* 16:68). *Shaddai* equals 314: the numerical value of YHWH is 26, which when multiplied by three results in 72 (the first of the four spellings of the Tetragramm), and three times 72 amounts to 216 (the sum of the letters in Exod 14:19-21; each verse contains 72 letters). This appears to be also the climax in Zacuto’s interpretation of “and his hand [יָדוֹ] grasping [Esau’s heel]” (Gen 25:26) in his commentary on Zohar 1:138a (*Yodei Binah*, ed. Isaac Naḥum, Bithah: Qol Bithah, 2010, 470f.). Introduced by the statement that the destruction of the Temple was linked to *Hod* (the fifth of the seven lower *sefirot*), Zacuto explains the secret of (mother’s) milk, including the “secret of the name *Elohim*, (i.e.) the secret of Eldad and Medad with the remaining letter *heh*,” which can be drawn by piecing together the letters *dalet* and *waw*, or *dalet* and *yod*. This is why they are written in “his hand” (Gen 25:26). The secret of “nursing” implies the “lifting of the refinements (*berurim*)” of the

The “secret of the creation of the demons” relates to the transition stage just before the possible redemption, and to the involvement of evil, which was introduced in *ofen* 17 by the “breaking of the vessels” — actually a distension of the letters by overflowing *ḥasadim* or “light of kindness” — and the “death of the kings of Edom (Gen 36)” corresponding to the six days of creation, but without any sign of a potential dualistic tendency. On the contrary, only the lack of “balancing” the isolated points forming the world of *Tohu* empowered demonic forces to affect what are recognized as catastrophic events in history. The weak point — effectively the strong judgment — within the divine world allowing this kind of access “from outside” is manifest in the divine names themselves. In the end, it appears to be part of the “dynamical process” of the configuration called *Ze’ir Anpin* (before its final metamorphosis into the central *partsuf*), symbolized by the sun, which is considered to link angels, men, and demons to both the heavens above and the earth below.

Moses Zacuto’s Magic Application

In the last chapters of *Ofanim*, the divine structures below the World of Emanation proceed to the domain of the angels. In this context, the second example presented in the following shall clarify one aspect of Zacuto’s marginal notes to *Ofanim* (totaling seven altogether) and the relation to the other texts in his autograph.⁴²

In *ofen* 119,⁴³ the reader’s attention is drawn to the importance of human deeds that may generate by stimulation (called “rising of the female waters”) three aspects of divine consciousness (*moḥin*) within the sefirotic structure of the World of Formation (*olam ha-yetsirah*): with regard to *Ḥokhmah* arises the name יהואל, regarding

lowest part up to *Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tiferet*, which are called “the hands on high,” and belong to the three divine names of 26, 72, and 216, which amount to 314. To them the verse “resting between my breasts” (Song 1:13) applies. See *Yodei Binah* (ibid., with reference to *Mevo She’arim, sha’ar* 5, 2:1-2). The hint to *Hod* is based on an interpretation of Dan 10:8.

42 The marginal notes appear on fol. 59b, 81b, 92a, 95a, two on 101a, and 107b (*ofen* 119).

43 Subtitle: עור על מוחי היצירה וכן כל מדותיה. The core subject is the correlation between human deeds and the effects of divine consciousness (*moḥin*) in this area.

Binah the name שמועאל, and מטטרון in the *moah* of *Da'at*.⁴⁴ The priestly blessing (“the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace,” Num 6:26) addresses the secret of these names, and connotes also the notarikon of YHWH, *Shaddai*, and *Adonai* (ישא), representing the extension of divine energy from the World of *Atsilut* unto the three lower worlds, which are illuminated by *El Shaddai*, *El YHWH*, and *El Adonai*. *Metatron*, whose name equals *Shaddai*, is represented by the word *shalom* (Num 6:26).⁴⁵ In addition, the notarikon of the three names *Yaho'el*, *Shamoa'el*, and *Metatron* can be identified with the word (וישמ) in Num 6:26, and these letters refer to שמי, “my name,” in Exod. 3:15. Against this background, Exod. 23:20, “I’m sending an angel before you,” also called “the secret of *Metatron*,” is explained as follows:

The name יה"ו illuminates the World of *Yetsirah* ... When spelled with fillings of Aleph ... its numerical value is equal to כו"ו (i.e. a derivation of YHWH),⁴⁶ and this name again filled with Alephs, i.e. כף ואין זין ואו, results in 193, which equals the sum of the last letters of Exod. 23:20 until *ha-maqom*. And 193 is also the numerical value of טפטפיה. Rabbenu Bahya wrote about this in

- 44 Cf. Naphtali Bacharach, *Emeq ha-melekh* (Jerusalem: Yerid ha-Sefarim, 2003), 1083 (*sha'ar* 18:1): והנה המוחין דיצירה הם שמועאל מטטרון יהואל אשר סימנם זה שמי: ותחתיהם 'שבעה רואי פני המלך היושבים ראשונה'. On the three names see also *Brit Menuḥah*, ed. Oded Porat (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 2016), 142.
- 45 Cf. Zacuto's entries in *Em la-Binah* as noted in Ms. Jerusalem 615, fol. 13a, referring to *Metatron*, who rules in *Olam ha-Yetsirah*, and fol. 48a, referring to *shalom*, *Yesod* and *El Shaddai*; both entries refer also to the name Moses (also in *ofen* 119 the same numerical value of “Moses” and *El Shaddai* is highlighted; see below). On the names of the three angels interwoven in the emanation process as described by Naphtali Bacharach, see Baumgarten, “הערות,” 14.
- 46 Compare Zacuto's statement in *Em la-Binah*: אהיה has the same numerical value as יה"ו, and leads up by the help of Gematria to the name *Taftafyah*, “which is a great name (שהוא שם גדול)” and equals, when counted by *milui*, the numerical value of תכלה, “light-blue” (Ms. Jerusalem 615, fol. 17b). One of the first copies of the material of *Em la-Binah* after it was arranged alphabetically appears to be Ms. New York, JTS 2193, which includes also David ben Jehuda he-Ḥasid's *Sefer ha-Gevul* — a prime example for the early evidence of the graphic design of a hexagram together with the designation *magen David*, describing the divine countenance according to the *Zohar*, and placing the name *Taftafyah* at the center.

*parashat mishpatim*⁴⁷ that from this verse emerges a name useful for travelling, and this relates to what we said, for its name is called *sar ha-magen*,⁴⁸ since he includes the three lines of *חד"ר* (i.e. *Ḥesed, Din, Raḥamim*), which belong to *Mikha'el, Gavri'el, Nuri'el*. Also the divine name *El*, when multiplied three times, refers to the numerical value of *magen*, which is 93. (fol. 107b)

At this point, Zacuto adds the following gloss:⁴⁹

[More] on this secret: by mentioning this name one says 'Taftafyah order fear upon shield – upon armed forces (*tsava*),' for both words amount to the same value as the name itself, 'order fear' is in Gematria 193, also 'upon shield' and 'upon armed forces,' the number of each equals the name *Taftafyah*.⁵⁰

Exactly this information was used by Zacuto for the entry *Taftafyah* in *Shorshei ha-Shemot*, as noted in Ms. Jerusalem 615, fol. 138a:

Taftafyah: this holy name is called 'name of thought,' and he emerges from the last letters of 'Behold, I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place' – until here. The last letters amount to 193, like the number value of this name, and it is said, by mentioning this name: order fear 'upon shield', 'upon armed forces (*tsava*)', both

47 Apparently, there has been some confusion because of Exod. 23:20, which belongs to *parashat Mishpatim*, but the reference should read *parashat Mattot*; see below.

48 On this name cf. the remark in the old collection (sixteenth century) of "practical kabbalah," *Ma'yan ha-Ḥokhmah* (also *Ma'yenot Ḥokhmah*) edited according to a manuscript of Avraham Mamo by Meir Mazuz, Jerusalem 1999: וסוד הבהליו [בגנימטריא] צב"א וסודו מגן כי צבאות של מעלה מבהילים ומפחידים שרו של אדום שלא יקטרג וישחית את ישראל למטה והוא מגן אברהם ומגן דוד וחקוק עליהם השר המגן טפטפיה שר המגן טפטפיה identified with Mikha'el, in charge of *Ḥesed*.

49 The gloss was included in the text of *Ofanim* by the scribe of Ms. Moskau, Guenzberg 474, fol. 164b.

50 ועל סוד זה כשמוזכרים שם זה אומרים טפטפיה צוה פחד על מגן על צבא כי כל שתי מלות עולות כשם עצמו צוה פחד בגי' קצ"ג וכן ע"ל מג"ן וכן ע"ל צב"א שכל אחת מהם במספר שם טפטפיה. In *ofen* 119 follows then the reference to the same numerical value of Moses and *El Shaddai*, and an explanation why Moses rejected the company of the angel traditionally identified with Metatron (see Ramban on Exod 23:20, *Perush al ha-Torah*, vol. 1, ed. Charles Chavel, 441–43).

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words amount to 193, as well as (the name) כו"ו, filled like this
כך ואו זין ואו...

In addition, Zacuto notes, it is helpful to think about this name while facing enemies, and he added examples he found in *Sefer ha-Ḥesheq*. They explain that the name *Taftafyah* can be used against enemies in the battlefield.⁵¹

The starting point, however, is that the entry and the gloss in the autograph can be traced back to two complementary sources: on the one hand, *Sefer ha-Ḥesheq*, which includes already all the Gematriot presented by Zacuto, as has been elaborated by Moshe Idel in the context of Neḥemia of Erfurt's commentary on the seventy names of Metatron;⁵² and on the other hand, Naftali Herz Treves' supercommentary on Rabbenu Bahya, including a tradition of Me'ir of Rothenburg:

Taftafyah, a name for facing fear, emerges from the verse (Exod 23:20): 'Behold I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place.' The last letters amount to the numerical value of *Taftafyah* (i.e. 193). Being on the road, one should say '*Taftafyah*, order fear upon the robbers, against armed forces be unto me armed forces, against [armor] shield be my shield (cf. Gen 15:1)'. *Taftafyah*, order fear upon shield, upon armed forces: the numerical value of each word (i.e. 'shield' and 'armed forces') amounts to 93,⁵³ he should consider [that] in his heart, [as] the thought is [located] there.⁵⁴ It is a tradition of R. Me'ir of Rothenburg to mention [the name]

51 In addition, he copied at the end of the autograph (fol. 173b) an apparently popular amulet including the name *Taftafyah* that assures help in any situation.

52 Cf. Moshe Idel, “ נחמיה בן שלמה הנביא על מגן דוד והשם טפטפיה: ממגיה יהודית, ” in *Ta Shma: Studies in Judaica in Memory of Israel M. Ta-Shma*, vol. 1, ed. Avraham (Rami) Reiner et al. (Allon Shevut: Tvunot Press, 2011), 4f. et passim, and 36f. et passim on שם המחשבה; cf. also Moshe Idel, “One from a Town,” 205.

53 To this the numerical value of “upon (‘al)”, which amounts to one hundred, should be added. In fact, also "order fear" totals one hundred and ninety three.

54 This could also be understood as “he should consider the ‘name of thought’ in his heart,” which is apparently the reading of Zacuto (see above).

Na'aryron in case of scary danger, and this name in combination with *Taftafyah* consists of thirteen letters. May it be [God's] will that I won't fail but succeed in finding out the secret.

שם של פחד והוא טפטפיה יוצא מפסוק [שמות כג, כ] הנה אנכי שולח מלאך לפניך בדרך לשמרך ולהביא"ך אל המקום, סופי אותיות גימטריא טפטפיה. וכשהוא על הדרך יאמר טפטפיה צוה פחד על הלסטים, על צבא תהיה לי לצבא, על מגן תהיה לי למגן. טפטפיה צוה פחד על מגן על צבא, כל אחד עולה גימטריא תשעים ושלוש ויחשוב בלבו שם המחשבה. קבלה ממחר"ם בסכנת פחד להזכיר נעיריון ושם זה ושל טפטפיה הם שלש עשרה אותיות. יהי רצון שלא אכשול ושזכה למצא הסוד.⁵⁵

Divine names are not captured in their original context. Here, they are linked because of Rabbenu Bahya's comments on Numbers 32:32, which is one of the eleven verses beginning and ending with the letter *Nun*.⁵⁶ These biblical verses are characterized in such a way that the *shem ha-mephorash* emanates from them, and one who mentions them will be without fear. *Taftafyah* and *Na'aryron* can easily be connected to this function. For the author of *Ofanim* it is an aside, as he focuses mainly on the implementation of *Taftafyah* within the divine structures reaching the World of *Yetsirah*. But in Zacuto's eyes the magic application was deemed worthy to be added, if only for the sake of extending knowledge and at the same time bridging between the concepts of theoretical and practical kabbalah.

55 Cf. Naftali Herz Treves, *Sefer Naftali* (supercommentary on *Bahya ben Asher's* commentary, first edition *Naftulei Elohim Niftalti*, Heddernheim 1546), (Jerusalem: Yerid ha-Sefarim, 2011), 424 (*sitrei Rabbenu Bahya* on Num 32:32); this tradition was adapted in Yom Tov Lipmann Heller's commentary *Tuv Ta'am* on Numbers 32:32 (*Rabbenu Bahya 'al ha-Torah 'im sefer tuv ta'am*, vol. 3 [Bne Brak: Avraham Shmuel ha-Levi Heller, 1992], 194), but reading נעוריה"ן; cf. the variations of this name in Claudia Rohrbacher-Sticker, "Die Namen Gottes und die Namen Metatrons," *FJB* 19 (1991/92), e.g. נעורויאל (p. 121, note 116); and her reference to נעורירון (AdRA [A]), "womit ein deutlicher Bezug zu Metatron gegeben ist" (120f.). Cf. also Idel, "ר' נחמיה," 17, note 54, and 41, note 204.

56 See the added references in Gershom Scholem, "מקור למסורת: עקיבא: הברלה דר' עקיבא: מקור למסורת," in *Devils, Demons, and Souls: Essays on Demonology* by Gershom Scholem, ed. Esther Liebes (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 2004), 168f., note 95.

Concluding Remarks

Lurianic conceptions provided new contexts for divine names. Some resulted from innovative readings like those of Eldad and Medad, which belong to a preliminary state of divine emanation, just before the first *Tiqqun* took place, representing the demonic condition of this process. Others supported reinterpretations of old traditions, as was the case with *Taftafyah*. This name in particular shows that practical and theoretical kabbalah merged into each other from the high Middle Ages onward.

Zacuto’s exceptional autograph Ms. Jerusalem 615 contains by and large three different parts: the famous magical collection, the treatise *Ofanim*, and his own Lurianic notes from various sources. Evidently, these three fields of kabbalistic exercise do not represent different stages (neither in a hierarchical nor in a chronological sense), but have been jointly cultivated by Zacuto, his later preference of Vital’s (and Tsemaḥ’s) redaction work notwithstanding. In any case, he abided by his synergetic approach towards theoretical and practical kabbalah. As for the treatise *Ofanim*, certain issues still have to be clarified, yet its affinity to a late layer of the Saruq school of thought is beyond question. It seems reasonable to assume an Ashkenazi provenience, since it shares Lurianic sources on Gen 36 that point in this direction. In addition, at least one example affiliated to magic and commented on by Zacuto – though definitely no specific interest in magic can be found in *Ofanim* – reveals that esoteric traditions concerning the names of Metatron (as for the pair of *Na’aryron* and *Taftafyah*) cannot exclusively be traced back to the circle of Neḥemia of Erfurt. Rather, these traditions have been more prevalent, probably as a result of the widely spread material associated with *hekhhalot*-literature since Gaonic times. Aside from the magic tradition, some concepts in *Ofanim*, especially when their Saruqian implementation can be understood in a broader Cordoverian context, surfaced again in Zacuto’s own collection of Lurianic notes in this manuscript and thus made their way into his posthumously printed work *Em la-Binah*.

The Open Secret of Sabbatean Communal Leadership After 1666

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Abstract

Popular works of Jewish history have often portrayed the Sabbatean movement as all but disappearing after the apostasy of Sabbatai Zevi in 1666. The impression given by such works suggests that the few remaining believers went deep underground and were aggressively pursued by the rabbis. This paper marshals evidence that there were many believers remaining, including communal leaders; and that the pursuit of Sabbateans was generally lackluster.

Introduction

Many of the widely read English-language surveys of Jewish history suggest that after the conversion of Sabbatai Zevi to Islam in 1666, only a few followers continued to believe in Sabbatai's messianic mission. These adherents went deep underground, cunningly concealing their true beliefs. Rabbis and lay functionaries ferreted out remaining believers for punishment or excommunication. Occasionally a new Sabbatean figure would arise openly but he would be immediately cut down by the authorities.¹

1 See, e.g., Solomon Grayzel, *A History of the Jews*, revised ed. (Philadelphia: JPS, 1968), 447; Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews*, revised ed. (New York: Schocken, 1970), 312–13, who is a bit more aware of later believers); Robert M. Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 471–72. All these works, in their revised editions, post-date the appearance of the great classic, Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), whose Hebrew original appeared in 1956/7. Despite the fact that Scholem had written previously as well as at length in this book about

Scholars of Sabbateanism have long known that this is a misleading picture; indeed, the voluminous writings of Scholem, Benayahu, Liebes and others on post-apostasy Sabbateanism make that point abundantly clear. The purpose of this brief study is to gather evidence, mainly from easily available secondary and primary sources, in order to paint a clear overall picture of post-1666 Sabbatean communal leadership. It makes two arguments. First, the rabbinic leaders' search for underground Sabbateans was sporadic and often half-hearted. Second, a number of communal leaders between 1666 and the 1720s were Sabbateans whose commitment to the faith could easily have been discovered had anyone been looking for it.

The Aftermath of Sabbatai Zevi's Apostasy

Sabbatai's sudden apostasy to Islam in 1666 left his followers in shock. Each was faced with a set of choices: whether to believe the news at all; whether to maintain faith once the news was confirmed; whether to accept the explanations for Sabbatai's apostasy given by Nathan of Gaza, Abraham Miguel Cardoso, or other Sabbatean theologians; whether to wait and see what would happen or to adopt a more active stance; whether to adhere to Jewish law or to join in the ritual antinomianism of many believers; whether to view Sabbatai as a messiah or a deity; whether to convert to Islam in imitation of Sabbatai; and whether to persist in belief after Sabbatai's death in 1676. A significant number of Jews, especially scholars, remained fully committed to Sabbatai and Sabbatean theology through both the apostasy and the expiration of their messiah.² The movement was later carried on by people who had never faced these choices because they were quite young at the height of the movement or had not yet been born.

The choices changed over time. During the first several years after the apostasy, there was enough confusion and uncertainty that large portions of the Jewish community continued to expect salvation

the lively continuation of the movement after Sabbatai's apostasy, that story seems not to have truly penetrated into these popular histories.

2 See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, ch. 7.

through Sabbatai. Into the 1670s, almost every community in the Ottoman Empire and Italy still had a party of believers whose identities were generally well known. Prominent among these were rabbis, judges, and communal leaders.³ In some cities, the Sabbateans were in control. Scholem points out that much of the impetus to persecute believers came from the Istanbul rabbinate, while the rabbinates of many cities were quite conciliatory toward the faithful.⁴ This was probably because it was so easy to remind them of their own Sabbatean proclivities during 1665-66.

Over time, a series of events eroded the outer circles of “soft” believers, leaving those at the center ever more dedicated (on this subject see below). These events included the ban of excommunication on believers issued by several major rabbinical courts; the efforts by Sabbatai to convert Jewish followers to Islam; a series of failed predictions for specific dates of redemption; Sabbatai’s death in 1676; Nathan’s death in 1680; and the mass Dönme conversion in 1683.⁵

In addition to the element of time, place also played a major role in the changing nature of the community of the faithful. In the immediate aftermath of the apostasy, the further away from Istanbul one lived, the longer it took for the news to arrive, and the more people were inclined to disbelieve it. Distance also increased the odds that news had been tampered with. At greater distance, with more time between the apostasy and arrival of the news, outlying communities were also more likely to be exposed to the “spin” put on the conversion by Nathan and Cardoso. This might occur either before or very shortly after confirmed reports of Sabbatai’s apostasy arrived. Another spatial factor was the power and nature of the official rabbinate. The rabbinate in Istanbul, in close proximity to the sultan and the seat of Ottoman power, was far ahead of the rest of the Jewish world in condemning Sabbatai and issuing harsh bans on believers. Other communities varied greatly. There was also a certain territorialism that contributed to a contrarian attitude in some

3 Jacob Sasportas, *Zizat Novel Zevi*, ed. Isaiah Tishby [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1954), 318–20, 358.

4 See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 693–705.

5 See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, ch. 8.

quarters. Finally, the depth of a given community's faith at the height of the movement was often a good determinant of its Sabbatean character after the apostasy.

Additionally, it is not always possible to describe what it meant to be a believer for any given person. Sometimes our awareness of the faith of those who did not leave behind Sabbatean writings can only be derived by examining their actions. A series of incidents suggests that the rabbimates of many regions in both Europe and the Mediterranean were either believers, or (more likely) averted their eyes as Sabbatean activities occurred essentially in the open. These include the controversy over continuing Sabbatean ritual practices, such as the daily Priestly Benediction and midnight vigils with Sabbatean liturgy; the ability of Judah Hasid and Hayyim Malakh to mount a major Sabbatean 'Aliyah movement in 1700; the reception of the Sabbatean Nehemiah Hiyya Hayon; and the refusal of rabbis who should have known better to pay heed to the accusations made by Rabbis Moses Hagiz, Zevi Ashkenazi, and Jacob Emden.⁶ If rabbinic leaders had really been searching out and exposing Sabbateans, each of these situations should have occasioned an investigation which would quickly have exposed its Sabbatean nature.

Why to Expect Continued Sabbatean Leadership

The classic work on failed prophetic movements is *When Prophecy Fails*, by Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken, and Stanley Schachter.⁷ This book

6 On the continuation of Sabbatean ritual practices in Amsterdam see Yacob Dweck, *Dissident Rabbi: The Life of Jacob Sasportas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 189–91, 249–51. On R. Judah Hasid, see Meir Benayahu, "The 'Holy Brotherhood' of R. Judah Hasid and Their Settlement in Jerusalem," *Sefunot* 3–4 (1961): 131–82; Alexandr Putik, "Prague Jews and Judah Hasid: A Study on the Social, Political and Religious History of the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," *Judaica Bohemiae* 38 (2002-3): 72–105, 39 (2003-4): 53–92, 46:1 (2011): 33–72. On Hakham Moses Hagiz, see Elisheva Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). On Rabbi Jacob Emden, see Jacob J. Schacter, "Rabbi Jacob Emden: Life and Major Works" (unpublished PhD diss., Harvard University, 1988).

7 Leon Festinger et al., *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956 [reprint: New York: Harper, 1966]). Sabbatai is discussed on 8–12.

posits that prophetic movements almost never die with the failure of their central prophecies. They rather continue in even more vigorous forms. Festinger and his colleagues actually cite the example of the Sabbatean movement to support this thesis. Their understanding of its dynamics is erroneous because they did not have Scholem's main work available, but they are absolutely correct to use Sabbateanism as a model of the pattern. Some Sabbateans were so deeply invested in their faith that it seemed impossible to them that they could have been mistaken. When the news of Sabbatai's apostasy was verified, and later, when Sabbatai died, these apparent disconfirmations frightened off the less committed outer circles of believers. The inner circles, however, doubled down and eagerly accepted the explanations offered for the apparent defeats by Nathan of Gaza, Abraham Miguel Cardoso, and others.⁸

Who were the members of these inner circles? A large proportion of the truly committed were rabbis of what Moshe Idel calls the "secondary elite."⁹ While ordinary Jews thronged to the Sabbatean faith at the height of the public movement in 1665-66, their understanding of the meaning of Sabbatai's mission, the prophecies of Nathan and Cardoso, and the very significance of the messiah would often have been quite shallow. The credulity of scholars, however, was surely pushed to its limits by Sabbatai's "strange deeds," culminating in his apostasy. Those acts, however, were expounded in a positive manner by Sabbatai, Nathan and Cardoso, using the highly ductile imagery of Kabbalah. Rabbis who understood and accepted these explanations became far more invested in the faith than ordinary Jews who did not have all this spiritual infrastructure.

Sabbateanism had, in fact, been a rabbinic movement from the outset. Sabbatai was a rabbinic scholar. Nathan of Gaza was a highly

8 The extremely important work of Dr. Noam Lefler makes a strong case that one of the central Sabbatean narratives explaining Sabbatai's (apparent) death, the doctrine of his occultation, was originally formulated by Samuel Ber Perlhefter rather than by Nathan of Gaza as scholars thought until now. See Lefler, "Studies in the Sabbatean Doctrine of Occultation" [Hebrew] (unpublished PhD diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2020).

9 See e.g. Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 201-2.

accomplished and respected rabbi at the tender age of 22 when the movement began. The witnesses to the 1665 Shavu'ot night prophecy by Nathan, who both spearheaded and spread belief in Sabbatai's messianic mission, were rabbis. In fact, throughout the movement's height in 1665-66, it is rare to find leading figures who were not rabbis, cantors or communal functionaries. This was not always the case with Jewish messianic movements. Neither Asher Laemlein Reutlingen nor David Reubeni, messiahs of the early sixteenth century, was a rabbi, nor were the leaders of those movements mainly from the scholarly elites. This is also the case concerning Frankism, several of the Hasidic messianic movements, most of the medieval messianic movements, and the Yemenite movements.¹⁰ Sabbatean rabbis and communal leaders, on the other hand, took center stage from the beginning. They would also be the ones to carry on after the apparent failures of Sabbatai's apostasy and death. It should therefore not be terribly surprising to find Sabbatean communal leaders after the apostasy.

Pattern of Pursuit and Ignorance

Elisheva Carlebach has collected a number of testimonies by rabbis of this era who state that they had long been aware of the Sabbatean commitments of certain individuals but took no action. The general attitude of Jewish leaders, they say, was to sweep such knowledge under the rug. The Sabbatean commitments of Nehemiah Hiyya Hayon, whose writings were the occasion for a huge uproar around 1713, were known much earlier by Rabbis Benjamin ha-Levi of Izmir, Netanel ha-Levi of Pesaro, Joseph Ergas of Pisa, and an unknown Livornese correspondent of Rabbi Abraham Segre. Amazingly, Rabbi Moses Hagiz himself, the great heresy hunter, said that at the outset of the Hayon episode, the rabbis had no interest in creating a public scandal of the matter. Netanel ha-Levi's comment is most revealing:

I did not speak of this to anyone because it was the way of that generation to sit in the study halls and suppress such matters in

10 On these movements see Harris Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

fulfillment of the verse, *and he who is wise at that time will remain silent*. I had known about these matters since my youth, but I had kept the words guarded in my heart.¹¹

Hagiz, Emden, and others make similar statements concerning the general policy of silence about knowledge of Sabbateans before the explosion of anti-Sabbateanism in 1713.¹² Even the most fiery of anti-Sabbateans, Jacob Sasportas, reports his own decision to remain silent in the face of the continued activities of the believers. After extensive attempts to rein in Rabbi Jacob Sa'adun of Salé, the leader of the believers in that North African city, Sasportas states, "I did not bother to respond to him concerning his absurdities, for I reasoned, *Do not answer a fool according to his folly [or you yourself will be just like him. Proverbs 26:4]*"¹³

This situation did not necessarily change after 1713. A dozen years after the outbreak of the Hayon affair, Sabbatean literature for distribution was discovered in the possession of a wandering bookseller in Mannheim and Frankfurt. This literature included material from the rising star of the Prague rabbinate, Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschutz. Pawel Maciejko states that, "Among the rabbinic authorities of the period, Hagiz and Michael Hasid were the only ones who advocated the public exposure of clandestine Sabbatians in general and an attack on a prominent rabbinic figure such as Rabbi Jonathan [Eibeschutz] in particular."¹⁴ We know already that this was not always true of Hagiz. Emden, later to be known as Eibeschutz's inveterate pursuer, said of Eibeschutz's manuscript *Va-Avo Hayom el ha-'Ayin* in 1724, "The book is the work of heresy and sacrilege and it certainly deserves to be burned, but I advised him not to make his objections public, because nothing good would come out of it and it would likely only cause damage."¹⁵ Clearly the idea of a vigilant rabbinate seeking out and exposing Sabbateans loses any validity in the face of such evidence.

11 Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*, 78.

12 Carlebach, *Pursuit of Heresy*, 76–80.

13 Sasportas, *Zizat Novel Zevi*, 359.

14 Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschutz, '*And I Came This Day Unto the Fountain*,' critically edited and introduced by Pawel Maciejko (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2014), ix.

15 Eibeschutz, '*And I Came This Day*,' ix.

Sasportas gave up his attack on Sa'adun largely because he could get little support from the establishment rabbinate in his campaign against the believers. This was not surprising at the height of the public phase of the movement, when most of the rabbis either believed in Sabbatai or wished to stand aside and await developments. Sasportas was absolutely mystified, however, that the rabbinate was still fighting him rather than the Sabbateans, years after the apostasy. This was not the case in Salé alone but in many communities. It turns out that all the leading anti-Sabbatean activists struggled to obtain any support from establishment rabbis or leaders. When Hagiz and several leading scholars produced proofs of Nehemiah Hayon's outrageous Sabbatean heresy, the lay leadership in Amsterdam viewed the attack on Hayon as an incursion on its own sovereign power over the community.¹⁶ Again and again these zealots were given only the most tepid support by communal leaders, both lay and rabbinic. Sometimes they were openly opposed and often they found themselves marginalized or even exiled as a result of their anti-Sabbatean efforts. This is additional clear evidence that Jewish leaders were not interested in hunting Sabbateans.

There are many other situations in which we have no direct testimony about the lackluster or fragmentary pursuit of Sabbateans by establishment leaders, but the lassitude of the rabbis reveals their true disposition. Three examples will give a sense of this.

The home and circle of Rabbi Abraham Rovigo in Modena was a central hub of Sabbateanism in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Rovigo and his very close friend, Benjamin Kohen Vitale of Reggio, were among the most prominent Italian Sabbateans. They were students of the leading Western European kabbalist, Rabbi Moses Zacuto (1625-1697). Zacuto had flirted with Sabbateanism at the height of the movement but moved away from it with Sabbatai's apostasy.¹⁷ He was in close touch with his two disciples and was well aware of their Sabbatean beliefs. He took no steps, however, to punish them, persecute them, or reveal their beliefs. Meanwhile, believers

16 Carlebach, *Pursuit of Heresy*, 104–16.

17 See Gershom Scholem, "The Attitude of Rabbi Moses Zacuto to Sabbateanism," in Scholem, *Researches in Sabbateanism*, ed. Y. Liebes [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1991), 510–29; Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1988), 449–50.

from all over Europe and the Ottoman Empire came to Rovigo's study hall to learn the latest news in the movement and teach the doctrines they had learned from Nathan of Gaza or his apprentices. What is more, for decades Rovigo was host and mentor to a series of Sabbatean *ba'alei maggid* — men who channeled heavenly spirits which revealed Sabbatean secrets from the supernal realm. His home was thus not only a clearinghouse for Sabbatean rumors and teachings, but was a fountainhead of new intelligence which would then be distributed and debated across Sabbatean circles. Rovigo made certain efforts to keep his Sabbatean commitments hidden, but if there had been even a moderate effort to uncover the believers, Rovigo could hardly have remained incognito for long. Zacuto, or any of the scores of visitors, *ba'alei maggid*, suspicious neighbors, or numerous correspondents, could have revealed his secret and uncovered the entire network. No circle of that size and complexity could have held up to careful scrutiny — but there was none. Anti-Sabbatean heresy hunters would have been reluctant to go after Rovigo for other reasons as well. There is no indication that he was a heretic in any sense. He was an important scholar and a wealthy community leader.¹⁸

Another example of the lackluster pursuit of Sabbateans in the period is the case of the Hevra Kaddisha of Rabbi Judah Hasid. This

18 On Rovigo and his circle see inter alia [all in Hebrew]: Meir Benayahu, *The Shabbatean Movement in Greece* (=Sefunot 14/NS 4) (1977): passim; idem, "Sabbatean Rumors from the Notebooks of Rabbi Benjamin ha-Kohen and Rabbi Abraham Rovigo," *Michael* 1 (1972): 9–77; Jacob Mann, "The Stay of Rabbi Abraham Rovigo and his Entourage in Jerusalem in 1702," *Zion* 6 (1934): 59–84; Gershom Scholem, *Halomotav shel ha-shabta'i R. Mordecai Ashkenazi: 'Al devar pinkas ha-halomot shel R. Mordecai Ashkenazi, talmido shel R. Avraham Rovigo* (Leipzig: Schocken, 1938); idem, "On the Italian Sabbateans at the end of the Seventeenth Century and on Rabbi Elijah Mojajon" in Scholem, *Researches*, 564–7 (including Liebes's thorough notes); idem, "Lesson 38" in Scholem, *Parashat ha-Shabta'ut*, ed. and annotated Avi Elqayam (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2018), 303–9; Isaiah Sonne, "On the History of Sabbateanism in Italy," in *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume*, Hebrew section (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1943), 89–103; idem, "New Material on Sabbatai Zevi from a Notebook of R. Abraham Rovigo," *Sefunot* 3–4 (1961): 39–70; Isaiah Tishby, "R. Meir Rofe's Letters of 1675–80 to R. Abraham Rovigo," *Sefunot* 3–4 (1961): 71–130; idem, "The First Sabbatean 'Magid' in the Study Hall of R. Abraham Rovigo," in idem, *Paths of Faith and Heresy: Essays in Kabbalah and Sabbateanism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982), 81–107.

was a migration of scores if not hundreds of European Jews to Palestine in 1700. The caravan or traveling camp of participants built up over several years under the charismatic leadership of Hasid and his fellow leader, Hayyim Malakh. Malakh was a disciple of Benjamin ha-Kohen of Reggio as well as of Samuel Primo, Barukhiah Russo, and Abraham Miguel Cardoso — all leading Sabbatean theologians. Malakh was ultimately a radical Sabbatean heretic, a follower of Primo, and apparently brought Hasid into that camp as well. Hasid preached with great charisma and success around Poland as the group moved slowly westward. The whole *'aliyah* project was inspired by Sabbatean motives. Many if not most of the participants were Sabbateans. Some Polish rabbis knew of the group's true nature. Rabbi Saul of Krakow wrote to the Hakham Zevi Ashkenazi in Altona to request help in responding to the Hevra Kaddisha and was advised to harass them. This approach was successful to the degree that the group left Poland for Germany; or perhaps they were headed that way in any case. If the Polish rabbinate knew that Hasid and Malakh were Sabbateans, why did they not alert the German and Palestinian rabbis? Perhaps they did and were ignored. Amazingly, it took another decade for the Sabbatean character of the Hasid entourage to be publicly acknowledged in Europe. When this occurred, the leaders expressed shock at the discovery. In the years leading up to 1700, though, they were clearly busy with some other occupation because — like the Sabbatean nature of the Rovigo circle — the “secret” of the Hevra Kaddisha was not hidden very deeply.¹⁹

A third example brings home the point that the rabbinic leaders were looking the other way rather than searching for Sabbateans. Saloniki became the leading Ottoman center of the movement after Sabbatai's death. In 1683 (and/or 1686) hundreds of Saloniki Jews, including a significant group of important rabbis, converted to Islam in imitation of Sabbatai's apostasy. They were not the first; individuals and smaller groups had done this since 1666. Aside from the size of

19 Benayahu, “Hevra Kaddisha”; Putik, “Prague Jews and Judah Hasid”; Jacob J. Schacter, “Motivations for Radical Anti-Sabbateanism: The Case of Hakham Zevi Ashkenazi,” in *The Sabbatean Movement and Its Aftermath: Messianism, Sabbateanism and Frankism*, ed. Rachel Elijor, vol. 2 (=Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, vol. 17) (Jerusalem: Institute of Jewish Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2001), 41*.

the faction, however, the distinguished standing of many participants made this mass apostasy noteworthy. Among them was Rabbi Joseph Filosof, a respected rabbi and son-in-law of Saloniki's most distinguished rabbinic scholar, Barukh Angel. Filosof was Sabbatai Zevi's father-in-law! His son, Rabbi Jacob Filosof, was believed to have absorbed Sabbatai's soul after the death of the latter.²⁰ They were joined in apostasy by the highly respected Rabbi Solomon Florentin. These rabbis had not troubled themselves much to hide their Sabbatean commitments before 1683 either. Nathan visited Saloniki and found allies as well as students. For years before the mass apostasy, the city was home to the leading Sabbatean *yeshivah*. Could the Sabbatean nature of large proportions of the Jewish population and rabbinate in Saloniki — known as *'ir ve-em be-yisra'el* [a city and mother in Israel] — have remained unknown to the Jewish leaders everywhere? It is only imaginable if the rabbis and leaders were not only neglecting to search, but were averting their gaze.²¹

Clearly, there was no organized and concerted anti-Sabbatean campaign before 1713. The typical rabbinic response to knowledge of Sabbatean believers was rather to stay silent. We will now look at some of the reasons that might have been the case.

Why Was the Hunt So Sporadic?

The pursuit of Sabbatean believers varied greatly in different places and periods. The inquiry was altogether inconsistent even in the same region and time. The rabbinic court of Venice interrogated Nathan of Gaza and actively persecuted him while the rabbis of Modena, Ancona, and Reggio were barely disguised believers. The rabbinate of Istanbul was busy excommunicating Sabbateans while the rabbinate of Saloniki was full of them. Certain rabbinic courts (Istanbul, Venice) or individual rabbis (Sasportas, Hagiz, Emden) became ardent pursuers of Sabbatean heretics while other courts and rabbis looked the other way. A glance at some of the conundrums and frustrations facing even the zealous courts and rabbis can suggest reasons that Sabbatean-hunting might have been regarded as a fool's errand.

20 See Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 149.

21 See Scholem, *Researches*, ch. 4; Benayahu, *The Shabbatean Movement in Greece*.

Early in the post-apostasy phase of the Sabbatean movement, dissembling became a standard tool of the believers. Known Sabbateans are, for example, repeatedly listed among the rabbis who publicly decry the movement and call for its extirpation. Even if the heresy-hunters suspected such duplicity, however, they tended to tread lightly when it came to suspected Sabbateans who were community leaders. Four main reasons might explain this. First, the leading individual rabbinic heresy hunters — Sasportas, Hagiz and Emden — were in relatively weak leadership positions at the time they commenced these activities. They therefore had little leverage. Hagiz, for example, could not get the Council of Four Lands or the Chief Rabbi of Prague to respond to his letters. Second, many if not most communal leaders had been believers during 1665-6, so the ongoing investigation shamed them all. Third, exposure of such figures would be a scandal and embarrassment to the community as well as to its leaders. Finally, a powerful Sabbatean communal leader could turn the tables and damage the reputation of his detractors.

This fourth scenario indeed played out multiple times. Sasportas was deeply hated and barely avoided violent attacks at the height of the movement.²² Hakham Zevi Ashkenazi and his son Jacob Emden lost rabbinic positions because of their fearless anti-Sabbatean campaigns.²³ Hagiz was kept at the margins of rabbinic leadership for his efforts. The two most famous cases of Sabbatean persecution boomeranged. In the case of Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, the subject turned out not to be a Sabbatean.²⁴ In the case of Jonathan Eibeschutz, the pursued proved more powerful than his pursuers.²⁵

In addition to these factors, there were many versions of Sabbatean faith after 1666. Scholars of the movement from Scholem

22 See Dweck, *Dissident Rabbi*, ch. 2-3.

23 See Carlebach, *Pursuit of Heresy*, Ch. 4-5; Jacob J. Schacter, "Rabbi Jacob Emden: Life and Major Works" (unpublished PhD diss., Harvard University, 1988), ch. 5.

24 See Isaiah Tishby, "Luzzatto's Attitude to Shabateanism," in Tishby, *Messianic Mysticism: Moses Hayyim Luzzatto and the Padua School* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2008), 223-53.

25 See e.g. Scholem, *Researches*, ch. 8; idem, *Kabbalah*, 405-8; Eibeschutz, 'And I Came This Day,' *passim*.

to Maciejko have emphasized the heretical facets of Sabbateanism.²⁶ Even after Sabbatai's apostasy, however, there were many believers who were neither heretics, nor antinomians, nor apostates. Some of these figures were rabbis of considerable stature, such as Abraham Rovigo of Modena.²⁷ Rabbinic leaders in other communities may have felt little impetus to investigate colleagues who were — certainly to all appearances — orthodox community leaders.

It is not contrary to Judaism's laws or traditions to believe that some given person is the messiah, even if that belief is misguided. This truth is famously exemplified in the Talmud by Rabbi Akiva's faith in Simeon Bar Kokhba.²⁸ Sabbateanism, like early Christianity, subsumed forms which were heretical and forms which were not. Here part of the problem lay in determining what heresy is. Most rabbis could agree that those who believed Sabbatai to be a deity crossed the line into heresy. Other Sabbatean ideas and practices were more difficult to categorize. Those who followed Sabbatai's "strange deeds" by practicing ritual antinomianism — such as eating precisely an olive's weight of leaven on Passover — deliberately broke Jewish law. Did their beliefs concerning the status of Jewish law make them heretics? They had Talmudic precedents to indicate that *halakhah* would change when the messiah appeared.²⁹ What of those who turned the fast of 9 Av into a day of feasting, as Sabbatai had taught? This is a change explicitly predicted in the Midrash for the End of Days. Those who converted to Islam broke with their people, but the great Maimonides himself had said that Islam is not idolatry. Did such an apostasy (or the appearance of one) constitute heresy? Perhaps, then, someone in pursuit of heresy would have a difficult time distinguishing which

26 See e.g. Gershom Scholem, "Redemption Through Sin," in Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 78–141 (originally published in Hebrew in *Keneset II* [1937]: 347–92); *Sabbatian Heresy: Writings on Mysticism, Messianism and the Origins of Jewish Modernity*, ed. P. Maciejko (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2017).

27 See note 18 above.

28 See e.g. Richard G. Marks, *The Image of Bar-Kokhba in Traditional Jewish Literature: False Messiah and National Hero* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

29 See e.g. *Vaykira Rabba* 13:3 and 32:10 (Margolioth edition); *Midrash Tehillim* 146:4; Rabbi Abraham Azulai, *Hesed le-Avraham* (Amsterdam, 1685), 13c–14a, cited in Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 255.

Sabbateans were dogmatically problematic and which were merely mistaken about who the messiah would be.

Finally, Judaism was already beginning to encounter existential struggles of identity during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries when all this was occurring. This was the age of the *Kol Sakhal*, of da Costa and Spinoza, of growing acculturation and massive Jewish displacement. In such circumstances, and before the advent of Jacob Frank, some leaders may have seen the underground Sabbateans as more of an annoyance or embarrassment than as a threat.³⁰

In short, a rabbi or rabbinic court was taking enormous chances in deciding to pursue Sabbatean leaders. The believers would dissimulate. Some were powerful or beloved and could ruin the lives of their pursuers. Bringing up the Sabbatean episode in public was embarrassing to Jewish communities and even more so to the rabbis. It was difficult to know whether a particular Sabbatean was actually a heretic, which was the main rationale for stirring up a controversy. The pursuit of heresy could distract leaders from greater threats. What was there to gain by reviving the ugly flames of Sabbatean strife? Ultimately, the most assiduous pursuers were those who had the least to lose — rabbis near the margins of the community — and who were therefore the least effective. There were certainly situations in which leading rabbis joined the fray, but in many such cases these were the voices of compromise and conciliation.

Some Sabbatean Communal Leaders

Several communal leaders with barely disguised Sabbatean views have already come up in the discussion: Abraham Rovigo, Benjamin ha-Kohen of Reggio, Jacob Sad'un, Jonathan Eibeschutz, Judah Hasid, Hayyim Malakh, Joseph and Jacob Filosof, and Solomon Florentin. As sections 7-8 of Scholem's massive biography of Sabbatai cover the period from 1666 to 1676, I will focus on figures who were active after that time. Here are a few examples of the many which could be cited.

30 See David B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), ch. 4, "Crisis of Rabbinic Authority."

Two individuals from the background of Jonathan Eibeschutz are exemplary cases. First is Samuel Issahar Ber ben Judah Moses Perlhefter (ca. 1650 - ca. 1713). He was born and educated in Prague. His family was not, in fact, named Perlhefter — this was his wife's family name which he adopted — but rather Eibeschutz. His relationship with Jonathan Eibeschutz is not yet clear but the family was not then so large as to make any distance of kinship likely. Ber was serving as a rabbinic judge in Wandsbek, Germany, in the late 1660s. He was apparently in Vienna when the Jewish community was expelled in 1670. Ber and Bella were back in Prague between 1670 and 1674. From fall of 1674 to winter of 1676, Ber was in Altdorf tutoring the Hebraist Johann Wagenseil. He left Germany and arrived at Rovigo's home in Modena in the winter of 1676 and remained until fall of 1681. There Ber channeled a Sabbatean *maggid*, a heavenly spirit, which revealed secrets about Sabbatai Zevi and the messianic future. Recent research by Isaiah Tishby, Avi Elqayam, and Noam Lefler shows that Ber was not only a conduit for Sabbatean messages from the supernal realms, but probably the architect of important Sabbatean doctrines as well. He was a public figure known widely in Northern Italy as a mystic and interpreter of secrets.

Ber subsequently served as a rabbi in Mantua, as his father had done before him. He was eventually forced to leave Italy because of a fight over the messianic status of his erstwhile friend Mordecai Eisenstadt. Ber eventually returned to Prague where he was appointed a rabbinic judge, a position formerly held by his grandfather. All indications are that he was well respected there.³¹ Whatever his familial relationship with Jonathan Eibeschutz, Ber was clearly a longstanding Sabbatean — even a prophet — who held leadership positions in several important communities.

A second figure of interest from Jonathan Eibeschutz's background is Rabbi Me'ir Eisenstadt (ca. 1670-1744), one of the leading Ashkenazi scholars of his time. Eisenstadt had been a rabbi

31 Isaiah Tishby, "The First Sabbatean 'Maggid' in the Study-Hall of Rabbi Abraham Rovigo," in Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982), 81-107; Avi Elqayam, "The Rebirth of the Messiah," *Kabbalah* 1 (1996): 85-166; Lefler, "Studies" passim; Ber and Bella Perlhefter, *Be'er Sheva*, ed. and trans. and introduced by Nathanael Riemer (Berlin: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010).

and head of a *yeshivah* in Poland and Germany but had to flee Worms ahead of the French invasion. He ended up in 1702 as rabbi in Prossnitz, Moravia, where he was Jonathan Eibeschütz's teacher and foster father. He later became rabbi of the city of Eisenstadt, where his *yeshivah* became extremely successful. While back in Prossnitz, Eisenstadt had been an enthusiastic supporter of the Sabbatean preacher and prophet Leibele Prossnitz. Leibele openly taught Sabbatean beliefs and predicted the return of the messiah in 1706. Letters from Leibele to Eibeschütz were found together with Eibeschütz's manuscript *Ve'avo Hayom el ha-'Ayin* in 1724 (see above), indicating a warm relationship. While Meir Eisenstadt did eventually disassociate from Leibele when the latter became very radical, there is no reason to think that Eisenstadt abandoned his Sabbatean commitments. He was certainly a Sabbatean for an important period of his years as a communal leader; he was extremely close with Jonathan Eibeschütz; and he showed no interest in attacking the Sabbatean Leibele Prossnitz until the latter became highly radical.³²

The congregations of the Land of Israel were not free of Sabbatean leaders. The evidence from Abraham Rovigo's notebooks from the 1680s and 1690s indicates that many of the respected fundraisers who left the Holy Land to collect funds from communities all over the diaspora were Sabbatean operatives who spread the faith as they traveled. Rabbi David Yitzhaki, one of Sabbatai's most dedicated supporters throughout his life, and a student of Nathan of Gaza's teachings, was a leader in Edirne and possibly in Saloniki as well. In 1687 he settled in Jerusalem, where he served as a judge on the rabbinic court for years. He was highly respected, but again, after his decades-long association with Sabbateanism in Greece, his commitment to the faith could hardly have been a great secret. Scholem contends that many rabbinic leaders in Jerusalem and Safed during this period were Sabbateans.³³

The case of Elijah Mojajon (Muchacheon) shows the international scope of Sabbatean training and leadership in the late seventeenth

32 Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 441–42; EJ s.v. "Eisenstadt, Meir," vol. 6, columns 549–50.

33 Scholem, *History of the Sabbatian Movement*, ed. Jonatan Meir and Shinichi Yamamoto (Tel-Aviv: JTS-Schocken Institute for Jewish Research, 2018), 240–41; idem, *Researches*, 190–202; Benayahu, *Shabatean Movement in Greece*, 50.

century. Mojajon was a native of either Greece or Ancona, born around 1663. He studied in Saloniki under Rabbi Solomon Florentin, who would shortly afterward become a leader among the Dönme, those Sabbateans who converted to Islam. Mojajon apparently also learned briefly with Nathan of Gaza shortly before Nathan's death. Mojajon came to Italy as a young rabbi. There he spent time with the two ardent Sabbateans, Abraham Rovigo of Modena and Benjamin ha-Kohen Vitale of Reggio. In 1692 Mojajon was in Bayonne, where the community had for the first time been permitted the appointment of a rabbi. It is possible that Mojajon was called there for that purpose. In 1693 he was in Amsterdam. By 1696 he was serving as rabbi in Ancona, where he followed in the footsteps of that city's earlier rabbi, Mehalalel Halleluyah, a very enthusiastic Sabbatean throughout his life. Mojajon corresponded with fellow Sabbateans and composed important Sabbatean writings.³⁴

Mojajon's companion from the Saloniki days, and one of the most influential Sabbateans in Western Europe, was Rabbi Solomon Ayllon. He was born, probably in Saloniki, around 1655. It appears that he converted to Islam with the Dönme in 1683, and Moses Hagiz claims that he contracted a highly irregular marriage while with that group. (Ayllon's own subsequent writings support that claim.) He abandoned the Dönme and returned to Jewish life but remained an enthusiastic Sabbatean. He followed the familiar route from Greece to the home of Rovigo in Modena, apparently spending time in the Palestinian city of Safed on the way. In Rovigo's home, Ayllon revealed Sabbatean secrets from Nathan of Gaza and composed a work of Sabbatean theology. He moved on from Modena to Amsterdam, where emissaries from the young Spanish and Portuguese congregation of London found him and hired him as their rabbi. He served in London from 1689 to 1699, when he was brought back to the highly prestigious Amsterdam Portuguese community to serve as its rabbi. He remained in that position until his death in 1728. When the radical Sabbatean author Nehemiah Hiyya Hayon appeared in Amsterdam in 1713, he was supported — if with some hesitation — by Ayllon. When Ayllon was attacked by Hagiz and other anti-Sabbatean activists, the Sephardic

34 Benayahu, *Shabatean Movement in Greece*, 138–46; Scholem, "On the Italian Sabbateans."

community rallied around its rabbi and turned its powers against the detractors. Ayllon remained in contact with the Sabbatean network and wrote Sabbatean-related material into the 18th century.³⁵

To return to where this paper began, here is what Moses Hagiz has to say about Ayllon and the way he himself handled the knowledge of Ayllon's Sabbateanism:

The sins of this generation brought it about that one of the holy congregations of Israel was taken in by him and employed him. When the sages of Israel heard of the matter, they turned a blind eye as if they knew nothing of the matter. (It is possible — nay, almost certain — that this deliberate obliviousness has been the cause of all these sorrows we suffer at present from this villain. Still, the Lord God knows, and Israel will know that when the congregation consulted me in 499 of the minor count [1698/9], I only withheld my testimony [against Ayllon] out of a desire not to impede penitents. I said, since he has already risen, he should not be toppled, out of honor for the congregation that erred unknowingly.)³⁶

Hagiz, then, the great Sabbatean hunter, knew all about the Sabbatean beliefs of Ayllon in 1698/9, but did not speak out. He suggests that other rabbis knew as well, and blames the post-Hayon mess on their reticence.

35 See Benayahu, *Shabatean Movement in Greece*, 147–60; Yael Nadav, “A Kabbalistic Treatise of R. Solomon Ayllion,” *Sefunot* 3-4 (1960): 301-348; Carlebach, *Pursuit of Heresy*, 114-116; Lefler, “Studies” passim; Matt Goldish, “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in the 1689 London Sermons of Hakham Solomon Aailion,” in *Tradition, Heterodoxy and Religious Culture: Judaism and Christianity in the Early Modern Period* ed. C. Goodblatt and H. Kreisel (Be'er Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2007), 139–65; idem, “An Historical Irony: Solomon Aailion's Court Tries the Case of a Repentant Sabbatean,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 27:1-2 (1993): 5–12; idem, “Jews, Christians and *Conversos*: Rabbi Solomon Aailion's Struggles in the Portuguese Community of London,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 45:2 (1994): 227–57.

36 Moses Hagiz, *Shever Posh'im* (Amsterdam, 1719), 37v.

Conclusion

This brief paper has only touched the surface of the evidence concerning Sabbatean communal leaders after 1666. The rabbis of the period attest that there was an unspoken policy to look the other way regarding such figures. There is, furthermore, abundant evidence from their actions that the official rabbinate often turned a blind eye toward Sabbatean community leaders. There were campaigns to find and excommunicate Sabbateans, to be sure, but these tended to flare up and die down. The leading heresy hunters were not the most prestigious rabbis and had a hard time getting others on board with the pursuit. There were a number of powerful reasons that a rabbi of the period might not want to involve himself in such hunts. Meanwhile, a mountain of evidence points to the fact that there were many Sabbatean communal leaders from Sabbatai's apostasy in 1666 until the 1730s, and that most of the time they remained undisturbed.

The Claim to "Hidden Truths" as the Reason for the Rejection of Kabbalah by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

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Abstract

The essay analyses several reasons for the well-known rejection of the theological "worth" of kabbalah by two of the leading scholars of the 19th century German-Jewish movement of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*: Heinrich Graetz and Abraham Geiger. Kabbalistic esotericism, resting on fraudulent claims to authorship and masking the irrationality of its doctrines, was among the major objections of these historians. Dealing in mysticism was understood to ruin the morality of human relations by leading to a secretive, elitist individualism instead of creating a healthy human society — kabbalah focused on the capturing of imaginary worlds instead of improving the existing world. Particularly disturbing was that kabbalah often blurred the boundary between the bodily and the spiritual, specifically by formulating a new, hallowed dialectic relation between human limbs and the human intellect that was purportedly superior to common morality. Eventually, both scholars agreed that kabbalah could therefore not promote the modern Judaism that nineteenth-century German Jews wished to see as a viable, ethical alternative to traditional religion, a Judaism that is capable of survival in the modern age.

We may define science as the analysis and explanation of the laws of nature, as well as the rules that govern human society and history, with results that lay open this research's methodology and allow the scientific outcome to be reproduced. Given this definition, science in essence becomes the ultimate disclosure of all secrets. Esotericism anchored in revelation or a purported authoritative tradition that can be known only by the initiate thus stands in contradiction to scientific research. The kabbalist, who speaks of "hidden truths" which he believes to be universally true but not in need of or even open to rational proof, is not only being irrational from a scientific perspective but also falsely pretentious. The present study will look into the exciting question of what happened when these two methods of knowledge, the scientific and the kabbalistic, came for the first time in close contact within the realm of Judaism.

I

The story of the modern scientific research into kabbalah probably began when, in 1838, the young Jewish scholar Meir Hirsch Landauer (1808-1841) decided that there was no better place to begin his studies of kabbalistic manuscripts than the Court Library in Munich. There he read hundreds of manuscripts in this field, and soon a new world opened up for him. Fascinated, he developed several highly original theories about the history and essence of kabbalah.¹ Four years later, in the fall of 1842, another young man interested both in science and in kabbalah came to the city of Leipzig, then the stronghold of German academic orientalism; soon, this scholar would turn into a worthy successor of Landauer, whom he held in great respect. During the almost fifteen years of his stay in Leipzig, Rabbi Adolf Jellinek (1820-1889) became the leading and most prolific German-Jewish scholar of kabbalistic thought of his time, probably even of the entire nineteenth century.² During the first half of the 1850s alone, Jellinek published five books on kabbalah, correcting most of Landauer's wild theories.³ Already in the 1850s, Moritz Steinschneider (1816-1907), one of the most famous Jewish bibliographers, catalogized all known kabbalistic literature in a ten-page list, included in his landmark "Jewish Literature" (1857).⁴

In parallel to this development, almost at the same time, several young German-Jewish theologians developed the first detailed and sophisticated theories about the reasons and conditions of the emergence of kabbalah in the history of Jewish thought. They all seem to have been well acquainted with kabbalistic thought, at least with

- 1 Landauer's ideas were published posthumously in several installments of *the Literaturblatt des Orients* of 1845. On Landauer see Eveline Goodman-Thau, "Meyer Heinrich Hirsch Landauer: Bible Scholar and Kabbalist," in *Mysticism, Magic, and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism*, ed. K. E. Grözinger (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1995), 275-94.
- 2 On Jellinek, see Samuel J. Kessler, "Rediscovering the Study of Spanish Kabbalism in Wissenschaft des Judentums: Adolf Jellinek in Leipzig, 1842-1856," in *Pardes* 24 (2018): 125-44.
- 3 Most important: Adolf Jellinek, *Moses ben Shem-tob de Leon und sein Verhältnis zum Sohar* (Leipzig: Hunger, 1851).
- 4 Moritz Steinschneider, *Jewish Literature from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1857). For the long story of the emergence of this essay, see Ismar Schorsch, "Moritz Steinschneider: The Vision beyond the Books," in *Studies on Steinschneider*, ed. Reimund Leicht and Gad Freudenthal (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 3-36.

the main mystical works, the *Sefer Yezirah* and the *Sefer haZohar*. Already in 1840, Rabbi Abraham Geiger (1810-1874) published a philosophical analysis of the emergence of kabbalah within Judaism, claiming it was a direct result of the theological confrontation between the talmudic and philosophical schools in the intellectual history of the Jewish religion.⁵ In 1846 the young historian Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891) first constructed the connection between Gnosis and kabbalah, analyzing in depth the *Sefer Yezirah*,⁶ and in 1849 Rabbi David Joel (1815-1882) wrote an ambitious book on the more intellectual aspects of the *Sefer haZohar*.⁷ A lengthy and pathbreaking philological study of the same work was published in 1858 by the Hungarian scholar Ignatz Stern (ca. 1810-1865), re-opening the question of the authorship of the Zohar, a question that Adolf Jellinek assumed to have settled before, when he established that the Spanish kabbalist Moses de Leon (1250-1305) was the main originator of the *Zohar*.⁸ Stern showed that this subject was far more complex: he was convinced that the *Zohar* is in fact a patchwork of at least three layers of text, from different periods of time, transitioning one into the other — a claim that has remained essentially valid until today.

The 1860s belonged to Heinrich Graetz's magisterial *History of the Jews*, eventually spanning eleven volumes, a work that fundamentally changed German-Jewish identity during the nineteenth century.⁹ In the seventh volume, published in 1863, Graetz devoted two full chapters and two essay-long endnotes to the emergence of kabbalah, demonstrating the surprising amount of manuscript study he had undertaken to produce reliable research results in the field of Jewish mysticism. Graetz re-established Moses de Leon as the sole author of the *Zohar* and provided a more detailed foundation for modern kabbalah research when he introduced and discussed several minor, previously mostly unknown figures of kabbalistic thought until the eighteenth century. In addition, Graetz first analyzed at length the

5 Abraham Geiger, *Melo Chofnaim*, "Biographie Josef Salomo del Medigo's," (Berlin: L. Fernbach, 1840), ix-xxi.

6 See Heinrich Graetz, *Gnosticismus und Judentum* (Krotoschin: B. L. Monasch, 1846).

7 David Joel, *Die Religionsphilosophie des Sohar und ihr Verhältnis zur allgemeinen jüdischen Theologie* (Leipzig: Fritzsche, 1849).

8 Ignatz Stern, "Versuch einer umständlichen Analyse des Sohar," in *Ben Chanajah* 1858), several installments.

9 Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden, Von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart. Aus den Quellen neu bearbeitet*, 11 vols. (Leipzig: Leiner, 1853-1875).

thought of the great Christian kabbalists of the renaissance, especially of Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522) and his appropriation of kabbalah for the proof of the truth of Christianity.¹⁰ Eventually, in the 1880s, lengthy accounts of kabbalah found entrance even into textbooks for Jewish schoolteachers published by *Wissenschaft* scholars like David Cassel or Gustav Karpeles, and into the first ever Jewish encyclopedia, written by Jacob Hamburger, that appeared in 1883.¹¹

II

The groundbreaking results of this German-Jewish kabbalah scholarship must of course be validated within the historical context of the nineteenth century, a century, as is widely known, that brought revolutionary new developments, not only in the natural sciences and medicine, but also in the humanities. Indeed, it was the century when a completely new intellectual ideal, the idea of scientificity (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*), replaced the old ideal of *Bildung* that still ruled Europe during the Age of the Enlightenment. If the Enlightenment promised a rationality that made it possible to prove or disprove dogmatic belief by the study of nature, to reveal a new rational world through science — the nineteenth century extended the critical, scientific method to the humanities. Beginning with Kant's great project to investigate whether metaphysics could be scientific, soon many more empirical disciplines followed suit and were established on the basis of rational laws: philology, jurisprudence, historiography, and, ironically, eventually even theology itself.

Now, beginning essentially with the foundation of the Berlin University by the Humboldt brothers in 1809, a new age dawned that replaced the aestheticist (*schöngeistig*) rationalism of the previous century with the dry technicism of the scientific state employee, paid for by the government, to produce useful and practical research results in increasingly specialized disciplines. But this was not only the age when the trained expert replaced the aristocratic polymath; it was also during the nineteenth century that a new critical, empirical, and inductive method of research replaced the great

10 Graetz, *Geschichte*, vol. 9, 3rd edition (Leipzig: Leiner, 1891), 172-77.

11 For the entire history of the foundation of kabbalah research in the nineteenth century, see: George Y. Kohler, *Kabbalah Research in the Wissenschaft des Judentums (1820-1880)* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019).

metaphysical ideas and theo-philosophical concepts that had shaped the development of thought for so long.¹² It was in the nineteenth century that Wilhelm von Humboldt demanded that the historian must rather extract the ideas underlying history from the concrete events collected by empirical research, a concept that was literally transferred into Judaism by Heinrich Graetz's essay on the "Structure of Jewish History" in 1846.¹³ This was the century when Friedrich Carl von Savigny demanded that the primary sources of the law must be purified from the "slags of history" (*Schlacken*), that is, from erroneous additions compiled over the course of the centuries, in order to rediscover the original ideas — a concept soon applied consistently not only to all the legal texts of Jewish literary tradition by Abraham Geiger and many others,¹⁴ but also to the much-contested question about the true authorship of the *Zohar*. It is no coincidence that after Jellinek and Graetz established that we were dealing with a fraudulent work, Gershom Scholem, the great kabbalah scholar of the twentieth century, made an initial (but eventually unsuccessful) attempt to show that some sections of the *Zohar* were in fact ancient. When this appeared to be almost out of the question, Scholem took an exceptionally apologetic stance to the false claim of the Kabbalists about the *Zohar*'s origin, expressing his desire to see in this work the essence of Judaism and not the "slags," as the Wissenschaft scholars

- 12 This is not to say, of course, that there was no critical thought before the modern era, especially in the philosophical tradition. Many humanist Renaissance scholars come to mind here, such as Dante, Bacon, and Erasmus, who replaced the dogmatic, clerical scholastics—but most of their works are still shaped by the great, overarching ideas of their time that they tried to discover in the ancient texts they studied. Only the nineteenth century produced the unbiased, inductive method of "bottom-up" research that believed in nothing but the manuscript itself.
- 13 Heinrich Graetz, "Die Construction der jüdischen Geschichte" first in *Zeitschrift für die religiösen Interessen des Judenthums* (1846): 81–97, 121–32, 361–81, and 413–21, here 83–84. New German edition by Nils Roemer, Düsseldorf: Parerga, 2000. English translation: "The Structure of Jewish History" in Heinrich Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, ed. Ismar Schorsch (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1975). For Humboldt's famous 1822 lecture "Über die Aufgabe des Geschichtsschreibers," see *Wilhelm von Humboldts Gesammelte Werke*, vol. I, Berlin: Reimer, 1841, 1–25 (English: "On the Historian's Task," in *History and Theory* 6, no. 1 (1967): 57–71.)
- 14 Cf. John Edward Toews, *Becoming Historical: Cultural Reformation and Public Memory in Early Nineteenth-Century Berlin*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

did.¹⁵ Ultimately, the nineteenth century was the age when Leopold Ranke declared empirical historiography to be also a new *religious* enterprise that had to reveal not metaphysical truth, but the very cultural properties of the nation—an idea that was adopted into Judaism by the *Wissenschaft* movement as a new and effective means to understand the Jewish national ‘essence’ of religious thought.¹⁶ In all those and more respects, Jewish scholars took part in the general intellectual trends of the nineteenth century, so that their work and thought cannot be properly understood when not placed into the context of their own time. Concerning their kabbalah research specifically, anachronistic, dissociated readings seem to be a major source of twentieth-century misunderstandings of these efforts, if not even of deliberate misinterpretations.

The first Jewish kabbalah scholars belonged to the first generation of Jewish intellectuals who added to their traditional Jewish education in the classical texts of Judaism the critical method of the university. Many of them were practicing rabbis, but they chose this profession only because after graduating from German universities they could not continue their academic career without accepting baptism. Nevertheless, this first generation of *Doktor-Rabbiner* was not only in constant contact with other Jews interested in *Wissenschaft*, but also networked with Gentile scholars, and published new discoveries regularly in non-Jewish academic journals. All this is true for the Jewish *Wissenschaft* project in general, and for the field of Jewish mysticism specifically. There was no secrecy at play at all on the side of the Jewish kabbalah scholars — not only did they not willfully neglect research into Jewish variants of mysticism, as

15 Scholem’s justification of pseudo-epigraphy seems to be based on the idea that the authority of the alleged author was exerted in order to give more weight to what was perceived as an authentic expression of this sage’s theological thought. As per David Biale: ‘Pseudo-epigraphy became a means for legitimizing a creative work as part of a hidden tradition. The authority of tradition is recognized, but the freedom of literary creation is preserved’ (*Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978], 119).

16 For Ranke’s influence, see *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, eds. Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989).

was often claimed, they even published their results widely, so that the whole academic world would know.¹⁷

Soon an interesting tension began to emerge from the encounter between the new scientific method and the kabbalistic traditions of Judaism: While many of the first Jewish kabbalah scholars distinctly rejected the theological importance of mysticism for the Jewish religion, this harsh assessment had in fact surprisingly little influence on their motivation to continue to research and discuss kabbalah. Given this dialectics, kabbalah scholarship turns out to be an illuminating test case for the understanding of the Jewish *Wissenschaft* movement itself—that is, for its methodological foundations and its cultural or even religious motivations.¹⁸ The *Wissenschaft* movement's kabbalah research constitutes an ideal standard for the examination of nineteenth-century Jewish intellectual and religious agendas, precisely because it unites apparent opposites: the emphasis on the critical method as the foundation of all science is applied to the understanding of kabbalah — essentially a subject not necessarily dominated by dry, logical, and reproducible thought, but rather by ornate literary motifs and mystical metaphor. The task to reach harmony between an outright theological rejection of kabbalah and the diligent, non-partisan research of the relevant texts would turn the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* first and foremost into an inner-Jewish movement, applying itself to Jewish identity building in the modern era. I will investigate this tension using the example of two leading *Wissenschaft* scholars, Abraham Geiger and Heinrich Graetz—both essentially historians, and both generally in deep divergence of opinion when it comes to theological questions.¹⁹ Among the few subjects they widely agree upon is their blatant and explicit rejection

17 The theory ultimately goes back to Gershom Scholem, who frequently asserted that kabbalah was “thrown out as un-Jewish or, at the least, half-pagan” by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. See his “The Science of Judaism – Then and Now,” in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1974), 309.

18 Boaz Huss has claimed repeatedly that calling kabbalah ‘mysticism’ is in itself a theological assumption that is not a fruitful designation for kabbalah research. But this raises the question whether kabbalah research then becomes pure philology or cultural history. See Huss, “The Theologies of Kabbalah Research,” in *Modern Judaism* 34, no. 1 (2014), 3–26.

19 Cf. Michael A. Meyer, “From Combat to Convergence: The Relationship between Heinrich Graetz and Abraham Geiger,” in *Reappraisals and New Studies of the Modern Jewish Experience: Essays in Honor of Robert M. Seltzer*, eds. Brian M. Smollett and Christian Wiese (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 145–61.

of the “religious worth” of kabbalah for Judaism, while both scholars studied this subject throughout their lifetime.

While it is true that in the wake of Graetz, Geiger, and other scholars, history, seen in itself as *Wissenschaft*, became the “new religion” for the modern Jew during that time, this was hardly a process of secularization of Judaism. If history, or more precisely, historical awareness, was still a *religion* for the “believers” in it, historical knowledge created a spiritual and at the same time intellectual connection to Judaism within a past totality.²⁰ And Judaism, for many nineteenth-century German Jews, had the longest and most heroic past of all known cultures. “A little nomadic crowd (*Völkchen*) encountered a whole world...” Geiger once described the biblical beginning of what was seen as a major and irreversible civilizing impact of the descendants of those nomads on world history down the millennia to Geiger’s own days and even beyond.²¹ The very notion of a *world-religion* goes back to Judaism, and it is only through history that the divine influence on human society is discernable. Geiger’s friend and colleague Rabbi Samuel Holdheim (1806-1860) also saw history, and not supernatural revelation, as the ruling force for the legal part of Judaism: the destruction of the Temple meant the divine abolishment of the sacrificial service, Holdheim claimed, and not its mere suspension.²²

Thus, no part of this history should remain unstudied, the first *Wissenschaft* scholars believed, not even the mystical traditions, in order to achieve this new spiritual-scientific connection between the rich and influential Jewish past and an eternal, outstanding Jewish *Geist*. The nineteenth century created for the first time an unconditionally critical, undogmatic rationalization of the Jewish religion: Historicism was religious and religion was scientific. But the critical method of science left no room for the theological pretexts that even great pre-modern rationalists like Maimonides or Mendelssohn still upheld to save the last Jewish principle of faith. The

20 Yosef Yerushalmi oddly called history the “faith of the fallen Jews” (see: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996], 86), betraying a view of religion that is closer to Christian dogmatism than to Jewish legalism. Nineteenth-century German Jews, at any rate, saw themselves rather as *elevated* by historical consciousness.

21 Geiger, *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte*, vol. 1 (Breslau: Schletter, 1864), 38.

22 Samuel Holdheim, *Das Ceremonialgesetz im Messiasreich* (Schwerin: Kürschner, 1840), 40.

nineteenth century thus also brought a specifically religious enlightenment — for the modern Jewish scholars saw religion first and foremost as an openly ethical and not a secretive and mystical enterprise. The scientific-historicist destruction of the last dogma, the sanctity of the biblical letter, ironically also dispelled the last Jewish myths, and thus allowed for Judaism to become what was then widely perceived as “a pure religion” of ethical monotheism.²³

Kabbalah, in the eyes of rationalist Jewish historians of the nineteenth century, could not be theologically rejected if it had not first been studied with the same intensity and depth as was applied to the study of medieval Jewish philosophy, for example. They studied kabbalah because Jewish history would not be complete without it, but they studied the complete Jewish history “to no other end other than to be good Jews,” as Moritz Lazarus once admitted.²⁴ Through the study of the “totality of Judaism,” discernable in its history, and exclusively this way, wrote Heinrich Graetz in 1844, we are able to understand the “soul of Judaism,” the great underlying principle(s) of the Jewish religion.²⁵ Judaism was everything Jews historically chose to think or do, emphatically including adopted “foreign” influences, no matter if they came from Greek, Muslim, or German philosophical thought.²⁶ Only if one had accomplished this dry, technical philology of all Jewish sources exhaustively, Graetz believed, would one be able to discern what among those various aspects is *essential* about Judaism — and what is not. The essence of Judaism, therefore, must not be confused with the concept of “authentic Judaism,” which excluded outside influences and thus much of the historical development of Judaism. Jewish thinkers of the nineteenth century

23 The term is actually of Christian origins but soon appeared also in Jewish thought—where throughout the nineteenth century it became the ultimate formulation to describe “the essence of Judaism.” (For early instances, see: Salomon Formstecher, *Die Religion des Geistes* (Frankfurt: Hermann, 1841), 109, Josef Lewin Saalschütz, “Der Monotheismus in sittlicher Beziehung,” *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie* 5, nos. 1, 2, & 3 (1844), 44–53, 152–74, 391–95.) For discussion, see Steven Kepnes, *The Future of Jewish Theology* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

24 Moritz Lazarus, *Was heisst und zu welchem Ende studiert man jüdische Geschichte und Literatur?* (Leipzig: Kaufmann, 1900), 34.

25 Heinrich Graetz, “Die Construction der Jüdischen Geschichte,” here 83.

26 Maimonides’ partial dependence on Aristotle, for example, was only criticized by traditional figures, never by Geiger and Graetz, who rather complained about his consequent dry rationalism. See here: George Y. Kohler, *Reading Maimonides’ Philosophy in 19th Century Germany* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012).

would certainly admit that there is a scale of theological value beyond history. One must know history well, however, to identify which specific values Judaism historically promoted — again, by an unbiased, empirical, inductive method of historical research. How precisely social values are scaled theologically, how rationality and spirituality are interconnected, is often not yet clear to those thinkers by the mid-nineteenth century. But contrary to Hegel, for Geiger and Graetz “moral freedom” is explicitly the highest value on the scale, only followed by true (not mystically shallow) spirituality, that is, the collective spirituality of the community. Moral freedom, though, is achieved by historical Judaism through the strictest distinction of the divine from the natural world, whereby no mystical remnant remained in the idea of God.²⁷

III

This newly discovered ethical aspect is probably the most important among the many different and complex reasons for the rejection of the theological value of kabbalah for what Jewish scholars in the nineteenth century believed was the “essence,” the “fundamental idea” (*Grundidee*) of Judaism.²⁸ Already by the 1840s, liberal Jewish theologians had developed, out of universal, progressive-messianic considerations, the notion of Judaism's unique mission to general human culture, countering the still-widespread Christian supersessionism of the age: the strict monotheism of the Jewish religion was the original and decisive contribution Judaism had to offer to the progress of world civilization.²⁹ Based on an idealized reading of the Biblical prophets, the Jewish people itself became the messiah who suffered for the atonement of the sins of the entire world, so that through Jewish ideas the entire world would be redeemed. Jewish monotheism and messianism stood now in an inextricable rational relationship: If there is but One God, then there

27 Graetz, *ibid.*, 85. For the spirituality of the community, see Geiger's view in the next section.

28 This is what Graetz proposed to find already in 1846, long before Leo Baeck wrote his well-known “The Essence of Judaism” in 1905 as the climax of this long-nineteenth-century development. See Graetz, *Construction*, 83.

29 See here Cf. Max Wiener “The Concept of Mission in Traditional and Modern Judaism,” in *YIVO Annual* 47/48, 9–24. See also David Novak, *Jewish Social Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 225–28.

is only one ethical truth and one humanity as a united whole to be saved in the approaching messianic age.

Heinrich Graetz wrote in 1863 that kabbalistic literature, with its “absurdities” and its appeal to the senses instead of reason, made its readers eventually “unable to tell right from wrong.”³⁰ But this very ability was one of the basic purposes of religion in the universal history of humanity for the thinkers of the nineteenth century. It was probably also one of the reasons for many Jewish scholars to cling to practical Judaism, as they did, notwithstanding their academic approach to Jewish history, theology, and eventually even to the Biblical text. Elliot Wolfson has shown impressively how indeed “the mystical experience truly embraces a form of non-dual consciousness” that would basically collapse the polarity of good and evil. The mystical union with the pantheist deity causes a “salvific gnosis,” a contemplative ideal of unified opposites, that precludes morality precisely the way Graetz had feared it would. “Just as the One to whom the mystic is conjoined is the being in whom opposites coincide and thus there is no basis to differentiate between right and wrong,” writes Wolfson, “so the self that is absorbed in this indifference is itself located beyond good and evil and, stands outside the purview of moral concern.”³¹ Interestingly, here the seamless transition from “good” to “right,” that is, from a moral judgment to a truth-value, betrays an underlying lawful rationality of ethics that is otherwise often denied by the proponents of relativist ethics.

On the other hand, the nineteenth century’s objection to kabbalah is not simply based on an over-emphasis on rationality in the concept of religion, as was often claimed.³² Both Geiger and Graetz

30 Graetz, *Geschichte*, vol. 7, second edition (Leipzig: Leiner, 1873), 232–33.

31 Elliot R. Wolfson, “Morality and Mysticism: Parallel or Intersecting Lines,” in the introduction to *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7–8. Wolfson refers in this essay to a large number of scholars who all agree that the mystic is indifferent to moral values, prominent among them Soren Kierkegaard, who believed that mysticism *leads to a renunciation of one’s moral obligations to other human beings* (quoted in Wolfson, p. 10).

32 Thus wrote, for example, Andreas Kilcher of the “simple rationalism” in the treatment of kabbalah by the “bourgeois historiography of the 19th century,” probably meaning Graetz and Geiger. See Kilcher, “Kabbalah und Moderne – Gershom Scholem Geschichte und Metaphysik des Judentums,” in *Jüdische Traditionen in der Philosophie des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. J. Valentin (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000), 86–99; here 86.

propounded massive criticism against the philosophy of Maimonides for precisely the reason of the dry rationalism dominating the medieval philosopher's thought—while they themselves preferred a spiritual Judaism that elevated its followers rather than forcing reasonable explanations on all its many traditions.³³ The spirituality of mysticism, however, is not elevating but shallow; it is only that of a secret that one keeps for himself, instead of sharing this knowledge with human society. Geiger wrote explicitly with respect to kabbalah:

Equally wrong is the claim that kabbalah, only because it is dubious and effusive, because it breathes spirit into earthly matters, would possess depth or a greater inwardness. Inwardness, the life of the soul, must not be achieved by spiritual searching; it should rather be expressed through love in our relation to God and man. In mystical systems, all enthusiasm, all movement of the soul, is exhausted, as it were, and then there is nothing left for real life.³⁴

It is thus not that Geiger rejects inwardness per se and would permit only rational thought when it comes to a description of the essence of Judaism. But inwardness, that is, the emotional, intuitive side of religion, is an *interhuman* category for Geiger. It belongs to the field of ethics, and it is not an individualistic, elitist trait. Inwardness must find expression in the selfless love of God, and through God, in the love of our fellow human beings — not in an effusive searching for “deeper,” spiritual meanings in texts or symbols, as in kabbalistic thought. Truly *religious* inwardness must yield concrete moral results in real life, and not exhaust itself in mystical speculations and playful allegories. Even self-negation, the extinction of the ego, as often demanded for and necessarily found in mystical experiences of the “conjunction with God,” is essentially immoral from this interhuman point of view, for only by beginning from the “I” can the “Thou,” the *Other* to be loved as oneself and respected, be discovered, while the annihilation of the self in a mystical union with the divine precludes

33 Cf. Kohler, *Reading Maimonides' Philosophy*.

34 Abraham Geiger, “Literaturbriefe aus dem Jahre 1853,” in *Nachgelassene Schriften*, vol. II, ed. Ludwig Geiger (Berlin: Gerschel, 1875), 277–367, here 317.

the very alterity of the “neighbor,” the fellow human.³⁵ This moral demand, therefore, seems to be Geiger’s true motive behind the strong rejection of kabbalah: It does not promote the modern Judaism that nineteenth-century German Jews wished to see as a viable, ethical alternative to traditional religion, a Judaism that is capable of survival in the modern age.

Very likely, for many nineteenth-century scholars, Jewish and Protestant, the opposite is true: Dealing in mysticism was understood to ruin the morality of human relations. It did so by leading to a secretive, elitist individualism instead of creating a healthy human society—that is, as Geiger wrote elsewhere, because it focused on the capturing of imaginary worlds instead of improving the existing world. Geiger was sure that, whatever the intellectual worth of kabbalistic speculations, mystical activities in thought or in practice lead inevitably to an estrangement from real life at best, or to the immoral behavior of an arrogant elite at worst. Particularly disturbing for Geiger was that kabbalah often blurred the boundary between the bodily and the spiritual, specifically by formulating a new, hallowed dialectic relation between human limbs and the human intellect that was purportedly superior to common morality. For Geiger, however, ethical behavior is based on a strict distinction of the carnal and the spiritual in human beings.³⁶

On a more philological level, much of the *Wissenschaft* movement’s criticism was directed against the phenomenon of pseudo-epigraphy, which was typical of medieval kabbalistic literature. If indeed *history* was the “religion of the modern Jew,” deliberate false attribution amounted to idolatry. The secretiveness of kabbalah became the exact counter-image of the intellectual honesty of *Wissenschaft*, as the nineteenth century generally saw it. Even for the rather unbiased bibliographer Moritz Steinschneider, the connection of pseudo-epigraphy to the theological realm was

35 For the discovery of the “thou,” see Hermann Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft* (Frankfurt: Kauffmann, 1929), 18–20. Kant famously included the I in the end-in-itself-formula of the Categorical Imperative. This critique of self-negation might even be true of the rather non-mystical *conjunctio intellectualis*, arguably found in Maimonides’ *Guide for the Perplexed* (III, 51), for even in this form it remains a selfish project. Cf. Wolfson, Introduction, 6.

36 Abraham Geiger, *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte*, vol. III (Breslau: Schletter, 1871), 71.

obvious.³⁷ *Deceit* [*Betrug*], he wrote in the introduction to an entire monograph dedicated to the pseudo-epigraphic literature of the Jewish Middle Ages, is the “natural companion” of superstition and enthusiasm (*Aberglauben und Schwärmerei*), the combination of which was Steinschneider’s usual characterization of kabbalah.³⁸ Also for Geiger and Graetz, this “secret of the true authorship” was a moral disaster, because it was not even truly mystical, but constructed—in other words, made up by man for a certain purpose. “The basic concept of the *Zohar* (if it is a concept at all),” Graetz wrote, is that the Pentateuch does not intend to transfer “the literal meaning of its text, but something higher, secret, and supernatural.” This secretiveness meant for Graetz that everything the author of the *Zohar* could think of could be “given a higher meaning, so that in the end a worthless doctrine” was created [*Afterlehre*] that was not only “unreasonable, but sometimes even absurd and immoral.”³⁹ Geiger also emphasized what he saw as the artificial, purposeful nature, and thus the actual emptiness, of the pseudo-epigraphic secret with reference to the *Zohar*. Once published, the book spread “like a disastrous avalanche,” he wrote, basically because of the arbitrariness of its thought “that concealed abysmal subjectivity with self-declared holiness, with *made-up secretiveness* and false attributions to ancient authorities.”⁴⁰

Clearly, therefore, esotericism resting on fraudulent claims and masking irrational doctrines was among the true reasons for the rejection of the religious “worth” of kabbalah by the scholars of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, based on their liberal Jewish theology and their religious convictions. In any event, religious thought stood in the background of this rejection much more than the politics of emancipation, or personal desires to assimilate into German society and culture. Ironically, thus strong *research* efforts, and not suppression of kabbalah, were the inevitable consequence of all coherent nineteenth-century criticism of mysticism and mystical

37 For Steinschneider, pseudo-epigraphy was either a rather technical outrage, “a capital offence in the realm of bibliography,” or egoistic, “immoral behavior,” as Giulio Busi called it. See Giulio Busi, “Steinschneider and the Irrational: A Bibliographical Struggle against the Kabbalah,” in *Moritz Steinschneider and the Emergence of the Science of Judaism in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, eds. Reimund Leicht and Gad Freudenthal (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 213–31, here 221.

38 Moritz Steinschneider, *Zur pseudoepigraphischen Literatur insbesondere der geheimen Wissenschaften des Mittelalters* (Berlin: 1862), 3.

39 Graetz, *Geschichte*, vol. 7, 223.

40 Geiger, *Delmedigo*, xvii (my emphasis).

traditions within religion.⁴¹ Where scientificity rules, these scholars believed, the truth must be openly told; it must always be rationally reproducible, and not accessible only to the few initiated. This is even more so when it comes to the discussion of religious or spiritual phenomena. If the decisive feature of science is the reproducibility of its results, philosophy, as the abstraction of all science, is elusive only in an empirical sense, given intellectual differences between human beings. But philosophy is always open to all thinkers being able to follow its arguments. Kabbalah and mysticism, by contrast, are elusive *by definition*, that is, in a very essential sense: their arguments are intuitive and thus not in need of justification, and so they are open and acceptable only for those who are ready to agree. Such an arbitrary elitism constitutes the opposite of the nineteenth century's scientific ethos and its humanistic underpinnings — which is why it was rejected so decisively.

IV

For a true appreciation of the hostile position of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* towards mystical esotericism, it might be useful to recall the arguments of the most outspoken critic of this movement — Gershom Scholem, who was also the most fervent twentieth-century proponent of the academic study of Jewish mysticism. It is not so much Scholem's apparent dislike for having productive predecessors in the project of the “foundation of the research of Jewish mysticism” that made him reject, and often ignore, the Jewish kabbalah scholars of the nineteenth century — Scholem adopted the study of mysticism for the very same goal and with the same methods that his scholarly predecessors pursued: the rescue, indeed the redemption, of Judaism in the age of modernity.⁴² It is well known that Scholem consistently

41 The stereotype of neglect or even suppression of kabbalah research by the *Wissenschaft* scholars reappears in countless articles. Eric Jacobson, for example, claimed that “the historians of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* school discouraged the interest in Jewish mysticism” — without giving any textual or other proof. See his “The Future of Kabbalah: On the Dislocation of Past Primacy, the Problem of Evil and the Future of Illusions,” in *Kabbalah and Modernity*, eds. B. Huss et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 47.

42 Almost all scholars who have studied both Graetz's and Scholem's research results marvel at how “surprisingly insignificant” (Nils Roemer) the differences

opposed the practical “Erlebnismystik” of cultural Zionism, and rather saw the dry, technical philology of kabbalah eventually being transformed into “philology as kabbalah,” that is, as rescuing kabbalah from the “slags” of the past.⁴³

The key notion to understand this basic difference between the scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is in fact the lawfulness of rationality. It turns out to be the difference between a universal, axiomatic ethics, supposedly found in prophetic Judaism, on the one hand, and a particularistic, consequentialist care for the national interest of the Jewish people on the other. It is in the sense of this tension about the law that Scholem called none other than St. Paul the “the most outstanding example known to us of a revolutionary Jewish mystic.”⁴⁴ What is attractive in Paul for Scholem is not the appeal of the Apostle to faith and divine grace as an alternative to the Jewish idea of the covenant, nor is it Paul’s challenge of the ‘dead letter’ of the law as opposed to the living spirit (2 Corinthians, 3: 4-6), as Paul was often misunderstood — it is rather Paul’s rejection of law and of lawfulness *as such* that obviously motivated Scholem. It is Paul’s original, anarchic antinomism, his ‘revolutionary’ claim that *any* lawful behavior could never bring about redemption, as the Jews believe. The usual term used to describe this motivation, *antinomism*, is actually too weak for what Scholem meant: In 1941, he writes instead about the “subversion of the law” by the mystics, out of revenge for legalism’s having “disturbed and broken the order of the mystical world” — the 1967 German translation of this passage has the even stronger “Zerstörung des Gesetzes” (destruction

actually are. What does deeply divide *Wissenschaft* and twentieth-century nationalist kabbalah scholars is that the former see kabbalah as a spiritual decline of the Jewish religion, while for the latter it comes as a “regenerating force within Judaism” (Nils Roemer, “Breaching the ‘Walls of Captivity’: Gershom Scholem’s Studies of Jewish Mysticism,” *The Germanic Review* 1 [1997], 23-41, here 28).

43 See Kilcher, “Kabbalah und Moderne,” 91.

44 Gershom Scholem, “Religious Authority and Mysticism,” in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 5-31, here 14. This might have led into what is today called political Neo-Paulinism, probably initiated by Jacob Taubes, and later followed by as diverse philosophers as Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, and Slavoj Žižek, who saw Paul as a nihilistic Jewish revolutionary against liberalism. For this development, see Philipp Lenard, “Aufstand gegen das Gesetz, Zur Kritik des Neopaulinismus,” in *Münchener Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 2012, 31-46.

of the law).⁴⁵ From this appreciation of the Christian apostle, a consistent line through history could be drawn to Johannes Reuchlin's kabbalistic justification of Christology,⁴⁶ Heinrich Graetz's ridiculing of Reuchlin for the same construction,⁴⁷ and eventually to Peter Schäfer's critique of Graetz's alleged esotericism: what this important mysticism-scholar of the Scholem school saw as Graetz's true (though well-hidden) motive for his rejection of kabbalah was in fact the first Jewish historian's deeply rooted aversion towards Christianity, Schäfer claimed.⁴⁸

This myth-based antinomism, detected by Scholem, soon became part of Zionist nationalism, in part because "mysticism is the nationalistic realm per excellence," as Scholem believed in the wake of German romanticism.⁴⁹ Probably liberal German-Jewish scholars and theologians opposed Zionism so strongly for the very same reason. It is short-sighted to reduce the explanation of their opposition to the Zionist idea to an unwillingness to leave "comfortable Germany" for rough Palestine. There were strong theological reservations at play as well. Hermann Cohen made the connection between Zionism and mysticism already in his 1916 essay "Religion and Zionism," the text that initiated his well-known controversy on the subject with Martin Buber: the Zionist reversal of

45 Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941), 35. Scholem, *Die jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), 38.

46 Moshe Idel believes that Reuchlin's influence on Scholem's view of Kabbalah was "quite formative." See Idel, "Hieroglyphs, Keys, Enigmas: on G.G. Scholem's Vision of Kabbalah," in *Arche Noah; die Idee der "Kultur" im deutsch-jüdischen Diskurs*, eds. Bernhard Greiner and Christoph Schmidt (Freiburg: Rombach, 2002), 227–48, here 228–29.

47 See Graetz, *Geschichte*, vol. 9, 84–85, referring to Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico* (Tübingen, 1494).

48 Peter Schäfer, "'Adversus cabbalam' oder: Heinrich Graetz und die jüdische Mystik," in *Reuchlin und seine Erben*, eds. P. Schäfer and I. Wandrey (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2005), 189–210. This is not a very sophisticated argument, since Graetz was in fact very outspoken in his critique of Christianity.

49 Amir Engel has shown how Scholem celebrated romanticism even after it was generally suspected as a major ideological source for German Nazism. See Engel, "Gershom Scholem's Kabbala und Mythos jenseits deutsch-jüdischer Romantik," *Gershom Scholem in Deutschland*, eds. G. Necker et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 214–15. For the Scholem quote (*Mystik als der nationalen Bezirk par excellence unter allen Gebieten des Judentums*), see: Gershom Scholem, "Franz Rosenzweig und sein 'Buch Stern der Erlösung'" [1930] in *Franz Rosenzweig: Der Stern der Erlösung* (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1988), 525–49, here 535.

the Maimonidean distinction between this-worldly messianism and mystical eschatology abolished what Cohen believed was “the central Jewish principle of rationalism.” Eschatological mysticism, in its nationalistic egoism, as seen by Cohen, would ultimately “block the main source of the ethical idealism of our religion.”⁵⁰

If it is true, as Cohen held, that religion begins only where mysticism ends, that is, where man and God are eventually on par,⁵¹ many of the liberal German-Jewish scholars concluded that the particularistic re-mythologizing of Judaism in the twentieth century was precisely the very secularization that the historicizing of religion during the nineteenth century had been accused of. Jewish liberalism’s rejection of Zionism can be traced to an emphasis on the humanistic and universal values that Judaism possessed in the eyes of the liberals. This includes the tradition of a messiah that is weak and suffering from his faithful service to God, a messiah that redeemed the nations of the earth by bearing their sins.⁵² On the opposite side stood Nietzsche’s rejection of shame and his nihilistic worship of strength, that is, a redemption, not from sin, but *through* sinning, as in the case of Sabbatai Zevi’s unfaithful, “heretical” messianism, at least in Gershom Scholem’s reading of it.⁵³ Scholem himself seems to prefer a Hegelian scheme of Jewish history, where indeed the mystical re-unification of man and God is seen as a symbiosis, consequent upon the dialectical sublation (*Aufhebung*) of transcendent, ethical monotheism. Mysticism, for Scholem, is the “quest for the secret” that will close the gap between man and God, “the hidden path that will

50 Hermann Cohen, *Jüdische Schriften*, ed. B. Strauss, vol. II (Berlin: Schwetschke, 1924), 324 (“God preserve us from a Zionist reading of the Prophets!” the text continues.) For the debate, see Hermann Cohen and Martin Buber, “A Debate on Zionism and Messianism,” in *The Jew in the Modern World*, eds. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

51 Hermann Cohen, *Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie* (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1915), 32–33.

52 The concept goes back to a Jewish reading of Isa. 53, in which the “servant of God” is interpreted (first by Rashi) to be the Jewish people, atoning for the sins of their oppressors by their suffering. This is transformed by nineteenth-century liberal Jewish theology into a theodical form of universal messianism. See on this development: George Y. Kohler, “Prayers for the Messiah in the Thought of Early Reform Judaism,” in *Jewish Prayer: New Perspectives*, ed. Uri Ehrlich (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University, 2016), 5–29, here 12–16.

53 Cf. Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai ʿZevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2017). Eric Jacobson called Nietzsche “the only true kabbalistic philosopher of modernity.” See Jacobson, *Future*, 65.

span it.” It is *this quest* that will “bring back the old unity that religion has destroyed,” and it seems almost obvious that here “religion” in itself stands in the way of regaining this secret.⁵⁴ For Scholem, however, mysticism does not replace rationalism that Cohen held to be “the essence of Judaism”; Scholem rather rejects “essence” as an a priori category, above and beyond history.⁵⁵ His lifelong search for Jewish authenticity, a *core Judaism*, instead, is the search for the empirical Jewish *Volksgeist* which he found while studying kabbalistic mysticism. It seems that Jewish *Volksgeist*, for him, determines Judaism, rather than the Jews themselves determining their *Volksgeist*. The nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft* scholars, on the contrary, held on to the concept of essence, as we saw above, and rejected that of core/authenticity rather than defining it, because it would always remain empirical and would thus never be essential for their (ethical) view of Judaism.⁵⁶

In an often-overlooked book from 2000, Christoph Schmidt argued that according to Scholem, for the same reason that Sabbatai Zevi converted to Islam, liberal German Jewry converted to the “religion of historicism”: this step helped them to “heretically” act out their repressed, “authentically” Jewish inner life. This, of course, is a life of antinomian mystical messianism, that is, a secret rebellion against the (talmudic) law, against traditional Judaism.⁵⁷ The advantage of Schmidt’s assumption is that if the new German ideal of

54 Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941), 8 [emphasis mine].

55 For Scholem’s relation to “historical truth” and his rejection of an essential Judaism, see Ronny Miron, “The Mystics of the Historical Truth: A Metaphysical Commentary on Gershom Scholem’s Idea of Jewish History,” in *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 18 (2015): 135–56.

56 Compare here Rosenzweig and Buber, who believed that they had found “authentic Judaism” in the Hassidic ghettos of Eastern Europe, because it appeared to them unaffected by all the cultural influences they themselves despised.

57 Christoph Schmidt, *Der häretische Imperativ: Überlegungen zur theologischen Dialektik der Kulturwissenschaft in Deutschland* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 116–19. Schmidt even compares Scholem’s nationalist theology to that of the German jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) who himself spoke of the national “myth of the vital life” (regarding Italian fascism) as being stronger than bourgeois, liberal democracy—which had lost its evidence vis-à-vis the new “vital movements.” Also for Schmitt, it was only the irrational that could create a new existentialism, defying the abstract, “relative” rationalism of parliamentarianism.

empirical science is no longer a foreign element imposed on Judaism from the outside, but a originally kabbalistic-heretical moment of liberation from the Talmud, Scholem himself can also continue to make use of philology in his scholarly project of the scientific construction of a genuine Jewish modernity. But nevertheless, this “revolt of authenticity” against the Talmud is at best an unconscious one (at least for the German liberals), and thus it is again *a secret* that drives Scholem’s agenda, if Schmidt is right. This mystical nescience, the Jewish secret behind the enlightenment, would thus not lead to a rationalization of religion but rather to secularization — not to a better, more moral world freed from dogmatic constraints, but to the particular redemption of Judaism, to a rather nationalistic version of messianism. As we saw, what Paul and Scholem reject is not the “dead letter,” the “slags” of the Talmud, but lawfulness as the foundation of rational religion as such — in the name of divine vitality and cultural authenticity. With lawfulness, however, one rejects ethics — because anarchism undermines the self-consciousness of the “I,” not as an individual, but as a rational, indeed as a legal subject, for whom others count as much as oneself. This is what the Jewish *Wissenschaft* scholars of the nineteenth century understood, however critical they might have been themselves towards the authority of the Talmud.

V

Expressed in theological terms, it is the possibility of a continuous reinterpretation and thus of a *transformation* of religious traditions that stands between orthodoxy and secular atheism while both inflexibly try to preserve the status quo: it is the possibility of the attempt to re-form Judaism along the rational lines of a modern reading of classical Jewish sources and concepts that both traditionalists and secularists reject. All of the nineteenth-century scholars who disputed the value of Jewish mysticism can be counted in the non-orthodox camp of religious Judaism, in various ways and degrees. If kabbalah was rejected as an essential form of Judaism on theological grounds by the nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft* scholars, one of the reasons was that the secret, unproven “truths” of mysticism (like the dogmatic “truths” of orthodoxy) oppose intellectual flexibility, that they actually circumvent and thus prevent the very adaption of Judaism to modernity.

It was in particular Abraham Geiger who identified this as a harmful effect of mysticism, in addition to its immorality, at least in view of Geiger's own ideal of a perpetual transformation of Judaism according to historically changing social and cultural circumstances. "As soon as the healthy mind, or the learned progress of thought, comes to contradict positive tradition, it is mysticism that intrudes with the purpose to refute this contradiction and to obliterate it by secret wisdom," Geiger argued. This opposition of the inherently unassailable authority of secrecy to all religious reform must certainly have been felt as an outright hostility, as a direct resistance to all that was important about Judaism for Geiger.⁵⁸

Many of the leading theologians of the *Wissenschaft* movement adhered to a concept of religious truth that was rather borrowed from the enlightenment of Lessing: a developing truth, which is to say, an approximation of truth, a becoming truth, or a truth in historical progress. For Lessing, only the search for religious truth was undiluted, because it was still unclouded by religious dogma, untouched by the corrupt coercion of theological allowances — according to Lessing, freedom of opinion and argument are more important than truth itself, for truth is dynamic and needs unrestricted room for its progressive development.⁵⁹ Geiger called Lessing's famous dictum that the perpetual striving for truth was to be preferred to the possession of full truth "a word of the deepest and most genuine *religiosity*."⁶⁰ In contrast, the "hidden truth" of mysticism, by dint of its metaphysical nature, is rather a rigid, immutable one, not open to arguments. While Gershom Scholem's project to write a "kabbalistic metaphysics of Judaism" aimed not by chance at a *secular* modernity,⁶¹

it is Geiger's own deep religiosity that provides the background for his opposition to kabbalah. For Geiger's reform project of Judaism — aimed as it was to preserve and not to destroy — this attempt of

58 Abraham Geiger, *Judentum* III, 66.

59 For this influence, see George Y. Kohler, "The Pattern for Jewish Reformation: The Impact of Lessing on Nineteenth-Century German Jewish Religious Thought," in *Harvard Theological Review*, forthcoming.

60 My emphasis. If God were to hold all truth in his right hand, and in his left only the steady and diligent drive for truth, Lessing would take the left hand (see his "Eine Duplik," in idem, *Gesammelte Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. Heinz Puknus; 3 vols. [Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1966], 3:240). Geiger's quote is found in *Judentum* I (Breslau, 1865), 10.

61 Kilcher, "Kabbalah und Moderne," 93.

kabbalah to hinder religious development in the legal realm by obliterating contradictions between the rational and the outdated laws made Jewish mysticism the archenemy. The Jewish liberal theologians, who believed they radically *re-formed*, and therefore respected, talmudic Judaism, soon detected and deplored that kabbalah, while outwardly upholding talmudic law, in fact arrogantly ridiculed the Talmud as a whole as inferior to its own wisdom. Graetz tried to prove this point with a number of quotes from the *Zohar* that were supposed to show how legal talmudic categories of pure/impure, permitted/forbidden, or fit/unfit were unessential for Judaism, and therefore of minor importance compared to the vital spring of mystical dedication.⁶² As mentioned above, in Scholem's view, Jewish mystical vitalism came to dialectically (messianically) "sublate" law-based talmudic Judaism as a whole, as a concept. Ironically, kabbalah thus needed to preserve the un-reformed, unqualified authority of the mitzvot as its indispensable counterpart. This is probably the source of Scholem's dual attitude to kabbalah, which favored the antinomian aspect, but at the same time showed that kabbalah was a much stronger protector of the mitzvot than medieval Jewish philosophy.⁶³

Therefore, in a theological sense, the kabbalah-controversy is part of the more general argument concerning the possibility of a "rational religion," or at least the search for rational sources of religion. Can there be a reasonable middle way between tradition-bound orthodoxy and secular agnosticism? Is there indeed room for the dual assumption that philosophy is itself a religious obligation and that philosophical thinking is an expression of religiosity, as the great Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages believed? Geiger and Graetz are certain that religion derives its content from history, and they see it as their scholarly task to construct the theology of Judaism from historical sources, referring to a totality of empirical events. But especially the invocation of morality (versus kabbalistic mysticism) goes beyond the analysis of mere givenness — because morality, in their view, demands lawfulness that removes much of historical contingency. To refer to a "moral core" of religion (within the historical shell) clearly comes to avoid the obvious pitfall of historicism: to reduce religion to a folk myth, to a "culture." If religion

62 Graetz tried to prove this point with a number of quotes from the *Zohar* in *Geschichte*, vol. 7, 228–29.

63 See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 28–30.

wants to make claims to truth, even a progressive truth, it falls under the jurisdiction of reason. Graetz at times seems to be personally offended in his religiosity by the mystical literature of Judaism, most certainly in cases when the kabbalists “replaced the refined belief in God,” in his words, “with idolatrous phantasms [*gotteslästerliche Wahngelbilde*].”⁶⁴

In particular, the concept of God must not remain arbitrary or intuitive for Jewish *Wissenschaft* theologians; it cannot be subject to allegories and metaphors at the will of the kabbalist. God must be rationally understood to be worthy of being called this name. This view of the divine, however, can only be achieved along ethical lines, or, in Jewish terms, by finding the ethical meaning of the purpose of divine legislation. For a majority of nineteenth-century German-Jewish thought, irrational, “vital,” or personal concepts of the deity would be considered idolatrous and consequently immoral. Rationality, on the contrary, was not a “dogma,”⁶⁵ something to be accepted against rational conviction, but rather a *mitzvah*, a divine commandment inherent within ethical monotheism.

64 Graetz, *Geschichte*, vol. 7, 206.

65 As David Biale thought; see his *Gershom Scholem*, 18.