The Study of Christian Cabala in English: ADDENDA

Don Karr


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ADDENDUM A: Items of Interest


Some of the brief notices in the section called “A Handful of Curiosities” might be of interest:
  i. George Eliot and Solomon Maimon, pp. 242-246.
  iii. The Cambridge Platonists, 251-254.

Aïvanhov, Omraam Mikhaël:

Aïvanhov (1900-1986) may be better known for his audio productions than for his books. These lectures are, however, all in French. Go to https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=a%CF%82Fvanhov+omraam+mikha%C3%A9l

The titles listed above, derived from Aïvanhov’s lectures, draw specifically on cabala of the Western esoteric sort and its tree of life. Otherwise, Aïvanhov mixes an eclectic array of Eastern and Western “spiritualities” concluding in a form of Esoteric Christianity.


“The life and works of Queen Christina of Sweden (1626-1689) have often been obscured behind a haze of lurid myths and legends. This book looks again at her notorious abdication of 1654, seeing it against the
background of her reputation as a "libertine", a heterodox religious thinker. Her subsequent conversion to Catholicism is therefore understood as a consequence of messianic and millenarian expectations during those turbulent years, and her bizarre attempt in 1657 to become the ruler of Naples is revealed to be the political wing of a comprehensive religious and intellectual philosophy."

(—from the Brill website — https://brill.com/view/title/2071)

_____. “Queen Christina’s Esoteric Interests as a Background to Her Platonic Academies,” in Western Esotericism, Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Western Esotericism Held at Åbo, Finland, on 15-17 August 2007, edited by Tore Ahlbäck [SCRIPTA INSTITUTE DONNERIANI ABOENSIS XX] (Åbo/Turku: Donner Institute in Religious and Cultural History, 2008), pp. 17-37.


“The Latin copies of Sefer-ha-Raziel in particular shows (sic) a continuation of interest in Hebrew angelology among Christian readers well after the great blooming of such concerns among Rosicrucian authors in 1614-1620” (page 13). “The angelic doctrine of liber Raziel is taken up by a group of texts called Claves Salomonis, magical texts that in conjunction with al-Magriti’s book of Arabic magic, Picatrix, influenced Cornelius Agrippa” (page 18).


Allan, J. Mason. An Introduction to the Kabbalah, with Special Reference to the Kabbalistic Elements in Freemasonry (rpt. Edmonds: Sure Fire Press = Holmes Publishing Group, 1994).

Allan’s 20-page introduction has a turn-of-the-century feel, though its date, save that of its recent reprint, is not given. It is based on Ginsburg, Mathers, and, it would appear, Westcott.


This rich collection of writings and illustrations includes Ezechiel Foxcroft’s translation of The Hermetic Romance, or the Chymical Wedding (1690); Thomas Vaughan’s translations of Fama Fraternitatis and Confesio Fraternitatis (1652) and his Holy Mountain, A Rosicrucian Allegory; material from Heinrich Khunrath (Amphitheatrum of Eternal Wisdom, 1609), Robert Fludd (BOOK IV of Summun Bonum), Hinricus Madathanus (The Parabola, A Golden Tractate), Daniel Stolcius (Pleasure Garden of Chymistry); four articles by Rudolph Steiner; some bibliographic pieces; and The Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians (1785).

There are numerous editions of and commentaries on The Chymical Wedding; two noteworthy renditions:

(i) Knight, Gareth. The Rose Cross and the Goddess: Quest for the Eternal Feminine Principle (New York: Destiny Books, 1985); in Part Three, pp. 89-111


Aptekman, Marina. THE LANGUAGE AND THE LIGHT, THE KABBALISTIC ALLEGORY IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE: FROM RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY TO POLITICAL MYTHOLOGY (Ph.D. dissertation,

The dissertation’s first chapter, “Kabbalistic Philosophy: A Historical Perspective,” was hastily assembled from too few sources. The book’s introduction, “Kabbalah Then and Now: A Historical Perspective,” improves upon the dissertation greatly, offering a better focused and more nuanced background account.

As for the rest, matters of Russian Masonry and mystical literature are beyond my abilities to appraise.

The remaining three chapters analyze the place of kabbalistic allegory in Russian literature. ... The second chapter discusses the role of the kabbalistic allegory in the Masonic literature of the second half of the eighteenth century. ... The third chapter discusses the mutation of kabbalistic imagery in early nineteenth century Romantic works, especially in the works by the authors who were interested in the idea of universal science, such as Vladimir Odoevsky. ... The fourth chapter of the dissertation analyses the return of kabbalistic symbolism in the literature of the Silver Age [as represented by Symbolist and Futurist writers]. ... The mystical interpretation of the images of Wisdom and Adam Kadmon dominates also in philosophical works of the Symbolist writers, especially in the works of Vladimir Soloviev.

(dissertation, PREFACE, pages 2-4)


See below, under “Burmistrov,” “Kornblatt,” “Faggionato,” and “Leighton.”


The Key to the True Kabbalah is the final book of a four-volume set which includes (i) the preambule, Frabato the Magician (1979), a “mystical” novel which amounts to the author’s spiritual autobiography; (ii) Initiation into Hermetics (1956), a “course of magical instruction in ten steps”; (iii) The Practice of Magical Evocation (1956), instructions for evoking spirits, complete with seals. All of these titles were reprinted by Merkur.

The Key to the True Kabbalah treats its subject as a “cosmic language” linked by sympathetic correspondence to colors, elements, musical notes, and so on, as well as analogous influences in the akashic, mental, astral, and material realms. Guidelines for the magical use of one-, two-, three-, and four-letter keys (combinations) conclude the work.

Many serious practitioners of magic(k) extol Franz Bardon. For instance, Donald Tyson says of Bardon’s Initiation into Hermetics, “[T]his is the best book of exercises designed to prepare the mind for high magic that I have ever read” (—Ritual Magic, page 230). About The Practice of Magical Evocation, Tyson says, “The best book that I have read on the ceremonial evocation of spirits” (—Ritual Magic, page 234).

Often recommended to those for whom Bardon has proven difficult is A Bardon Companion: Commentary Upon Franz Bardon’s Books by Rawn Clark (Olivier Dorche/Josuah Hutchinson Publishing, 2002); expanded second edition: A Bardon Companion: A Practical Companion for the Student of Franz Bardon’s System of Hermetic Initiation (CreateSpace, 2010).

In § “Humanism and Renaissance,” see especially the sub-segments “Kabbalistic Bridges” and “Christian Kabbalism,” which give a quick history; and “Literary Battle Royal,” on Reuchlin’s involvement in various aspects of the “Jewish question,” in particular his debate with Johannes Pfefferkorn which grew into an international controversy.


Berg’s blend of fact and fable contains a chapter entitled “The Zohar’s Influence on the Renaissance, the Age of Discovery and Science” which discusses kabbalistic influence on Columbus (via Abraham Zacuto), Michelangelo, Newton, and Edison, along with the more usual “Christian Cabalists” (Paracelsus, Dee, Pico, Reuchlin, von Rosenroth), and finally on to Ezra Stiles and Albert Pike.


Claiming the influence of Henry More, Keith converted from Presbyterianism to Quakerism.

“Keith’s thoughts on worship are related ... to his understanding of immediate revelation by the Light that is experienced in worship and also to his unique Christology, since he identifies the Light with the soul of Christ, the heavenly man. To these discussions Keith brought his skillfulness in dialectic theology and his discoveries in Kabbalah.” (—page 258)


Of particular interest is Bloom’s section on the Mormons: Chapter 5, “The Religion-Making Imagination of Joseph Smith,” where Bloom states, “The God of Joseph Smith is a daring revival of the God of some of the Kabbalists and Gnostics, prophetic sages who, like Smith himself, asserted that they had returned to the true religion of Yahweh or Jehovah” (p. 99).

Further on Joseph Smith and Kabbalah, see below under “Owens” and “Quinn.”


After putting the recent popularity of angels in its place in a section called “Their Current Debasement,” Bloom surveys some of the deeper and more abiding aspects of Western religious concern by showing their roots, or likeness, in Gnosticism, Kabbalah, and Sufism. Bloom attempts to salvage at least a few shreds of sublime speculation and spirituality from the kitsch of the new age.


Chapter V, “Jewish Culture, Hebraists, and the Role of the Kabbalah” (pp. 145-177), especially the last three sections: “The Diffusion of the Kabbalah” (pp. 169-72), “Christian Hebraists” (pp. 172-5), and “The Role of the Kabbalah in the Evolution of Jewish Culture” (pp. 175-7).


“‘We see that Russian Freemasons of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and their intellectual successors—Russian philosophers and theologians who lived a century later—turned to kabbalah in order to solve problems which they felt were not adequately elaborated in Christian Orthodox theology.' (—page 50)


“There are two moments in the influence of kabbalistic ideas in Russia that are directly connected with the development of secret societies. After the establishment of the first Masonic lodges in the middle of the eighteenth century, Russians became acquainted with various ideas as works related to kabbalah. The impact of these ideas especially intensified with the advent of Rosicrucian lodges in the 1780s. The first period was interrupted with the official prohibition of freemasonry in Russia in the 1820s, but some background Masonic activity continued until the 1850s-1860s. The second period, between the 1880s and the 1900s, is characterized by an increased interest in the occult sciences, which culminates in the 1910s-1920s. In the 1930s, most of the members of various secret societies and occult groups were arrested and executed by the communist regime.” (—page 79)


“We will argue that the Russian Masons were deeply interested in kabbalistic matters. We will review the basic kinds of Masonic manuscript texts related to the Kabbalah and some kabbalistic concepts which are important to the Russian Masons. Finally, we will offer some preliminary reasons for this interest among the Russian Mason” (from the article, p. 11).

1 Konstantin Burmistrov and Maria Endel are regular contributors to the Russian-language journal, штут/ТИРОШ: STUDIES IN JUDAICA (Judica Russica), which survived nine printed volumes (Moscow: 1998-2009) and has continued online. Later issues are titled TIROSH: JEWISH, SLAVIC & ORIENTAL STUDIES. Volumes 6-19 (Moscow, 2003-2019) can be viewed at http://sefer.ru/rus/publications/tirosh.php.
It was the Christian Cabala, already subsumed into European Masonry, upon which these Russian Masons drew.


“Two Principal trends may be identified in Russian freemasonry of the late 18th-early 19th centuries: rationalist (deistic) and mystical” (p. 29). “The Order [of the Gold- and Rosy Cross] was founded by Bernhard Joseph Schleiss won Loewenfeld (1731-1800) ... [who] took an obvious interest in Kabbalah as if following the traditions of the Sulzbach Christian Kabbalah [i.e., von Rosenroth and van Helmont] of the late seventeenth century” (p. 31).


These essays, previously published in Artforum and Arts magazines, include “Duchamp’s Bride Stripped Bare: The Meaning of the ‘Large Glass,’” which discusses Duchamp’s work in relation to Tarot images and the kabbalistic tree of life, and “Voices from the Gate,” which relates the Cabala to an installation by Robert Morris entitled Hearing.

See also Burnham’s article on Duchamp, “Unveiling the Consort,” parts 1 and 2 in Artforum, March and April 1971, vol. ix, nos. 7 and 8 (New York: Artforum).


The articles are in Italian and English. See in particular “The Mantuan Kabbalistic Workshop,” § 1.


Chapter III, “The Cabala and the Names of Power,” offers a pretty fair introduction to Western occult qabalah.

Chajes, Julie; and Huss, Boaz (eds.) Theosophical Appropriations: Esotericism, Kabbalah and the Transformation of Traditions (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2016).

CONTENTS
Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss. Introduction
I. Theosophical Transformations
  • Julie Chajes. “Construction Through Appropriation: Kabbalah in Blavatsky’s Early Works”
II. Kabbalistic Appropriations

- Boaz Huss. “Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews: Jewish Theosophists and their Perceptions of Kabbalah”
- Eugene Kuzmin. “Maksimilian Voloshin and the Kabbalah”
- Andreas Kilcher. “Kabbalah and Anthroposophy: A Spiritual Alliance According to Ernst Müller”
- Olav Hammer. “Jewish Mysticism Meets the Age of Aquarius: Elizabeth Clare Prophet on the Kabbalah”

III. Global Adaptations

- Shimon Lev. “Gandhi and his Jewish Theosophist Supporters in South Africa”
- Victoria Ferentinou. “Light from Within or Light from Above? Theosophical Appropriations in Early Twentieth-Century Greek Culture”
- Massimo Introvigne. “Lawren Harris and the Theosophical Appropriation of Canadian Nationalism”
- Helmut Zander. “Transformations of Anthroposophy from the Death of Rudolf Steiner to the Present Day”


The first four chapters of this collection are illustrated expositions on Golden Dawn-style qabalah, under the general heading “The Crown and the Kingdom”: 1) “History of the QBL,” 2) “The Ten Sephiroth,” 3) “The Twenty-Two Paths,” and 4) “The Four Hundred Desirable Worlds.” Colquhoun (1906–1988) has received a fair amount of attention in recent years. Refer to


“Since the Enlightenment, the occultist tradition has lost almost all cognitive authority among educated persons in the West, so much so that in our time an intellectual who seriously professed belief in magic would thereby call into question his own seriousness. One of the reasons why magical beliefs have become literally incredible is that we have discarded their philosophical foundations, but in Ficino’s day the foundations were intact—indeed, Ficino and others were still extending them.” (—RQ.p. 524/AWMD p. 52).


Couliano approaches magic as (quoting his introduction) “a science of the imaginary” which was believed to be capable of exerting “control over the individual and the masses based on deep
knowledge of personal and collective erotic impulses”; thus, “[w]e can observe in it not only the distant ancestor of psychoanalysis but also, first and foremost, that of applied psychosociology and mass psychology.” Couliano discusses Ficino, Pico, and Bruno.


Praised by Harold Bloom, Andrei Codrescu, and Mircea Eliade, this book describes itself as “the first comprehensive account of the dualistic myths that constitutes a crucial hidden dimension in Western culture and radically challenges how we think about religion itself.” (back cover)


Dan traces scientific and mystical ideas starting with the *Sefer Yetzirah*, elaborations of tenth-century commentaries on it, especially that of Shabbatai Donnolo, and developments of the Hasidei Ashkenaz, in particular Eleazar of Worms. Dan shows how these commentaries “contributed to the establishment of the concept of harmonia mundi as a dominant world-view in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, mainly in the context of the variegated phenomena which are sometimes united under the general title ‘Christian kabbalah.’”


“This book presents an interpretation that will surprise most Tarotists (those who are esotericists) and most academics (those who are critics of the esotericists). My theory covers the evolution of the Tarot, the connotations of its symbols, the symbols’ sources, and their transmission to the proper places at the proper times.” (INTRODUCTION, page 1)

The most interesting of Decker’s “rediscoveries” is taken up in his CHAPTER 11, “Numerical Cards and Gikatilla’s ‘Gates.’”


*A Wicked Pack of Cards* discusses how Tarot came to be positioned at the core of the Western esoteric tradition, focusing on its assumption by the French occultists J.-B. Alliette (= Etteilla), Éliphas Lévi, Gerard Encausse (= Papus), and Paul Christian.


*History...* picks up where *A Wicked Pack of Cards* leaves off: tracing the developments of tarot down through the descendants of the Golden Dawn, i.e., A. E. Waite, Aleister Crowley, Dion Fortune, C. C. Zain, Paul Foster Case, etc.

The five-volume set represents the complete teachings of The Order of the Sacred Word, also called Aurum Solis, a descendant of the Golden Dawn.


“We shall be concerned with the Qabalah as Gentile occultists have received it from the traditions of Judaism,” states the preface. Duncan’s primary sources are Dion Fortune’s writings and Gareth Knight’s Practical Guide to Qabalist Symbolism.


The fifth chapter, “A Jewish Response to Christian Kabbalah,” discusses Modena’s criticism of Pico della Mirandola’s cabala. Modena’s problems with Pico for the most part follow his objections to (Jewish) kabbalah more generally.


Eco’s snide novel follows three Milanese editors as they concoct, then investigate, then get caught up in a grand esoteric conspiracy involving a twisted amalgam of secret societies and mystical traditions. In this entertaining but ultimately anticlimactic tale, Eco’s well-studied ease with source works of the Hermetic-Cabalistic tradition is strutted about.


This collection of essays is, in part, an extension of Eco’s Search for the Perfect Language, especially CHAPTER 2, “Languages in Paradise.” There is a substantial section on Athanasius Kircher in the third essay, “From Marco Polo to Leibniz: Stories of Intellectual Misunderstandings.”


“A distinct textual link between Moses de Leon’s thirteenth-century Zohar and the fourteenth-century Shewings of Julian of Norwich suggests Julian’s role in appropriating the ideas of her surrounding cultures into her mystical writings. Building on both the principle of the Divine Feminine and the allegorical nature of parts of the Zohar, Julian constructs a notion of God as Mother that combats the misogyny of medieval Christian doctrine and secures her place as a woman writer in a male-dominated Church, defending a role as visionary and writer for herself and for her female successors.” (—from the ABSTRACT)

Private Labyrinth is the first “scholarly” book which I saw (in the early ’seventies) which drew a
distinction between “The Two Cabalas,” namely Jewish and Christian—including the late occult
“qabalah” of the Golden Dawn—without dismissing the latter out-of-hand, which, until relatively
recently, academics tended to do. Recall Scholem’s comments in Kabbalah, p. 203: “To this category
of supreme charlatanism belong the many and widely read books of Éliphas Lévi, Papus…, and
Frater Perdurab..., all of whom had an infinitesimal knowledge of Kabbalah that did not prevent
them from drawing freely on their imaginations instead”; or in Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, pp.
2 and 533: “From the brilliant misunderstandings of Alphonse Louis Constant, who won fame under
the pseudonym of Éliphas Lévi, to the highly coloured humbug of Aleister Crowley and his
followers, the most eccentric and fantastic statements have been produced purporting to be
legitimate interpretations of Kabbalism ... No words need be wasted on the subject of Crowley’s
‘Kabbalistic’ writings in his books on what he was pleased to term ‘Magick,’ and in his journal, The
Equinox.”

Lowry’s letters suggest that Frater Achad (Charles Stansfield Jones) was a particular favorite of his.
In Epstein’s bibliography, however, some of the works listed as having been authored by Achad
were written by others. Achad indeed wrote The Anatomy of the Body of God and QBL, but he was
not, as Epstein has it, the editor of The Equinox or the author of Sepher Sephiroth (in The Equinox,
Volume 1, Number 8); these were Crowley’s works. Nor did Achad write “A Note on Genesis” (in
The Equinox, Volume 1, Number 2); this belongs to Allan Bennett. (All of these works are given
notice above in the present paper: PART 2.)

Escarmant, Christine. “Rabelais and the Midrash or Writing with Kabbalistic Tools: The
Kabbalah of the Pantagruelists,” in How Jewish Mystical Thinking Shaped Early Modern Europe:
Cabalistic Influences on Shakespeare, Cervantes, Rabelais and Others, edited by Yona Dureau

Faggionato, Raffaella. A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Masonic Circle of

“Drawing a comprehensive and convincing picture of Russia’s assimilation of contemporary Western
intellectual values and traditions, Professor Faggionato offers some telling overall conclusions: the
process of Europeanisation, forcefully initiated by Peter the Great, coming on top of the church crisis of
the eighteenth century, resulted in an intellectual disorientation of the elites that threatened both the
social and political system. Masonic lodges and mystically oriented circles of the nobility sought ways to
reform and stability by blending traditional Christian spirituality with scientific insight into the
workings of Nature. Rosicrucian Hermeticism and esoterism were ready to offer them guidance on this
path.”

(—Marc Raeff in the PREFACE to A Rosicrucian Utopia...)

Faivre, Antoine. Access to Western Esotericism [SUNY SERIES IN WESTERN ESOTERIC

“Book One” and “A Bibliographical Guide to Research” in Access... constitute something of a study
manual for Western Esotericism. “Book Two” presents a series of essays concerned with Franz von
Baader (the nineteenth-century Christian “gnostic”), Masonic and Rosicrucian doctrine, and
gnosis—old and new. Themes outlined in Access are followed up in Faivre’s Theosophy, Imagination,
Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism [SUNY SERIES IN WESTERN ESOTERIC

Note also Faivre’s article, “The Notions of Concealment and Secrecy in Modern Esoteric Currents
since the Renaissance (A Methodological Approach),” in Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in
the History of Religions, edited by Elliot R. Wolfson (New York – London: Seven Bridges Press,

A very rapid but intricately nuanced survey.


“A part of my concern will be to show how the functions and processes of creative activity documented by these authors may be mapped onto a set of essentially Freudian ideas, particularly those surrounding narcissism.” —page 161

Gnosis: A Journal in Western Inner Traditions, Number 3 - KABBALAH: EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF MYSTICISM (San Francisco: The Lumen Foundation, Fall/Winter 1986-7).

Stock pop-Kabbalah stuff here: the overview, the Kabbalah-and-psychology piece, the interview with Zalman Schachter, the recommended-reading piece (this one is particularly poor), etc., though surprisingly sticking pretty much with Jewish Kabbalah. Pinchas Giller’s overview, though brief, is nicely done; he discusses the tension between Kabbalah and Maimonidean rationalism. Giller’s piece is, however, plagued by some distracting typos (e.g. “Rabbi Mose Cordovero” for Rabbi Moshe, or at least Moses, Cordovero”—page 11; “the brown of the skull” for “the crown of the skull” in an account of the Zohar’s anthropomorphic descriptions of God—page 12).

Perhaps the most original article in the issue is Jay Kinney’s “A Higher Geometry: The Unique Kabbalistic Research of the Meru Foundation.”


Back issues of Gnosis are available through Fields Book Store:

https://www.fieldsbooks.com/cgi-bin/fields/st/GNOM


Dictionary would be more accurate. Hebrew and other words and names are listed alphabetically (via English and Hebrew in two separate sections) and by numerical value. Terms scattered all through Golden Dawn and surrounding material (planet, zodiac, and angel names; the goetic spirits of the Lemegeton; tarot correspondences; etc.) are systematically set out and defined in this large reference book. Crowley’s Sepher Sephiroth (from The Equinox, vol. 1, no. 8) is appended as well.


Halevi, Z’ev ben Shimon [Warren Kenton, 1933-2020] (listed chronologically—all of which have been subsequently reprinted):

  = Tree of Life: An Introduction to the Cabala (Rider & Co., 1972).
- Adam and the Kabbalistic Tree (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1974).
Halevi’s series is quite popular among both Jewish and non-Jewish readers. Individual volumes range from instructional to inspirational in that they present versions of Kabbalistic ideas while suggesting ways to apply them toward spiritual growth. Specifically, The Work of the Kabbalist gives practical advice for individual work, and School of Kabbalah suggests methods for developing group work; on the other hand, the earlier Adam and the Kabbalistic Tree and A Kabbalistic Universe are more theoretical. In The Tower of Alchemy (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1999), David Goddard recommends A Kabbalistic Universe, The Way of Kabbalah, and The Work of the Kabbalist for the gathering of “[t]he fundamental Qabalistic teachings...regarding the Qabalistic four worlds” (p. 41). On Halevi and his teachings, see the website, KABBALAH SOCIETY: TOLEDANO TRADITION at https://www.kabbalahsociety.org/wp/


Hall connects phrases from the familiar “Our Father, Who art in heaven...” to the kabbalistic tree, saying (pp. 12-13), “From the table of analogies between parts of the universe (i.e., the tree of the sefirot) and the sections of the Lord’s Prayer, it is evident that the prayer is intimately related to the divisions of the human soul.”


Man... is considered one of Hall’s two great works, the other being The Secret Teaching of All Ages ([1928] reprint: Los Angeles: The Philosophical Research Society, 1977).


“What follows is as much historiography as it is history, because the modern study of Kabbalah has a plot with its own personalities, internal developments and ideologies which have influenced how Kabbalah has been perceived historically” (—p. 102).

“Almost from the outset, Kabbalah has had a chequered history, as it has faced internal and external criticism. As what was esoteric became exoteric, and though Kabbalah sort [sic] to portray itself as conservative and not innovative, its claim for ancient roots and for not revealing anything new brought it into conflict with other existing belief systems” (—p. 103).

“Thus, what is being suggested here is that the appearance of Kabbalah on the historical stage can only be understood as an exoteric phenomenon. Jewish mysticism does not start with Kabbalah in the thirteenth century but is part and parcel of the religious system for centuries previously” (—p. 106).


“This study is concerned with a rarely studied sector of the history of religions: certain currents of modern or post-Enlightenment Western Esotericism.” (—PREFACE, page xiii)

“This is my doctoral dissertation, on the ways in which contemporary religious movements legitimate their claims. The data are taken from various related movements within the theosophical family, but the strategies of legitimation apply more generally.”

(—Olav Hammer: Personal Website > BOOKS, at http://www.olavhammer.com/books/)


“I believe it would be too simple to attribute the traditional resistance of academics against the study of Western esotericism merely to the fact that they reject its perspectives from their own ‘Enlightenment’ worldview, or even to the feeling that by taking such a field seriously one gives it some legitimacy.” (p. 248)


Go to THE ALCHEMY WEB BOOKSHOP > THE HERMETIC JOURNAL:
http://www.alchemywebsite.com/journal.html. Articles of interest include

• ____. “Wood and Metal – Kabbalistic Orientation and Elementary Alchemical Returning,” 1992


Secret Lore traces strands which intertwine with our cabalistic ones, especially in such figures as Athanasius Kircher, Ralph Cudworth, and Mme Blavatsky. One wishes that the use of Egyptian lore by the Golden Dawn and its offshoots had been explored, but only passing mention is given.


An apparent student of the works of Aleister Crowley, Horus sets up his own attributions of planets for the sefirot on the tree of life, adding to the scheme Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto (which, for obvious reasons, were not included in the arrangement of the Golden Dawn).


“I will show that [Abraham David] Ezekiel’s interest in kabbalah followed on his joining the Theosophical Society [around 1882], and that theosophy was of a major bearing on his perception of kabbalah and on his translation and printing venture [i.e., Idrâ Zuta or the Lesser Holy Assembly translated from the Aramaic Chaldee into Arabic (in Hebrew characters, Poona: 1887)].” (—page 169) [my brackets—DK]


Chapter 5, “The Neoplatonic Path for Dead Souls: Medieval Philosophy, Kabbalah and Renaissance,” begins with a discussion of Neoplatonic Arabic texts then takes us through early Kabbalah and the Zohar to Alemanno, Pico, Reuchlin, and Bruno.


This overview article touches on such topics as the comparison of the Hermetic animation of statues with material in the Hebrew Enoch (5 Enoch, or Sefer Hekhalot), references to Hermes in the works of Jewish philosophers, the influence of Yohanan Alemanno (one of Pico’s teachers), and “the well-known initiation of Ferdinand of Aragon by Ludovico Lazzarelli.”


“The main aims of this paper are, on the one hand, to survey the acquaintance of Jewish Kabbalists with Christian Kabbalah and, on the other hand to point out the possible impact of Christian Kabbalah on them in the Renaissance period and on scholars of Kabbalah in the twentieth century” (—pp. 49-50).

In the first section of her book, Izmirlieva analyzes The Divine Names of (pseudo-)Dionysius the Areopagite (1st century); in the second section, she studies the (Slavonic) amulet known as The 72 Names of the Lord (13th century). It is this second text which interests us here, for Izmirlieva “demonstrate[s], over a large body of textual traces, that The 72 Names of the Lord has its roots in the Gnostic Kabbalah and originates from a Kabbalo-Christian exchange that most probably took place in Provence in the twelfth century” (—page 12).


“The influence of the messianic ideas and especially the idea of ‘return of the Jews’ or ‘Jacob’s return’ found the most profound expression among the German Pietists. This served as a background for their interest in the Kabbala, which was considered to be a link between Judaism and Christianity beginning in the 16th century. The book of the early Silesian Pietist Christian Knorr von Rosenroth Kabbala Denudata published in the last quarter of the 17th century served as a scholarly basis for the massive use of the Kabbala in missionary activity among the Jews in Germany and later in Poland.” (—page 493)

*Approaching the Kabbalah of Maat* focuses on Western occult developments of kabbalah in the latter part of the twentieth century and includes an introduction to and transcription of the key documents of three important, albeit obscure, Maat-oriented groups: Horus/Maat Lodge, Ordo Adeptorum Invisiblum (OAI), and 416. For a more complete description and excerpts, go to either of the following:

- [https://www.academia.edu/3103161/Approaching_the_Kabbalah_of_Maat_excerpt](https://www.academia.edu/3103161/Approaching_the_Kabbalah_of_Maat_excerpt)

*Approaching the Kabbalah of Maat* is supplemented by The *Methods of Maat* (—not yet published), which includes a selection of significant OAI and 416 writings. For contents and excerpts from the introduction, link to either of the following:


This small-press production describes the author’s unique tarot, showing roughly drawn cards, each with a prominent Hebrew letter incorporated into the design, some with symbols of the chakras—all quite different from the Golden Dawn-Waite-B.O.T.A. images. Kasdin acknowledges his particular indebtedness to Albert Pike, Paul Foster Case, and Mme. Blavatsky.


See especially Chapter III, “The Order of the Asiatic Brethren.”


Kilcher considers the use of Kabbalah as a model of encyclopedic knowledge, or metascience, offering two possible forms: magical and mathematical.


One of the more enlightened “arm’s-length” studies. See especially Chapter Three, “Shiva and the Qabalistic Tree of Life,” and Chapter Five, “Chakras, Secret Traditions, and the Golden Dawn.”


A Christian application of Western occult qabalah by a student of Dion Fortune.


This article focuses on Vladimir Soloviev, “the most influential thinker in the religious renaissance at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries,” and his attempt to reconcile kabbalah with “the quite different and sometimes hostile theology of Russian Orthodoxy.” See also Kornblatt’s Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov, including annotated translations by Boris Jakim, Laury Magnus and Kornblatt herself (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).


This is a most inclusive and helpful bibliography of the books, articles, and MSS surrounding all matters and members of the Golden Dawn, many of which treat Kabbalah/Cabala/Qabalah.


Quoting LaDage, “The purpose of this book is to describe, in as far as I understand it, some of the inner correspondences between the Qabalah and the psychology of C. G. Jung.” LaDage’s primary cabalistic source was Dion Fortune’s Mystical Qabalah, one of the classics of Golden Dawn-style qabalah. It is interesting to compare LaDage’s book with David Bakan’s Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition, first published in 1978, reprinted as a Beacon Paperback (Boston, 1975).


“Theosophy, mysticism, Cabalism, nonempirical science, and thaumaturgy flourished in the Russian Enlightenment in the form of Rosicrucian mysticism and Masonic theosophy; the Novikov Freemasons were clearly erudite in these branches of arcane knowledge. How adept the later romantics were, however, is not clear. All that can be said for certain is that in the romantic period Masonic symbolism and the arcane skills of thaumaturgy were welcome in arenas of social and political action like the Decembrist affair, as well as in the larger arena of public journalism inhibited by ubiquitous censorship and private discussion made perilous by surveillance.” (—p. 32)

Leighton’s references to “Cabala,” “Cabalism,” and, alas, “Cabalistics” betray a limited and faulty understanding. Consider the following clause from Leighton’s discussion entitled “Gematria in ‘The Queen of Spades’ [Aleksandr Pushkin]”: “…other scholars assume that the yetzira are the letters and the sephira numbers.” (—p. 190)

“...this study and review of the literature introduces the topic of Hermetism and then describes its impact on Jewish thought in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, with special attention to updating the bibliography on Hebrew Hermetism.” (—page 112)


Love presents “Qabalah” in the light of Samuel Bousky’s teachings. While no works by Bousky are listed among Love’s references, Love does mention a “lecture given by Samuel Bousky at Bridge Mountain Foundation, Ben Lomond, California, 1969.” This very ’seventies book includes sections with titles such as “Matter is the Medium: Being is the Message,” “The Paramagnetic Fields of Mind,” and “Emanation, the Specific Intentionality of a Quantum God.”

Three books by Samuel Bousky are circulating:


This handsome eighty-page book reads as if it had been written a hundred years ago—and looks as if it had been printed a hundred years before that. It is filled with the pomp, ceremony, and blunders characteristic of post-Golden Dawn qabbalah books; this one even announces itself as “Publication class A authorized for publication by the COA of the A. . A..” The errors begin on the first page of the INTRODUCTION (page ix), where Macdonald states, “Most historians place the origin of written Qabbalah at about the same period as the Talmud, when the Hebrews lived in Babylon.” A footnote compounds the problem by stating that this Talmudic period was “c. 30 B.C.E.” Macdonald more-or-less admits to the irony of his title on page xii: “There are so many such books [which ‘elaborate on the mysteries at great length’] available in our present Century that the term ‘unwritten’ can scarce be applied to [the ‘Unwritten Mysteries’] any longer.”


The look of *Man, Myth, and Magic*—that of twenty-four coffee-table books—is somewhat contradicted by the names which appear on the list of contributors and its editorial advisory board: Mircea Eliade, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, R. C. Zaehner, to name a few. Topics include Agrippa, Alchemy, Francis Barrett, William Blake, Mme Blavatsky, Jacob Boehme, Giordano Bruno, Cabala, Aleister Crowley, John Dee, Robert Fludd, Dion Fortune, Gematria, Golden Dawn, Golem, Grimoire, Hasidism, Éliphas Lévi, Lilith, Raymond Lull, Isaac Luria, Magic and Mysticism, Pentagram, Renaissance, Rosicrucians, Austin Osman Spare (article by Kenneth Grant in vol. 24), Rudolf Steiner, Swedenborg, Tarot, Throne Mysticism, A. E. Waite, and W. B. Yeats.


This valuable anthology includes a section entitled “Magic and Kabbalah” which gives translations from Pico, Reuchlin, and Bodin, along with Manuel do Valle Moura, Francisco Torreblan Villapando, Andreas Libavius and Federico Borromeo. Elsewhere in the book one can find numerous passages from Ficino, Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Campanella.

McGaha, Michael. “Naming the Nameless, Numbering the Infinite: Some Common Threads in Spanish Sufism, Kabbalah, and Catholic Mysticism,” in *Yearbook of Comparative


Rosicrucians, more of a “popular” work than The Rose Cross..., is of particular interest for its chapter, “The Golden Dawn, Its Antecedents and Offshoots.” For an overview, see McIntosh’s article, “The Rosicrucian Legacy,” in The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited, listed below under “Ralph White.”

On a parallel strand, see McIntosh’s Astrologers and their Creed: An Historical Outline (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1969), especially chapter 6, “From the Renaissance to the Age of Enlightenment,” and chapter 7, “The Nineteenth Century.”


“In the following discussion, I hope to establish the major significance of Sabbatai Sevi for England by examining several questions—limited in comparison with those entertained by Sabbatai’s most profound and exhaustive historian [i.e., Gershom Scholem]—concerning the English awareness of him 300 years ago. How and in what form did the unparalleled developments in the Levant from 1665 to 1667 first become known to English-speaking people? What contribution was made by the Sabbatian movement to Christian eschatology and to the expectations aroused among devotees by the approach of the “wonderful year” 1666? What was the range of response to the movement among English observers; what was its ideological or sectarian meaning to contemporaries?” (—pp. 132-133)


The Magical Calendar is a grand chart, which amounts to a Hermetic-Cabalist-Magical compendium, by Johannes Theodorus de Bry, who did the illustrations, so often reproduced, for the works of Robert Fludd and Michael Maier.


“The bulk of the papers ... are grouped into three major sections: background of the Renaissance; magic, philosophy, and science; and art and literature” (p. 9). Articles from this collection have been cited elsewhere: see “Gosselin” (RE: Bruno), “Idel” (“Hermeticism and Judaism”), and “Zambelli” (RE: Agrippa).


Nineteen historic personages figure into Oberman’s discussion. Along with Luther, Calvin, and Erasmus, we find Reuchlin and his rival Johannes Pfefferkorn. Oberman writes (p. 29), “The modern picture of Reuchlin as a friend of the Jews, for all its accessibility, simply does not stand up. Reuchlin was firmly convinced of the collective guilt of the Jews....”


The practical part of this book, written in Ophiel’s distinctive style (with its words in **BOLD CAPS** followed by **THREE EXCLAMATION POINTS!!!**), associates the elemental (*tattwa*) images with the *sefirot* of the *tree of life*.


“The book is primarily directed towards arguing that occultism was constitutive of modern culture at the fin de siecle; conversely, it seeks to trace the lineaments of “the modern” in the gestures and presumptions of the occult. Most specifically, then, *The Place of Enchantment* sets out to show that this new form of occult spirituality was a particular articulation of the diverse and often ambiguous processes through which cultural modernity was constituted in Britain during the crucial years prior to the outbreak of the First World War.” (INTRODUCTION—p. 16)


“Joseph Smith and Kabbalah” is a most interesting piece. However, finding Volume 27 of *Dialogue* is unlikely, even in a well-stocked library; occasionally a copy turns up at Amazon or AbeBooks. Fortunately, there are two other sources for Owens’ work:

- the entire *Dialogue* article is online as part of the *Gnosis Archive* series at [www.gnosis.org/jskabb1.htm](http://www.gnosis.org/jskabb1.htm)
- a brief account, “Joseph Smith: America’s Hermetic Prophet,” is in *Gnosis Magazine*, Number 35, Spring 1995; this article is available on-line at [http://gnosis.org/ahp.htm](http://gnosis.org/ahp.htm).


“Qabalah” gets its turn in Ozaniec’s series of books on such topics as meditation, the chakkras, tarot, dowsing, etc. Ozaniec “worked with Gareth Knight and Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki,” placing her squarely in the eclectic Western tradition derived from Golden Dawn. After referring to her work as “Qabala Renovata,” an expression borrowed from William Gray, Ozaniec states, “While acknowledging the Jewish origins of Qabalah, at the same time it is impossible to ignore non-Jewish influences which have become incorporated into its fabric” (—page 7).


This well-circulated book begins, “The Qabalah, at the heart of the Western Mystery Tradition, is a way of personal development and self-realization based on a map of consciousness called the Tree of Life.”

“Reception...” is a summary article on Christian Europe’s encounter with Hebrew, discussing Sefer Yesirah, the writings of Bible commentator and grammarian David Kimhi (1162-1235), Reuchlin, Spanish humanist Antonio de Nebrija (1441-1522), Postel, and Swiss Hebraist Theodor Bibliander (d. 1564).


Quinn locates Smith’s sources for “Cabala” in adaptations of Johann Eisenmenger’s Traditions of the Jews (original, 1711; English editions produced by John Peter Stehelin in 1743 and 1748), and John Allen’s Modern Judaism (1816; 2nd edition: London: 1830). Quinn writes, “Smith’s apparent textual indebtedness to the books by Eisenmenger and Allen also demonstrates that he had access to their extensive discussions of the Cabala’s doctrine of the transmigration of souls.” (—page 303)


In the section of this article entitled “Renaissance and magic,” Quispel writes:

Pico was wrong when he believed that Cabala came from Moses. But he sensed that the two currents [Hermetism and Cabala] were essentially identical. In this he was right, because both Hermetism and Cabala date from the same period of history, reflect the same culture, Hellenism, and originate in the same climate, Alexandrian gnosis. (—pp. 224-5) [my brackets]

Only recently the texts found near Nag Hammadi in 1945 have shown that these Christian Cabalists [of the Renaissance and Reformation periods], although completely ignored by modern scholars, were on the right track. The Gospel of Truth, one of the first works of the Jung Codex, contains long speculations of Jewish esoteric origin about Christ as the Name of God. And few scholars would deny nowadays that according to the author of the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John, Jesus is the embodiment of that secret Name: ‘Holy Father, keep them through thine own Name, which thou hast given me’ (John 17, 11). And we see clearly that Paul sees Jesus as the Glory of God. Nay, even the mysterious title ‘Son of Man’ has been elucidated, now that so many works from Nag Hammadi call the Son of God: Man. Son of Man, Aramaic bar anash, simply means ‘Man’ and indicates God who reveals himself in the form of a man. All these insights were in nuce already there in the works of these Christian Cabalists. (—p. 226) [my brackets—DK]


“We have spoken of the ‘Pathway of Fire’ with reference to the Kabbalah, to Advaita Vedanta, and to Asparsa Yoga. ... [T]he ‘Pathway of Fire’...indicates the ‘Way’ along which to travel in order to realize one’s own essence.” (—page 25)


The Golden Dawn tree-of-life material is here done up for neo-pagans of various stripes. The old cliché “only the names have been changed...” could describe Reed’s innovations.

Reichelberg, Ruth. “In Memoriam: Don Quixote and Kabbalah” (translation by Véronique Dupuy), in How Jewish Mystical Thinking Shaped Early Modern Europe: Cabbalistic Influences on

“The following article traces the development of research led by Ruth Reichelberg concerning Cervantes and the kabbalistic sense of his work, as well as the pursuit of this quest for sense by current researchers. This text has been written in memoriam, from Ruth Reichelberg’s notes.” (—page 121)


There is no shortage of cabalistic diagrams and images here, especially in the section “Sephiroth” (pp. 310-328). At 700+ pages, this is the most extensive collection of alchemical, Rosicrucian, Masonic, and cabalistic images—a good proportion of them in color—at a reasonable price.


Refer especially to Chapter Three: “Theatres of the World,” and Chapter Four: “The Imaginative Logic of Giordano Bruno.”

Further, see

- Shumaker, Wayne. “George Dalgarno’s Universal Language,” in Renaissance Curiosa (Binghamton: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1982).


See the three articles in this collection by Moshe Idel: (i) “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance,” (ii) “Particularism and Universalism in Kabbalah, 1480-1650,” and (iii) “Major Currents in Italian Kabbalah between 1560 and 1660.” Herein also find also David Ruderman’s “Hope against Hope: Jewish and Christian Messianic Expectations in the Late Middle Ages.”


The Kabbalah Decoded gives translations of Sifre di-Tseniuta and the Idrot of the Zohar (i.e., the same items which appear in S. L. M. Mathers’ Kabbalah Unveiled). Sassoon and Dale treat these texts as
technical manuals for assembling a “manna machine,” namely, a food production device which could, for instance, have fed the Jews in the wilderness. This thesis is developed in detail in The Manna Machine by the same authors (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd, 1979).


Refer in particular to

§ 3.4. Raymond Lull’s Theology of Concepts
§ 3.5. Christian Cabala I: Giovanni Pico, Johannes Reuchlin, and Paulus Ricius
§ 3.6. Christian Cabala II: Jakob Böhme’s Doctrine of Qualities
§ 4.10. Ficino’s Angel and the Intellectus Agens
§ 4.11. Giovanni Pico: Pious Philosophy and the Dignity of Man
§ 4.12. Paulus Ricius’ Cabalistic Cosmos
§ 4.13. The Threefold Man of Paracelsus
§ 4.15. Abraham Herrera’s Adam Kadmon
§ 5.3. The Book Yezirah and the Archetypes of the Alphabet
§ 5.9. De Vita Coelitus Comparanda: Ficino’s Cosmological Medicine
§ 6.8. Giorgio Veneto’s Harmonia Mundi
§ 6.9. Agrippa’s Doctrine of Spiritual Elements
§ 6.10. The Dimensions of the Spirit: Nicolas of Cusa’s Conceptions of Space
§ 6.11. Giordano Bruno’s Infinite Space


...in the fourth ‘cultic’ degree (i.e., the first degree of the third section) the student was taught various exercises that involved physical movements and the ‘vibration’ vowels. These exercises were combined with the Masonic signs and ‘grips,’ and were taught to be the means by which the ‘subtle energies’ of the body could be harmonized.

In a note (p. 345, n. 90) Egmond adds,

These exercises played also an important role in the O.T.O.; hence it is also possible that Steiner received them from [Theodore] Reuss. ... Another version of these exercises was published by Albert Schutz, *Call Adonai* (Goleta, 1980).
Kosher Yoga is an occasionally paraphrased copy of A System of Caucasian Yoga, As Orally Received by Count Stefan Colonna Walewski (1897-1955) (New York: The Falcon’s Wing Press, 1955). Whereas Walewski’s version is hand-printed with crudely drawn illustrations, the Schutz/de Schaps version is conventionally typeset with slick (one might say “cheesy”) photographic and “pro” graphic art. Increasing the intrigue, Book Publishers Directory (Gale Research, 1983), p. 734, lists Caucasian Yoga: Cabalistic Roots of Western Mysticism—the same subtitle as Kosher Yoga—among the works by Albert L. Schutz available from Quantal Publishing. Who knows what, if any, connections there may have been between Walewski and Schutz.

There are reprints of Walewski’s work from Kessinger (2006) and Lulu/Pluto Publishing (2015 & 2019).


Shirley sketches Apollonius of Tyana, Plotinus, Michael Scot, Paracelsus, Swedenborg, Cagliostro, and Anna Kingsford.


The treatises discussed are (i) Bruno’s De Magia, Theses de magia, De magia mathematica; (ii) Martin Delrio’s Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex; (iii) Campanella’s De sensu rerum et magia; (iv) Gaspar Schott’s Magia universalis.


Shumaker’s study gives full accounts of astrology, witchcraft, magic, alchemy, hermetic doctrine, with, alas, only a few fleeting mentions of Cabala—a strange omission considering the date of Occult Sciences’ publication: after Walker’s Spiritual and Demonic Magic (1958) and Yates’ Giordano Bruno (1964), both of which are mentioned in Shumaker’s “Bibliographical Note,” the latter being referred to as “indispensable.” Given that he quotes Pico’s famous Conclusiones (on page 16), “No science offers greater assurance of Christ’s divinity than magic and cabala,” one would expect Shumaker to follow up.


See History... pages 308-312 on Abner of Burgos, pages 405-407 and 410 regarding two of Pico’s teachers, Elijah Delmedigo and Johanan Alemanno (in § “Jewish Philosophers in Italy of the Quattrocento”).

Stuckrad, Kocku von. Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities [BRILL’S STUDIES IN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY 186] (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2010).

Note § LINGUISTIC ONTOLOGIES IN CHRISTIAN KABBALAH within CHAPTER FIVE, “The Secrets of Texts: Esoteric Hermeneutics.”


Correspondences of the “Flashing Colours” are given for the ten sefirot and the twenty-two paths in the tradition of the Golden Dawn.


See my description of Suarex' SY in “Notes on Editions of Sefer Yetzira in English,” Part IV, page 43, at either

- https://www.academia.edu/22875900/Notes_on_Editions_of_Sefar_Yetzirah_in_English


Suarex’ series covers “the three great cabalistic works”: Genesis, Sepher Yetsira, and The Song of Songs. Suarex does not consider Kabbalah to be mysticism but rather a science of cosmic energies, though in a hidden code. Suarex' thesis rests on the belief that each Hebrew letter “denotes not only a ‘letter’ but also a sign, a proof, a symbol and ever a miracle revealing its forgotten ontological origin.” In a chapter which is repeated in all three books, Suarex explains the letter-code as he has discovered, or rather re-discovered, it.

Other items by Suarex:

- “I Am Cain,” in Maitreya 2: The Seeds of Liberation (Shambhala...1971).
- “I Am Cain II,” in Maitreya 3: Gardening (Shambhala...1972).
- The Passion of Judas: A Mystery Play (Shambhala...1973).
- The Resurrection of the Word (Shambhala...1975).
- “What about ‘Ra?’” in Tree 4: Ra, edited by David Meltzer (Berkeley: [Tree Books], 1974).


Refer to Chapter 8, “Enlightenment and Kabbalah,” which contains the following segments: PHILOSOPHY AND MYSTICISM: THE KABBALAH (sic) DENUDATA, GEORG WACHTER: SPINOZISM, JUDAISM AND DIVINE PRESENCE, and MYSTICAL DEMARCATIONS AND CONFUSIONS.


“Cabala” here, as in von Welling’s Opus Mago-Caballisticum..., is Paracelsianism, i.e., alchemy, more related to Khunrath and Maier than the “cabalists” of the current paper.


25
“It is extremely likely that Bach came across many different number alphabets. Techniques of gematria were well known in his day and the [Hebrew] milesian alphabet \(\text{aleph} = 1 \text{ to tav} = 400\) is used in at least two books that he owned... Had Bach used a number alphabet to embed theological meaning into his music through acceptable Cabbala Speculativa, he would almost certainly have used the caballistic milesian number alphabet.” (Tatlow, pages 126–127 and 129)


“Tenen examines the Hebrew text of Genesis and shows how each letter is both concept and gesture, with the form of the gesture matching the function of the concept, revealing the implicit relationship between the physical world of function and the conscious world of the concept.” (back cover)

See my description of Tenen’s book in “Notes on Editions of Sefer Yetzirah in English” Part IV, pages 45–46, at either

- [https://www.academia.edu/22875900/Notes_on_Editions_of_Sefer_Yetzirah_in_English](https://www.academia.edu/22875900/Notes_on_Editions_of_Sefer_Yetzirah_in_English)


In chapter 2, music historian Tomlinson sets “Agrippa versus Michael Foucault”; in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, he discusses Ficino’s mixture of magic and music.


Written for the would-be practitioner, *Ritual Magic* is in three sections: “Basics,” an expanded survey of definitions and rationales; “Systems,” a quick history of magic; and “Practices,” which includes chapters on preparations, instruments and two simple rituals. The final chapter, “The Magician’s Library,” consists of a rather eclectic reading list in three levels of difficulty.


Tyson covers the Tetragrammaton’s history, symbolism, and use from the Old Testament to the Enochian magic of Dee and Kelley. The *tour de force* of the book is Tyson’s handling of the Twelve Banners of YHVH (i.e., the twelve sequences in which the four letters can be ordered).


Versluis discusses the influence of not just alchemy, theosophy, Rosicrucianism and Free-masonry, but also Gnosticism and Swedenborg. Chapters are devoted to such luminaries as Poe, Hawthorne, Melville (learn about the Gnosticism of *Moby Dick*), Alcott, Whitman, Dickenson, and others. Alas, there is not much on Cabala.


“Lacking its own sources, Christian esotericism took over a number of Jewish elements, adapting them to its own vision. In these circumstances, the Jewish esoteric preoccupation with prophecy and Messianism
became, in the hands of Christian esotericists, a preoccupation with political changes. Of course, to say that Kabbalah had a direct influence on politics would be an overstatement. Still, the influence that Jewish mysticism exercised, through the Kabbalah, upon the (pseudo)philosophical doctrines providing the bases of several political movements with a decisive long-term impact on mankind cannot be denied.”

(—INTRODUCTION, page 173)


“Between medieval Hermeticism and Kabbalah there is, however, a major difference. If, for the kabbalist the demonic realm is important precisely so that he could keep it away during the process of restoration of the original harmony and repair of the world (Tikkun Olam), for the Hermeticist this knowledge is necessary so that he could conjure the demons and force them to take part in the magic act, whose finality is not always positive.” (—page 97)


“One of the most interesting correspondences between mysticism and science can be found in Lurianic Kabbalah and the modern scientific theories regarding the birth of the universe.” (—page 162)


This second enlarged edition reprints Wallis’ 1972 classic, adding Gerson’s updated bibliography. This work is included among our ITEMS OF INTEREST in light of the oft-repeated (in some circles, oft-resisted) formula: “Kabbalah is simply Jewish Neoplatonism.”


“Whether as inspiration or as initiation, then, Christian Kabbalah cannot be avoided in any rounded understanding of the rise (and decline) of the History of Religions. If there is an ‘untold story’ in the present project, it may be located in the shared Christian Kabbalist sources of Scholem, Corbin, and Eliade.” (—Wasserstrom, pages 50-51)


Webb treats the occult revival of the 19th century, including discussions of Mme Blavatsky (“...had led an intriguing and perhaps scandalous life...”), Annie Besant (“...from the arena of social reform rather than the jungles of Hindustan...”), Éliphas Lévi (“...the magus who remained faithful to his mystical socialism...”), Josephin Peladan (“...Catholic and occultist, artist and clown...”), “Three Messianists”: Adam Mickiewicz (“...at the College de France he discussed second sight...”), Andrei Towianski (“...the archbishop of Paris alerted his clergy against him...”), and J. M. Hoene-Wronski (“...a misplaced Renaissance man...”)—these comments are picture captions (between pages 192 and 193) drawn from the text. Another characteristic quote: “Whereas Fabre d’Olivet might merely be considered an eccentric, his disciple and plagiarizer, Saint-Yves d’Alveydre, was a fraud of the highest degree” (p. 271). Cabala is mentioned and discussed frequently.

Webb's companion volume, The Occult Establishment (LaSalle: Open Court, 1976), is a “meticulously-researched history of occultism since 1918.” Along with some follow-up on such figures as Mme. Blavatsky and Papus from the 19th century, The Occult Establishment covers a range from Aleister Crowley and Rudolph Steiner to The Protocols of the Elders of Zion and Hitler, then on to Timothy Leary and Ken Kesey.

White brings together papers presented at two conferences: “The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited” (September 1995) and “Prague, Alchemy, and the Hermetic Tradition” (August 1997). The prologue consists of the two initial Rosicrucian manifestos: Fama Fraternitatis and Confessio Fraternitatis. There follows a series of papers expanding upon—frequently challenging—Frances Yates’ studies, especially The Rosicrucian Enlightenment.

One paper, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke’s piece “The Rosicrucian Prelude...” (pp. 73-98) “tells the wild tale of John Dee’s mission in central Europe.”


“In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the notion of a language of nature exerted a widespread appeal in European culture, among poets and literary writers, as well as philosophers.” (—page 3)


“This article follows the development of a genre of eighteenth-century texts, explicitly self-designated a ‘cabbalistic’, initially intended for fortune telling by use of a number-alphabet. ... [T]hey were increasingly identified as ‘paragrams’, lost much of their mantic purpose and increasingly became an inventive technique for the stimulation of the composition of honorific verse”—ABSTRACT


Pagan Mysteries... is a study of the sources for imagery in Renaissance art. Chapter One, “Poetic Theology,” opens with a discussion of Pico. Wind notes that Pico believed that the myths and fables of all Pagan religions “show[ed] only the crust of the mysteries to the vulgar, while preserving the marrow of the true sense for higher and more perfect spirits”—such as Pico himself, of course.


Zap Comix, No. 3. SPECIAL 69 ISSUE (San Francisco: Apex Novelties, 1968).

The front cover, rendered by San Francisco poster adept Rick Griffin, shows a lantern-wielding beetle uttering “אפרים.” Griffin’s spread inside the front cover displays the upper two-thirds of the sefirotic tree, with banner-like lettering across the top reading, “AIN / AIN-SOPH / AIN-SOPH-AUR.” In the midst of the comic, Griffin has another page showing the letters A O M saying “ Sepher Yetzirah!” “ Sepher Ha Zohar!” and “Apolcalypse!” respectively. It appears that Griffin encountered Éliphas Lévi’s History of Magic—see page 61 of Waite’s translation (Rider, 1913 or Borden, 1949 and 1963; the Weiser edition didn’t appear until 1971).


“While there is no evidence to suggest that Goethe himself was a kabbalistic mystic, it is clear that he drew on this tradition freely ... Analysis of some key passages of his Wilhelm Meister, I suggest, makes clear that the tactile, fluid simultaneity of the aesthetic discourse he employs in presenting his feminine
understanding of human sentiment justifies identifying it with the *écriture féminine* the Kabbalah exemplifies." (—p. 65)


“My argument in what follows is that a reading of the female voice in *La Picara Justina* and *Wilhelm Meister* in the light of Irigaray’s theory of parler-femme reveals striking stylistic similarities in the two novels, similarities that internal and external evidence suggests may well be the result of both López de Úbeda’s and Goethe’s participation in the kabbalistic tradition of exploiting the literal bodiliness of language in order to express the (Divine) Feminine. In essence, my suggestion is that the Kabbalah may well be functioning here as the key intertext.” (—p. 158)


Described in Zinberg’s fifth volume are Jewish currents which influenced the formation of Christian cabala (Pico della Mirandola, Johannes Reuchlin, etc.)
ADDENDUM B: REVIEWS

Sheila Spector’s
“Wonders Divine”:
The Development of Blake’s Kabbalistic Myth

“Glorious Incomprehensible”:
The Development of Blake’s Kabbalistic Language

Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001; 213 & 202 pages
ISBN: 0-8387-5468-6 & 0-8387-5469-4
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An edited version of this review originally appeared in
online at http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeV/Reviews/Spector.html *

William Blake is sometimes illuminated but rarely explained by his sources,
because his fierce intellectual independence allows nothing to pass into his
work unchanged. It is therefore hazardous to accept prior analogues to his
ideas as sources, especially on the basis of mere conceptual analogy, and even
more hazardous to practice the kind of algebraic substitution in which Blake is
made to mean what a supposed source meant.

—Martin K. Nurmi, “Negative Sources in Blake,” in
William Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon, edited by Alvin
H. Rosenfeld (Providence: Brown University Press, 1969)

* Compare my review with those of Dena Bain Taylor in Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 38, Issue 2
(University of Rochester, 2004)—PDF at http://bq.blakearchive.org/38.2.taylor; and Mark S. Lussier in Romanitic
Circles (University of Maryland, 2005) at https://www.rc.umd.edu/reviews-blog/sheila-spector-glorious-
incomprehensible-development-blakes-kabbalistic-language—which, alas, has a “Security Risk” warning attached
to it.
Within the imposing mass of Blake studies one finds few items which discuss the use of kabbalah by Blake, even if esoteric currents are acknowledged as reflected in his work. Where kabbalah is identified as an influence—or possible influence—the connections, if developed at all, rarely go beyond simple part-for-part examples (e.g., Eden, Beulah, Generation, and Ulro as the kabbalistic “four worlds”). Mostly what one finds are scattered highly speculative remarks or free-floating ascriptions where it is neither specified nor clear what “kabbalah” (or “cabala”) refers to. Thus, most welcome is a recent study which treats at length the influence of kabbalah on Blake: Sheila Spector’s illustrated companion volumes: “Wonders Divine”: The Development of Blake’s Kabbalistic Myth and “Glorious Incomprehensible”: The Development of Blake’s Kabbalistic Language. Briefly, Spector’s thesis is this:

... even though he [Blake] explicitly, often even emphatically, rejected many aspects of what might be called normative Christianity, he still found himself trapped within what had become the oppressive archetypal framework he repudiated, and it was only through a concerted life-long effort, first to recognize the bonds, and then, to seek out alternate modes of thought, that Blake was able, finally, to create his own system. But that new system, contrary to popular belief, was not an original creation. Rather, when Blake finally liberated himself from the exoteric myth structure that dominates Western thought, he turned to its esoteric counterpart, the myth that, though originating with Jewish mystics, had been adapted by Christian Kabbalists to conform with their—and, in fact, with Blake’s—own brand of Christianity.

(—“Wonders Divine,” page 25)

Through the books, Spector reinforces her approach with such observations as

From the numerous failed attempts to explain these brief works [Blake’s minor prophecies], it should be apparent that Kabbalism truly is a different mode of thought, one not amenable to conventional methods of interpretation, at least not without grossly distorting the text.

(—“Wonders Divine,” page 106)

It is important to establish at the onset that the kabbalah to which Spector refers throughout her study is primarily the Christian interpretation of Lurianic kabbalah as exemplified by Francis Mercury van Helmont’s Adumbratio kabbalæ christianæ, a treatise appended to some editions of the second volume of Christian Knorr von Rosenroth’s Kabbala denudata (2 volumes, Sulzbach: 1677-84). Hence, it is neither any form of Jewish kabbalah (of which there is more of an array than is generally acknowledged) nor the Christian cabala of earlier figures such as Pico della Mirandola, Johannes Reuchlin, Francesco Giorgi, and Henry Cornelius Agrippa. Blake made use of merkabah mysticism as well. So, too, in this article, “kabbalah” will refer to the amalgam of merkabah, Lurianic kabbalah, and van Helmont’s Adumbratio which Blake, according to Spector, subsumed.

Spector offers a stage-by-stage analysis of Blake’s absorption of kabbalistic concepts, showing true incorporation—as opposed to reworking, gloss, or “mere conceptual analogy.” As Spector presents it, kabbalistic elements and doctrines naturally correspond to the characters, concepts, and methods in Blake’s writings, though, it
must be admitted that, in reading Blake without benefit of Spector’s guidance, these equivalences are not so obvious.

Both volumes are organized chronologically, starting with “Contexts,” then discussing Blake’s work according to a four-fold scheme: Pre-Myth / Pre-Intentionality, The Fact of Myth / The Fact of Intentionality, The Concept of Myth / The Concept of Intentionality, and The Transcendent Myth / The Divine Intentionality, myth being the focus of “Wonders Divine,” intentionality as reflected in Blake’s use of language being the concern of “Glorious Incomprehensible.”

Spector contrasts the two studies in the opening lines of her similar introductions. “Wonders Divine” begins

This is a book about Blake’s myth, defined as the structuring principle of intentionality. Concerned with neither the mental state nor the facticity of an object, intentional analysis focuses on the ways by which different levels of consciousness establish relationships with their respective referents.

Spector argues accordingly that

the progressive transformation of Blake’s personal myth from a Miltonic to a kabbalistic orientation reflects the evolution of the basic principles upon which Blake’s intentional relationship was predicated

(“Glorious Incomprehensible,” page 21).

The introduction to “Glorious Incomprehensible” opens

This is a book about Blake’s language, defined as the external manifestation of intentionality. Concerned neither with the mental state nor with the facticity of an object, intentionality refers to the relationship between the subjective consciousness and some kind of referent; and as its external manifestation, the material language system can be said to manifest the kind of relationship that has been established between a particular level of consciousness and its corresponding referent.

Spector goes on to demonstrate

how Blake’s language evolved from an original state of pre-intentionality in which he intuited some sort of relationship between language and thought, to a conscious awareness of the fact of intentionality, through a reflexive analysis of the concept underlying the material language system, and culminating, ultimately, in what amounts to an attempt to create a new language system, through which he might apprehend the “ultimate” referent.

(—“Wonders Divine,” page 19)

Somewhat like sections of a Lurianic text, Spector’s two volumes assume each other. While these are tandem studies, with identical prefaces (“Blake as a Kabbalist”) and closely parallel introductions (“Blake’s Problem with Myth” vs “Blake’s Problem with Language”), it seems best to start with “Wonders Divine,” which, in focusing on myth, offers the theosophical context into which Blake’s advance toward a concentratedly mystical use of language, taken up in “Glorious Incomprehensible,” is set.

“Wonders Divine” starts off by providing the context and background of Blake’s progress as it grew from his problems with the Christian formulation of Milton: the
Doctrine of Original Sin, the Ransom Theory, and Eternal Damnation. Bringing Jewish mysticism and kabbalah into the discussion at the outset, Chapters 1, 2, and 3 (“Contexts: The Myths of Eighteenth-Century England,” “From Calvinism to Kabbalism: Transforming Myths,” and “Pre-Mythology: Miltonic Antecedents”) include discussions of (i) Ma’aseh Merkavah, that is, speculation on visions of the Divine Chariot; (ii) Ma’aseh Bereshit, the Work of Creation, which concerns the occurrence and structure of the universe through such concepts as tzimtzum (contraction), the sefirot, the four worlds, shevirat [ha-kelim] (breaking [of the vessels]), the parzufim (“faces” or divine personae) and tikkun (restoration); and (iii) the passage of all this into “the most fully delineated Christianized version of the [kabbalistic] myth, the Adumbratio Kabbalæ Christiana” (—p. 44) of F. M. van Helmont, the contents of which are outlined (—pp. 44-46). The discussion then passes to Blake’s early works and their critique of and struggle with Milton (e.g., “passive obedience” [Milton] vs “active resistance” [Blake]) and Blake’s issues within himself (e.g., the dilemma between the visionary and the rational). Early on, Blake postulated the notion of the “Poetic Genius,” that potential within to apprehend the noncorporeal world, as a critical part of his effort to subvert Milton’s “passive obedience” and the Paradise Lost myth.

In Chapter 4, “The Fact of Myth: Contemporary Apocalyptic,” we find Blake at the stage where he passes from trying to renovate Milton to abandoning him. Here, too, are the first inklings of kabbalah in Blake’s work, though these are tentative expressions which may show only affinity or sympathy through some initial contact. Evidence of direct influence is not firm, even if some features (given Blake’s use of Hebrew roots) and passages are highly suggestive. This is also the stage at which Blake passes from “fiction” to “prophecy.”

Spector’s pivotal Chapter 5, “The Concept of Myth: Psychomachia,” offers full—and quite convincing—kabbalistic interpretations of Blake’s minor prophecies (The Song of Los, The Book of Urizen, The Book of Ahania, and The Book of Los), tracing, as in the earlier works, the pre-mythic state, the imposition of the dualistic (Miltonic) state, the exposure of the errors of that dualistic state, and, finally, postulation regarding the correction of this error. Spector, for instance, presents The Book of Urizen (—pp. 92-97) as pressing Lurianic myth upon Milton’s two “falls” (from Paradise Lost), with chapters kabbalistically organized according to the concepts of tzimtzum (God’s contraction within Himself, Chapter 1), the consolidation of din (unmitigated judgment, Chapter 2), and shevirat [ha-kelim] (the breaking [of the vessels], Chapter 3). Succeeding chapters of Urizen speak of the results of shevirah, eventually leading to the process of tikkun (restoration) in the final chapter. The Book of Los is shown (—pp. 102-106) to be derived from van Helmont’s Adumbratio, for it passes from the threefold Lurianic structure (tzimtzum-shevirat-tikkun as given in The Book of Urizen) to van Helmont’s four-fold structure: (i) The Primordial Institution, resulting in the formation of Adam Kadmon (Primordial Man); (ii) The State of Destitution, namely shevirah and the resulting excess of din; (iii) The Modern Constitution, on “Adam Kadmon’s attempts to separate the shards of negation from the lights of purity”; and (iv) The Supreme Restitution, tikkun, including “the restoration of all souls, the capture of Satan, and the destruction of the shards.”
Blake’s final stage is discussed in Chapter 6, “The Transcendent Myth: Kabbalism.” The chapter begins (—page 107)

In the major prophecies [Vala/The Four Zoas, Milton, and Jerusalem], the various kabbalistic motifs Blake had been experimenting with evolve into a complex, multi-faceted myth whose archetypal structure provides the means of reconciling the two dilemmas he had been grappling with throughout the composite art: the function of Christ and the role of the prophet in the fallen world.

Spector shows (—pp. 110-131) Vala/The Four Zoas to be structured according to the sefirotic tree, beginning with the lowest, malkut, and ascending through a succession of “nights” to the “Ninth,” hokhmah. Progress through the sefirot in ascending order is rare in kabbalistic literature. The only other example which comes to mind is Joseph Gikatilla’s Sha’are Orah (1559), which was fairly well-circulated via the Latin translation of Paulus Riccius, Porta Lucis, printed in Pistorius’ collection, Ars Cabalistica, and drawn upon for the grand kabbalistic glossary in Kabbala denudata. Blake could have been familiar with this.

In Spector’s report (—pp. 131-140), Blake’s work Milton develops the roles of “upper” and “lower” man according to features of Adam Kadmon, Primordial Man, and Adam Rishon, who descended into the corporeal world after shevirat. In Milton, Blake resolves some of the problems of his previous efforts by incorporating the kabbalistic notion of gilgul, the revolution (transmigration) of the soul—from pre-existence, through incarnation and reincarnation, to transformation in the form of the ability to apprehend the Divine Vision as symbolized by the merkabah (—page 132).

In Jerusalem (—pp. 140-168), Blake offers merkabah mysticism as the basis for development and restoration (—page 146). Jerusalem transforms van Helmont’s four-fold system into a kabbalistic narrative following the progress of the characters Los and Albion (see comments below).

Many more parallels are discussed to demonstrate Blake’s incorporation of kabbalah. Spector offers kabbalistic readings of Blake with an ease and assurance which suggest their being foregone conclusions, which—one might forget reading this book—they are not. But Blake’s cast of characters, his own array of parzufim if you will, so neatly aligns with elements in the kabbalistic universe that Spector’s argument is impossible to dismiss. The conclusion to “Wonders Divine,” “The Eternal Prophet,” begins

More than simply a collection of images and archetypes, the kabbalistic myth provided Blake with the medium necessary for reexamining his vocation as prophet.

“Glorious Incomprehensible” follows a parallel track to “Wonders Divine” through the phases of Blake’s development. The background Spector provides in the first chapter (“Contexts: The Languages of Eighteenth-Century England”) concerns the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers and grammarians. Blake saw the march of philosophy from Bacon (through Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, [James] Beattie, and [Thomas] Reid) to [Dugald] Stewart as a descent, or degeneration. The Cambridge Platonists are mentioned as something of an alternative. Blake didn’t have much time for contemporary grammarians either, though he did draw from
contemporary philologists, especially those who formulated theories regarding English as being descended from ancient Hebrew. Spector seems to assume Blake’s use of John Parkhurst’s works, e.g. Hebrew and English Lexicon, without Points.²

Chapter 2 is subtitled “Newton’s sleep,” the expression which Blake threw back at the empirical thought which he would attempt to supersede. As in “Wonders Divine,” this second chapter surveys Blake’s early prose, The Book of Thel, Tiriel, and Visions of the Daughters of Albion. Spector discusses Blake’s early experiments with Hebraic roots “which would eventually undermine the specious stability of conventional [English] language system” as Blake progressively treated his derived terms with more kabbalistic range and intention. In these early works, Blake often used Hebrew roots for the names he invented; these names, however, are not simply translated words with fixed denotations or connotations. Each suggests multiple meanings, or an aggregate of meanings, which defy singular allegorical reference or, for that matter, limitation on its mythic function. This technique, or process, in Blake becomes more conscious in the stage described in Chapter 3, “The Fact of Intentionality: ‘And twofold Always.’” Spector’s treatment of Songs of Innocence and of Experience reads like a fractal reduction of the whole course of Blake’s development, which progresses from pre-intentionality of the early works, as in “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found,” through the notions of the “twofold vision,” as in “A Little GIRL Lost,” toward the “Divine intention” of the major prophecies. Finally, “To Tirzah” predicts the need to transcend the double vision and to move into higher modes of intentional relationship. With the name Tirzah itself, Blake reached into the Bible, and, in the manner of kabbalistic exegesis, attempted to get past its literal meanings in order to uncover its essential reality—as he did with clusters of terms which were derived from Hebrew roots or which could be subject to improvised Hebraic etymologies.

Still, Blake’s workings with the facts of intentionality proved in themselves limiting. Blake’s next step was to move beyond fundamental principles of the language into its theoretical basis, as in the title of Spector’s Chapter 4, “The Concept of Intentionality: ‘soft Beulahs night.’” Parallel to the corresponding Chapter 4 in “Wonders Divine,” Spector discusses Blake’s pivotal four-part psychomachia, which again traces the whole process: (i) The Song of Los represents pre-intentionality, the animal soul; (ii) The Book of Urizen plots issues of the fact of intentionality via the split between the visionary and the rational; (iii) The Book of Ahania “turns the concept of intentionality back on itself”; and, lastly, (iv) The Book of Los expresses the need to transcend the material system.

Regarding again a work commented on above in the discussion of “Wonders Divine,” The Book of Urizen “dramatizes the process by which the Rational Soul forms the material language system” (—page 115) setting Urizen’s—the rational component’s—consolidation of language in coincidence and equivalence with Los’, the visionary component’s, isolation. In the end, the concept of intentionality is postulated as the means of transcending the restrictive effects of the language system. Demonstrations of this are in Blake’s reinterpretations of names according to kabbalistic rather than corporeal referents. An example:
The most significant, both in terms of myth and vocabulary, is the name Urizen. While probably coined as a kind of combination of the Greek for “horizon,” the Hebrew for “curse/light” of the “counselor,” and the English pun, “your reason,” now, the name is represented in terms of its occult core, the resh-zayin (raz), “secret,” hidden within Urizen.

(—“Glorious Incomprehensible,” page 116)

The final minor prophecy, The Book of Los, exposes the fallacies underlying conventional speech, but provides no alternative or transcendent system, one that would promote the visionary faculty.

The major prophecies are taken up in Chapter 5, “The Divine Intentionality: ‘my supreme delight.’” It is in this stage that Blake’s language is transformed, not solely by his “conversion” to kabbalah but by his surrender to an apparent “external voice” dictating to him from the spirit realm. The meanings of the familiar elements also shift as Blake moves from allegory to mysticism.

If one turns to a standard discussion of Blake, one finds that “the giant Albion” is said to represent “the collective being of the English nation,” and it is left at that. This evokes an issue which Spector addresses a few places (see, in particular, the opening of her conclusion to “Glorious Incomprehensible”): Conventional wisdom would have it that Blake’s themes, his mythic structure, and his cast of allegorical characters are more or less fixed, and that a character, such as Albion, should always refer to the same thing. Hence, the conclusion drawn by such conventional wisdom is that Blake’s use of these elements is inconsistent, if not arbitrary. Spector’s analysis, with the aid of a kabbalistic (or, at least, Hebraic) reading, suggests something entirely different.

In his early works, Blake used the word [Albion] fairly conventionally, at first as a poetic name for England, and then, in America, exploiting the Latin derivation to juxtapose the leprous Urizen, ally of Albion, against Red Orc, champion of the Americas. But at some point during the composition of The Four Loas, Blake seems to have recognized the deeper significance of the lexeme. No longer a personification of the “Island White” (or a pun on the Isle of Wight), Albion assumes the dimensions of an entirely original set of roots, both found in normative Hebrew: aleph-lamed (‘el, “God”), and beit-nun (ben, “son”). As the newly discovered “son of God,” Albion is revealed to be Everyman, Blake’s Adam Rishon, created or corporeal man, an indigenous “Orc” who, analogous to the biblical prototype, embodies the individual, the race and the land.

(—“Glorious Incomprehensible,” page 129)

Spector leads us to the culmination of Blake’s development, where Blake creates a fully mystical language that, no longer interposing itself between the subjective consciousness and the ultimate referent, finally serves as the vehicle for achieving the via mystica.

(—“Glorious Incomprehensible,” page 169)

It will be interesting to see what the response of Blake scholars is to Spector’s confident presentation. From the other side—that of the kabbalah specialist—one must appreciate Spector’s care in circumscribing just which kabbalah she is talking about
and her acknowledgement that, from a traditional Jewish standpoint, Blake’s kabbalistic sources leave quite a bit to be desired, especially given that they were written or translated by Christians either for Christians or for Jews to compel their conversion.

Assuming that Spector’s thesis is correct—her argument and analysis are certainly persuasive—one can uncover much of what lay behind the progress of Blake’s obscure works as well as his methods in composing them.

—Don Karr

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1. See Spector’s article, “Kabbalistic Sources—Blake’s and His Critics,” in Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly 67, volume 17, number 3 (Winter 1983-84) for
   (i) a brief review of scholars who broach the issue of kabbalah in connection with Blake,
   (ii) a discussion of the problems surrounding the scholarly approach to kabbalah itself, and
   (iii) a survey of sources of kabbalah which could have been available to Blake.

   Spector’s other works include
   • “The Reasons for ‘Urizen’” in Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly 21, no. 4 (Spring 1988)
   • “Hebraic Etymologies of Proper Names in Blake” in Philological Quarterly 67, no. 3 (Summer 1988)
   • “Sources and Etymologies of Blake’s ‘Tirzah’” in Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly 23, no. 4 (Spring 1990)
   • “Blake as an Eighteenth-Century Hebraist” in Blake and His Bibles [LOCUST HILL LITERARY STUDIES, No. 1], edited by David V. Erdman (West Cornwall: Locust Hill Press, 1990)
   • “Blake’s Milton as Kabbalistic Vision” in Religion and Literature 25, no. 1 (Spring 1993).

Robert Wang

The Rape of Jewish Mysticism by Christian Theologians:
How the Modern Occult Movement Grew out of Renaissance Attempts to Convert the Jews

Columbia [MD]: Marcus Aurelius Press, 2001; vi + 147 pages.

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[See a description and the preface of the book at www.marcusaureliuspress.com (NO LONGER EXTANT—2009)]

IN SPITE OF the “assertive title” (the author’s term, page ii), The Rape of Jewish Mysticism by Christian Theologians by Robert Wang is a rather drab summary of well-known—and well-worn—sources. Wang does not make use of much scholarship since Gershom Scholem (works cited from 1941 and 1974) on kabbalah (though there is recourse to Moshe Idel, especially regarding Abraham Abulafia), Frances Yates (1964 and 1979) and François Secret (1964) on cabala, Charles G. Nauert (1965) on Agrippa, Peter French (1972) on Dee, etc. The scope of the book is too limited: It starts too late (nothing on Ramon Llull, thirteenth century) and ends too early (nothing on
developments of the seventeenth-through-nineteenth centuries) to fulfill the promise of its title. Moreover, Wang does not engage his thesis (i.e., the rape of Jewish mysticism) except fleetingly anywhere in the book save the preface and the brief conclusion.

*The Rape of Jewish Mysticism* does fairly distinguish the separate, if intersecting, paths of Jewish *kabbalah* and Christian *cabala*. The first chapter (of three), “Beginnings,” opens with a summary of Jewish mysticism up to the *Zohar*. The chapter is interrupted by a few pages on the *Hermetica* and then returns to “The Early Hebrew Kabbalists” (one paragraph), Isaac the Blind (three paragraphs), and Abraham Abulafia (about four pages). Thereafter, we meet the familiar Renaissance figures: Ficino, Pico, and Reuchlin. However, to tell the story from the beginning, Wang should have begun his account of Christian appropriation of Jewish mysticism in the thirteenth century—a century earlier than he did—with Ramon Lull, who was apparently the first to incorporate *kabbalah*, or *kabbalah*-like ideas, into his system and rhetoric with the aim of converting Jews. (Refer to Harvey Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity & Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century*, Leiden – Boston – Köln: Brill, 2000.)

The second chapter, “After Reuchlin,” might be useful to those who cannot read the French works of François Secret; the first half of the chapter summarizes material from *Les Kabbalistes chretiens de la Renaissance* (Paris: Dunod, 1964) on Paul Ricci, Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo, Francesco Giorgio, and others. It then discusses Agrippa (dependent on Nauert), followed by a return to Jewish *kabbalah*—that of sixteenth-century Safed—with sections on Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria.


*The Rape of Jewish Mysticism* comes to a premature halt with “Christian Kabbalah becomes Rosicrucianism,” “The Fama Fraternitas,” and “Robert Fludd.” A coda entitled “Rejected Jews” sidles up to the supposed theme of the book which is so
energetically shouted by its title. Alas, there is little more here than restatements of the obvious and speculations undermined by inadequate research: “Expulsions and forced conversions were a deeply disturbing process...” (page 140); “Perhaps, indeed, there were many ‘secret Jews,’ for whom the deeply meditative Christian Kabbalah may have been a compromise” (page 141).

In the midst of the second chapter, Wang mentions S. L. M. Mathers’ and Aleister Crowley’s compendium 777 (page 71), where he states that Francesco Giorgio’s lists of correspondences is “an early precursor” of 777. This suggests that it is to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn—which was headed by Mathers and which counted Crowley among its members—that he is ultimately leading us, namely, to the British occult of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Golden Dawn’s dogma and ritual have indeed shaped Western occultism “as it is known today” (a phrase from the back cover). Not only does Wang fail to inform us who Mathers and Crowley are, but, as already noted, he stops his account short at Robert Fludd. (Nor does Wang specify the nature of 777, which is table upon table of correspondences whose organizing principle is the ten sefirot and the twenty-two paths, i.e. the twenty-two Hebrew letters, of the kabbalistic “tree of life.”)

Wang’s omission of developments through the seventeenth-to-nineteenth centuries is all the more puzzling given the book’s subtitle, How the Modern Occult Movement Grew out of Renaissance Attempts to Convert the Jews. We could quibble over the meaning of “modern” (as it might be broadly understood in a formula such as Biblical-Talmudic-Medieval-Modern), but the full text of the back cover takes away any doubt about what “modern” refers to here: “The extraordinary story of how, from the fourteenth century on, Christian theologians used the essence of Jewish mysticism to prove the divinity of Christ, and how that effort resulted in Christian Kabbalah, in Rosicrucianism, and in all aspects of the Western occult movement as it is known today.” Further, the last paragraph of Wang’s preface begins, “By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the assimilation of Jewish Kabbalah into Western occultism was complete” (page vi).² Add to this that Wang has written on the Golden Dawn’s manner of Western occultism in books such as An Introduction to the Golden Dawn Tarot (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1979), The Secret Temple (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1980), and Qabalistic Tarot: A Textbook of Occult Philosophy (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1983—a new edition is now available from Marcus Aurelius Press [2004]).

Were Wang at the very least to get us to Christian Knorr von Rosenroth’s Kabbala denudata (Sulzbach: 1677-8, 1684), he would have accounted for of the other key source for “the Modern Occult Movement” as characterized by the Golden Dawn (the most important single source being Agrippa’s De occulta philosophia—whether by way of Barrett’s Magus or not). Indeed, from the Latin of Kabbala denudata, S. L. M. Mathers translated to English three tracts from the Zohar (with von Rosenroth’s—and his own—elaborations) under the title The Kabbalah Unveiled (1887; this title is still available in several versions). Kabbala denudata was source to many other influential occultists, the best-known being Mme. Blavatsky and Albert Pike.
Along with the general shortcomings of the book, we must also endure its many ill-conceived phrases: (referring to the Zohar) “The book ... became shrouded in mystery” (page 11); “The system of Abulafia was quite unique” (page 21); (about Agrippa) “He was the turning point toward modern occultism” (page 76); and (also about Agrippa) “... he became the leader of a relatively avant garde group of scholars ...” (page 80). All this and the topic-by-topic rehash from too few sources suggest a hasty scholar writing at his material. Contrast Wang’s work with Philip Beitchman’s Alchemy of the Word (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), where a clear dependence on secondary sources does not stand in the way of a provocative and nuanced discussion.

Some of Wang’s statements are simply wrong: (writing about Lurianic Kabbalah after 1590 in a section on Jewish developments) “Of course, Luria’s work was only of use to, and understood by, a very small elite” (page 98); while Wang cites Scholem’s Major Trend in Jewish Mysticism, he seems to have missed the second part of Scholem’s “Seventh Lecture: Isaac Luria and His School.”

There are also mistakes and omissions in the notes.

The need for an up-to-date introductory book on Christian Cabala has certainly not been filled by The Rape of Jewish Mysticism. The fault is not with the effort to write a “popular,” accessible book. There are a number of well-done works on Jewish mysticism aimed at a general audience, e.g., Neil Asher Silberman’s Heavenly Powers: Unraveling the Secret History of the Kabbalah (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1998) and J. H. Laenen’s Jewish Mysticism: An Introduction (Louisville – London – Leiden: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). Even more specialized books, such as Lawrence Fine’s excellent study of Isaac Luria, Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) have been written so as not to exclude the non-scholarly reader.

—Don Karr

Notes:


2. What was, in fact, initially assimilated into Western occultism bore little resemblance to Jewish Kabbalah.

Menahem Recanati – Commentary on the Daily Prayers:
Flavius Mithridates’ Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text,
and an English Version
eddited with introduction and notes by Giacomo Corazzol, two volumes, 860 pages
[THE KABBALISTIC LIBRARY OF GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA 3]


The two generous volumes of Commentary on the Daily Prayers serve several purposes:

1. The Hebrew text is a critical edition of Perush ha-Tefillot, “the last work he [Recanati] undertook” (HEBREW SECTION: pages 1*-151*).
2. As with the two previous monographs in the KABBALISTIC LIBRARY series, the Latin translation of Commentary on the Daily Prayers by the Jewish convert Flavius Mithridates (pages 163-373) presents an important kabbalistic source work for Pico.
3. The English translation (pages 375-681)—from Mithridates’ Latin—is the first English edition of any complete text by Recanati.*

Giacomo Corazzol describes Mithridates’ rendition of Commentary on the Daily Prayers as a combination of strict word-for-word translation and glosses which “provided Pico with a sort of textbook” on Jewish liturgy and kabbalah (INTRODUCTION, page 108). But before taking up Mithridates’ Latin translation in detail (pages 98-161), Corazzol offers a full discussion of the fourteenth-century Italian kabbalist Menahem Recanati, his works and his sources (noting in particular Ibn Malka’s Commentary on the Daily Prayers and Ya’aqov ben Ya’aqov ha-Kohen’s Commentary on the Chariot), culminating in an analysis of Recanati’s theosophy and theurgy (pages 17-97). While Recanati is often mentioned in studies of kabbalah, cited along with “such seminal figures as Maimonides [and] Nahmanides” (Giller, 1993—page 5), and referred to as an “important Italian kabbalist” (Fine, 2003†—page 103), nowhere else do we find anything like “[t]he detailed reconstruction presented by Corazzol,” which, series editor Giulio Busi adds, “is even more important if seen within the framework of Pico’s Conclusiones, since Count della Mirandola used Recanati as a veritable encyclopedia for kabbalistic texts that he could not otherwise read” (Busi’s PREFACE to Commentary on the Daily Prayers, page 11). Corazzol’s introduction is the first comprehensive treatment of Recanati in English.††

Recanati’s Commentary on the Torah has been shown to have been a key source for Pico’s Conclusiones. Refer in particular to the numerous references in Chaim Wirszubski’s Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter with Jewish Mysticism (Cambridge – London: Harvard University Press, 1989), where, in identifying sources for points of Pico’s kabbalah, Wirszubski quotes—in English—the Commentary on the Torah dozens of times. These translations, however, are not rendered from Mithridates’ translation, which “seems to have been lost almost completely” (Busi’s PREFACE, page 9), but rather from Recanati’s Hebrew text. In contrast, the Commentary on the Daily Prayers is quoted by Wirszubski, using Mithridates’ Latin version which is fully preserved, only twice: on page 52, regarding the word AMEN, and on page 149 on “[t]he intrusion of magic into the mysticism of prayer.” Thus, the present edition of the Commentary on the Daily Prayers fills a major gap in Wirszubski’s study, just as the first volume in

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the KABBALISTIC LIBRARY series did: The Great Parchment (2004) published (in Hebrew, Mithridates’ Latin, and English) for the first time a work not mentioned at all by Wirszubski. I must hasten to add, however, that noting these lacunæ is not intended to cast criticism upon Wirszubski’s remarkable pioneering work.

The theosophy and theurgy of Recanati’s commentaries are founded on the idea that “the perfection of the supernal merkavah [the upper world] depends on the perfection of the inferior man [the microcosm]” (Commentary on the Torah, fol. 51b, cited in the INTRODUCTION, page 71 [my brackets—DK]). This contingent perfection can be obtained through the perfection of one’s thought, speech, and action (or gestures) in prayer, a “formula drawn by Recanati from the Sefer ha-Yihud” (INTRODUCTION, page 74). Prayer is instrumental in the perfection process, for “[e]ach word of the prayers [elaborated by the sages] is like a tessera [a glass or marble tile] of mosaic, whose proper interpretation can turn into a milestone for setting out in the celestial streets of emanation” (INTRODUCTION, page 80 [my brackets—DK]).

Giulio Busi concludes his preface (page 12), Recanati’s Commentary on the Daily Prayers was apt to raise Pico’s interest, especially since it offered a well-structured attempt to define a link between earthly liturgy and intradivine life. While reading the Commentary, the Count must have immediately perceived quite a few similarities with Neoplatonic theurgy, and Mithridates did his best to put his pupil on the right track. It is therefore not surprising that Corazzol was able to detect a most probable influence of Recanati’s Commentary on Pico’s Orphic theses, which are replete with theurgical hints. To the daring Neoplatonic magician that Pico was, the mystical sympathies between below and above sketched by the Italian kabbalist issued a challenge that could only be accepted.

Readership: those interested in Jewish mystical theology, kabbalah, Christian Hebraism and the Christian reception of the kabbalah, Medieval and Renaissance religious and philosophical history, Neoplatonism, and European humanism.

—Don Karr
February 2009

* Along with the many passages from Recanati’s Commentary on the Torah translated in Wirszubski’s Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter, a page-and-a-half excerpt from Commentary on the Torah (ff. 3r-v) is given in English (pages 217-8) and Hebrew (page 233), and “thematically summarized” (pages 218-9) in CHAPTER SEVEN, “The Beginning and End: Bereshit and the Sabbath,” in Crofton Black, Pico’s HEPTAPLUS and Biblical Hermeneutics (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2006).


‡ In Hebrew, there is Moshe Idel’s R. Menahem Rekanati, ha-mekubal (Tel Aviv, Schocken, 1998), which is the first of an intended two-volume study. My thanks to Joel Hecker for calling this work to my attention.

Sefer ha-Niqqud [= BOOK OF PUNCTUATION], from Joseph Gikatilla's early “philosophical-kabbalistic” period, is given in three versions: (1) a critical edition of the Hebrew text (the short version used by Mithridates); (2) a transcript of the Latin translation of Mithridates; and (3) an English translation from Mithridates' Latin.

Sefer ha-Niqqud is a treatise on “The Mystical Connotations of the [Hebrew] Vowels,” showing a play of influences, primarily between the scholasticism of Maimonides and the metaphysics of Sefer Yesirah. The text bears comparison to Gikatilla's Sha'ar ha-Niqqud, which is the third section (of three) of his Ginnat Egoz,* which is also from his early period.

Yet another work by Gikatilla with a similar title, Sod ha-Niqqud on the secrets of the vowels, is from his later “sefirotic,” or “theosophical-kabbalistic,” period.

Sefer ha-Niqqud commences with an introduction which

condenses the course of [Gikatilla’s] thought in a concise fashion ... followed by a general discourse on the vowels with respect to their effects on letters, the spheres and the unique name of God. Thereafter the vowels holam, qamas hataf, qamas, suruq, hiruq, sere, segol, sva’ and patah are treated one by one in detail. The treatise concludes with a presentation of all six combinations of the word ‘holam,’ that is to say hamal, lehem, lemoah, mahal and melah. (—pages 58-59).

Within Sefer ha-Niqqud,

it was one of Giqatilla’s main concerns to show that the Hebrew vowels take part in the theory of creation expressed in the Sefer yesirah because to him the vowels are the guarantors of motion and thus the mainspring of the process of creation. (—page 87)

The vowels “transform [the letters’] potency into actuality.” (ibid)

At the opening of a subchapter on GOD’S UNIQUE NAME IN RELATION TO THE VOWELS (§ 6), Martini offers this assessment (—page 118):

Giqatilla’s entire work, whether in his early philosophical-linguistic period or in his later sefirotic phase, is determined by the extensive consideration of the unique name of God, the tetragramm, and His other appellations such as Adonay, Elohim, or Eheyeh. The concept of the tetragramm emerges as the center of Giqatilla’s thought, and this concept of God’s unique name underwent interesting modifications, depending on the particular philosophical or religious influences to which he was exposed. Hence, a detailed study of the different perceptions that Giqatilla developed with respect to the tetragramm could serve as a mirror of his intellectual development.**
In § 7 of the introduction, ATTEMPT AT AN INTERPRETATION, Martini offers “a new approach toward defining Gikatilla’s position within Spanish mysticism of the 13th century” (—page 130), challenging conclusions of her predecessors along the way, e.g.,

Thus, according to Giqatilla, there is no conflict between allegorical and symbolical interpretation of the Torah as Scholem assumed, for the mystic strives to exceed allegory by accepting it as a method of harmonizing scientific knowledge with the Torah in order to reach the symbol as an image of God’s very own essence. However, there is no evidence for Idel’s thesis that Maimonides’ rational approach to ma’aseh bereshit and ma’aseh merkava launched a positive or negative discussion within mystical circles in Gikatilla’s writings—neither in his early works or in his later teachings. (—page 158)

Discussion of Gikatilla’s development from his early works to his later teachings is the core of the introduction’s § 7, describing it as a “process of disengagement from Aristotelian approaches” which “culminates in the Ša’are orah,” Gikatilla’s classic account of the sefirot.* With what I will call an efficient subtlety, Martini traces the influences affecting this process in detail.

Thus far, I have discussed only Martini’s introduction, which, like Giacomo Corazzol’s introduction to Menahem Recanati’s Commentary on the Daily Prayers from the same series**, constitutes a substantial (145-page) study not only of the featured text but of its author as well.

Martini describes Mithridates’ Latin translation, identifying the “reading aids” supplied by the translator to help Pico through passages which, in “pure translation” would have been utterly opaque. Mithridates’ “clarifying comments…distinguish themselves for being concise and faithful to the source.” (—page 174) There are, however, Mithridates’ more “interpretive comments,” designed to prompt the interest of “Renaissance philosophers such as Ficino or Pico” (—page 189), discussed in Martini’s § 3. THE ASCENSION OF THE SOUL TO THE GREATEST FELICITAS. Further, there are Mithridates’ infrequent CHRISTIANIZING INTERPOLATIONS (§ 4.), of which Martini remarks on two examples.

Martini’s analysis of the text shows how the concepts generated by the Latin versions of works such as Sefer ha-Niqqud position themselves in the emerging Christian kabbalah of Pico and Johannes Reuchlin, noting in particular Reuchlin’s notion of “the close affinity between the kabbalah and Pythagorean doctrine.” (—page 188) Martini concludes, however, that “the choice of the Sefer ha-niqqud for Pico’s kabbalistic library remains a riddle” (—page 218), for other works, i.e., Ginnat Egoz and Sha’are Orah, “the latter actually having been recommended to [Pico] by Del Medigo” (—ibid), would seem more fitting choices.

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—Don Karr, March 2011