Notes on the Study of Early Kabbalah in English

with section on the

Hasidei Ashkenaz
to which is appended

KABBALAH STUDY: JEWISH MYSTICISM IN ENGLISH (1996)

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The phase of Jewish mysticism conventionally referred to as “early kabbalah” begins with Sefer ha-Bahir (ca. 1180) and ends with the Zohar (1270-1300). The major features and figures of this span can be outlined thus:*

A. Early Kabbalah

1. Formative Period
   a. Sefer ha-Bahir (1180)
   b. Provence (ca. 1200)
      i. Isaac the Blind (1160-1235)
      ii. The Iyyun School (early to mid-1200s)
   c. Gerona (ca. 1200-1250)
      i. Ezra ben Solomon (older contemporary of Azriel)
      ii. Azriel (ca. 1160-ca. 1238)
      iii. Nahmanides (1194-1270)
      iv. Jacob ben Sheshet (contemporary of Nahmanides)
      v. Sefer ha-Temunah (ca. 1300)
      vi. Sefer ha-Yashar (13th century)
   d. Castile (active 1260-80)
      i. Jacob ha-Cohen (brother of Isaac ha-Cohen)
      ii. Isaac ha-Cohen (d. ca. 1300)
      iii. Moses of Burgos (ca. 1230-1300)

2. Developmental Period
   a. Abraham Abulafia (1240-1291)
   b. Moses de Leon (1240-1305)
   c. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid (ca. 1240-ca. 1320)
   d. Joseph Gikatilla (1248-1325)
   e. Menahem Recanati (1250-1310)
   f. Isaac of Acre, or Acco (1250-1340)
   g. Bahya ben Asher (1255-1340)

* This outline is offered with full awareness that it gives an oversimplified picture of the development of early kabbalah. The outline on page 26 of pre-kabbalistic streams is similarly convenient.
Four books cover the FORMATIVE PERIOD; they can serve as the basis of a study of early kabbalah in English.

  
  OK is from the German *Ursprung und Anfange der Kabbala* (1962), translated by Allan Arkush, edited by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky; *Ursprung...* is an expansion of the Hebrew work, *Reshith ha-Qabbalah* (1948).

- Dan, Joseph; and Keiner, Ronald C. *The Early Kabbalah* [THE CLASSICS IN WESTERN SPIRITUALITY] (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986)—hereafter EK.*
  
  EK is an anthology of texts which serves as an excellent complement to OK.

  
  JMII is a collection of Dan’s articles covering early Kabbalah, concentrating on *Sefer ha-Bahir*, and the Ashkenazi Hasidim (see below, Pre-Kabbalistic Streams of Jewish Mysticism, § 5. Hasidei Ashkenaz).


  To state my thesis in broad terms, a major factor that led to the development of Kabbalah was the adoption by the first Kabbalists of a philosophic ethos that, under the influence of the newly emergent Hebrew philosophic materials, had taken root in Jewish communities in Languedoc and Catalonia. This was an ethos in which a sort of meta-reflection on classical Jewish texts and, in particular, the investigation of God as the height of that reflection, was accorded great religious significance. It was their adoption of such an ethos, and the seriousness with which they took it, that spurred the early Kabbalists to actively develop and expand their traditions. (—page 3)

See also


  See CHAPTER TWO, “Suckling the Divine Overflow in Early Kabbalah,” which

  ...looks at three influential early kabbalistic works that develop and incorporate imagery associated with the nursing divine: *Sefer ha-Bahir* (The Book of Brightness), Isaac the Blind’s *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* (The Book of Formation), and Ezra of Gerona’s *Perush le-Shir-ha-Shirim* (Commentary on the Song of Songs). (—page 12)


  While Mottolese’s work covers a broad range (Midrash, Maimonides, and mysticism), the core of the book (from CHAPTER 6 on) treats early kabbalah “from Provence to the Zohar.” The kabbalists whom Mottolese draws upon most are Ezra of Gerona, Nahmanides, and, from a generation later, R. Bahya ben Asher (d. 1340).

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* From the Depth of the Well: An Anthology of Jewish Mysticism, edited by Ariel Evan Mayse (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2014) contains excerpts of writings from this period drawn from Dan and Keiner’s Early Kabbalah (noted above) with passages from Ezra ben Solomon from Seth Brody’s *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (listed below in § 1.c.1).
“Analogy,” which elsewhere might be termed “correspondence,” requires the notion of a sympathetic universe as epitomized by a phrase like “As above, so below.” If nothing else, kabbalah is about analogy.

- _____.
  Within the confines of his subject, Mottolese covers the entire spectrum of the current bibliography, from the formative period to the developmental period and the Zohar.

  “This study will focus on kabbalistic texts produced in Spain, mainly in the region of Castile-Leon, during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Kabbalists whose works will be of particular importance include Joseph Gikatilla, Moses de Leon, Joseph of Hamadan, David ben Yehudah he-Hasid, and to a lesser extent, Joseph ben Todros ha-Levi Abulafia and Isaac ibn Sahula. Occasional reference will be made, as a point of comparison, to kabbalists who lived and worked either earlier in the thirteenth century (such as Ezra and Azriel of Gerona, Nahmanides, Asher ben David, and the circle of Iyyun texts, or ‘Books of Contemplation’), or those who lived contemporaneously with the kabbalists in question but outside the region of Castile, mainly in Catalonia and Aragon (prominent examples would include Bahya ben Asher from Segovia and the students of Nahmanides living in the region of Catalonia), where kabbalists were somewhat more conservative. Notably absent from this list is Abraham Abulafia…” (pages 11-12).

To the above books, add the following dissertations:

  “Current discussion of Kabbalistic spirituality, originating with Gershom Scholem, tends to differentiate between the ‘theurgic’ and ‘transformative’ sides of Kabbalistic practice and to present them as constituting divergent goals for mystical intentionality and life. Our analysis of thirteenth-century sources dealing with contemplative prayer and the priestly cult indicate that on the contrary, the theurgic efficacy of a Kabbalist’s worship is a product of his experiential adhesion and absorption into Divinity.” (from the ABSTRACT, p. vii)

  Chapters include “The Opening to Myth in the Thought of Abraham bar Hiyya,” “Myth and Philosophy in Sefer ha-Bahir,” “Ascent and Decent” (in Sefer ha-Bahir, R. Jacob ben Sheshet, and R. Azriel of Gerona), and “Myth and Discursive Thinking in R. Asher b. David.”

  Focusing on the earliest kabbalists (e.g., Isaac the Blind, Ezra ben Solomon, and particularly Azriel of Gerona), Goldberg considers the role of individuality in mystical phenomena, i.e., mystical union and the ritual actions which precipitate it. See below, page 7, § 1.1b.
Formative Period

1. a. **Sefer ha-Bahir (BOOK OF BRIGHTNESS):**

The earliest work considered “kabbalistic” is *Sefer ha-Bahir*. There are substantial discussions of this text in OK (pp. 35-48, 49-198) and Dan’s JMII (xiv-lvii, 1-18—see below in “Other references”). Translated excerpts are given in EK (pp. 57-69).

Using Scholem’s observations as a starting point, Ronit Meroz has presented her conclusions regarding the three distinct strata of *Sefer ha-Bahir* in several lectures (including “A Bright Light in the East—The Babylonian Stratum in Sefer ha-Bahir,” Session: HERMENEUTICAL REFLECTIONS ON EARLY KABBALAH at the Association for Jewish Studies Thirty-fourth Annual Conference, Los Angeles: December 17, 2002) and in her Hebrew article, “A Bright Light in the East: On the Time and Place of Part of *Sefer ha-Bahir*” in Da’at: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah 49 ([Ramat-Gan]: Universitat Bar-Ilan, 2002):

- about half was written in Provence in the 12th or 13th century
- most of the rest was written in the Jewish Babylonian congregation which lived in the 9th and 10th centuries; this stratum has several layers within it and includes Raza Rabba
- a few paragraphs were written earlier in the land of Israel, some time before the Babylonian strata

Regarding all this, refer to Meroz’ articles in English:


Fixing a date for *Sefer ha-Bahir* is also taken up in Giulio Busi’s FOREWORD to Saverio Campaninini’s edition of Mithridates’ Latin translation of the *Bahir* (noted immediately below). Busi determines that the redaction of the *Bahir* must have been sometime after 1161, namely after Bahya ibn Pakuda’s *Duties of the Heart* and Yehuda HaLevi’s *Kuzari* had been translated from their original Arabic into Hebrew; one, the other, or both are the probable source of the *Bahir*’s “hidden quote” concerning “whoever frees his heart from worldly occupations” in its definition of the “Merkavah mystic.” Regarding further thematic sources for the *Bahir* coming from the *Kuzari*, Busi notes the likelihood that Yehudah ha-Lewi’s book influenced directly the redactor of the *Bahir*, since, between the final redaction of this one in Southern France and the translation of the *Kuzari* into Hebrew, there is a demonstrable relation in space and time. As a matter of fact, the highly positive meaning of the heavenly agriculture present in the *Bahir* is quite close to Yehudah ha-Lewi’s theories centered on the election of Israel. (The Book of *Bahir*—page 32)

*This paper is now at ACADEMIA: [https://www.academia.edu/2049611/7._The_Middle_Eastern_Origins_of_Kabbalah](https://www.academia.edu/2049611/7._The_Middle_Eastern_Origins_of_Kabbalah)
The notion of *Sefer ha-Bahir’s* being the “first kabbalistic work” has been called into question. Note Jonathan Dauber’s conclusion (*Knowledge of God*, page 3): “[T]he *Bahir* did not in fact become known until the thirteenth century and ... its designation as a Kabbalistic work is problematic.” (see *Knowledge of God*, CHAPTER FIVE) Daniel Abrams, an acknowledged source for Dauber, raises similar issues, questioning whether *Sefer ha-Bahir* is, in fact, kabbalistic—or even a work (see Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory..., CHAPTER 2, “The Interpolation of Marginal Glosses: ‘The Shekhinah’ and the Theosophic Revisions of Early Manuscripts of the Book *Bahir*”).

There are six English extended translations of *Sefer ha-Bahir*:


  The English version is from the Latin of Mithridates, composed around 1486.


  From the Amsterdam (1651) edition.


  “Drawing from both the [Reuven] Margolioth (*Sefer ha-Bahir* [Jerusalem: Mossad Rav Kook, 1994] and [Daniel] Abrams (*The Book Bahir...* [Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 1991 and 1994]) texts, for this collection I have selected fifty-one of the most piquant and ... accessible passages, enough to allow the reader to see the full scope of the *Bahir*’s interests, but sparing the reader both the seriously fragmented sections and often repetitive nature of the complete work”) (— page 8).


  Based primarily on the edition by Reuven Margolioth (Jerusalem: Mossad Rav Kook, 1951 and 1994), which “integrat[es] all the readings from three late manuscripts, including words and phrases not found in the early manuscript witnesses.”


  Translation with extensive commentary. Siet notes at the beginning: “Special thanks for the inspiration of Aryeh Kaplan and his translation of the *Bahir* that is the basis of all the commentary herein presented.”

Excerpts of the *Bahir* appear in the following:


- Dan/Kiener. EK (pp. 57-69).


  Dauber translates and comments on *Bahir* §§ 46, 48, 53, and 96.
• _____, STANDING ON THE HEADS OF PHILOSOPHERS... (noted above, page 3):
  CHAPTER 2, Section D, offers a “Textual Analysis of Sefer ha-Bahir, Sections 32-60” CHAPTER 3 translates § 60
  APPENDIX 2 translates parts of § 32.
  Finkel offers Bahir §§ 1, 3, 125, 126, 175, 176, and 195.
  Hoffman includes Bahir §§ 1, 2, 3, 5, 194, and 195.
  With commentary, Horowitz translates §§ 23, 119, and 195.
  Matt translates §§ 22 (THE COSMIC TREE), 104 (THE RIGHTEOUS PILLAR), and 150 (STUMBLING).
  Seven passages translated: Pars. 3, 37, 38, 54, 76, 131-2, and 181. based on the Hebrew edition of Reuven Margolioth (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1951) with recourse to Alan Arkush’s translation of excerpts in Gershom Scholem’s Origins of the Kabbalah.

Other references:
• Dauber, Jonathan. Knowledge of God:
  - CHAPTER 5. “Investigating God in Sefer ha-Bahir”
• _____, STANDING ON THE HEADS OF PHILOSOPHERS (noted above, page 3):
  - CHAPTER 2. MYTH AND PHILOSOPHY IN SEFER HA-BAHIR
  - CHAPTER 3: A. SEFER HA-BAHIR: § 30
  - APPENDIX 2. § 32 OF SEFER HA-BAHIR IN LIGHT OF EARLY KABBALISTIC SOURCES
The fragments of material that were to become Sefer ha-Bahir made their way to Provence where they fed the development of a mystical school, ca. 1200. This school’s second generation was headed by R. Isaac the Blind (d. 1235), “…the first Jewish scholar whom we know by name that dedicated all his creative powers to the field of Kabbalah” (Dan’s introduction to EK, p. 31). On Isaac the Blind, see EK (pp. 31-4, translations on pp. 71-86), and OK (pp. 248-309).

R. Isaac’s major work, Commentary on Sefer Yezirah, “the first systematic treatise of Kabbalah,” is fully analyzed and translated by Mark Brian Sendor in The Emergence of Provençal Kabbalah: Rabbi Isaac the Blind’s Commentary on Sefer Yezirah,
Volumes I & II (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge: Harvard University, 1994). In *Mystical Union, Individuality, and Individuation in Provencal and Catalonian Kabbalah* (noted above, page 3), Yecheil Shalom Goldberg analyzes key passages from R. Isaac the Blind’s *Commentary on Sefer Yezira* as well as passages from the works of R. Isaac’s nephew, R. Asher ben David, and R. Azriel of Gerona (see below).

Further references:

Also circulating in Provence in the early-to-mid 1200s were the writings of the *Iyyun* (Contemplation) school. The *kabbalah* of these strange texts is quite different from the doctrines which developed into classical *kabbalah*. See EK (p. 26, translations on pp. 43-56, “Book of Speculation,” “Fountain of Wisdom,” and “Explanation of the Four-Lettered Name”), OK (pp. 309-363), and especially Mark Verman’s study, *The Books of Contemplation: Medieval Jewish Mystical Sources* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992—a revision of Verman’s Ph.D. dissertation, *Sifrei ha-Iyyun*, delivered at Harvard, 1984), which includes translations of several major texts of this group.

On the *Iyyun* school, see
- Dan, Joseph. *The ‘Unique Cherub’ Circle: A School of Mystics and Esoterics in Medieval Germany* [TEXTS AND STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN JUDAISM, 15] (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999); comments regarding the *Iyyun* school, or “circle,” appear throughout.

1. c. Gerona (Catalonia):

The most prolific circle of kabbalists from the period before the Zohar was that of Gerona, which followed up on the teachings of R. Isaac the Blind. The primary figures of this group were (1) R. Ezra ben Solomon and (2) R. Azriel, who established a school which included (3) R. Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides) and (4) R. Jacob ben Sheshet.
On the Gerona circle, see EK (pp. 34-36), OK (pp. 365-475), and Moshe Idel’s article, “Some Remarks on Ritual and Mysticism in Geronese Kabbalah,” in *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, vol. 3, issue 1 (Harwood Academic Publishers GmbH, 1993).

Other references:

1. **R. Ezra ben Solomon:**
   - Includes excerpts from R. Ezra’s Perush ‘al Shir ha-Shirim and a letter to R. Abraham on God’s garments in English.
   - Along with R. Ezra’s commentary are the “Hidden Midrash to the Book of Lamentations” from the Zohar Hadash and R. Bahya ben Asher of Sargossa’s commentary on Genesis 1:1-2 (composed 1291).
   - A passage attributed to R. Ezra, on pp. 65-8.
   - R. Ezra’s detailed kabbalistic commentary on the meanings of the mizvot.

2. **R. Azriel:**
   - EK pp. 87-108, “Explanation of the Ten Sefirot” and “Commentary to Talmudic Legends.”
Azriel’s questions and answers about the sefirot, along with Blaha’s ranging commentary in the form of endnotes.

- Goldberg, Joel R. (= Yechiel Shalom Goldberg) “Azriel of Gerona: A Phenomenology of Individuality” = CHAPTER 6 of MYSTICAL UNION, INDIVIDUALITY, AND INDIVIDUATION IN PROVENÇAL AND CATALONIAN.

3. Nahmanides (1194-1270):

• Dauber, Jonathan. Knowledge of God, noted above, p. 2.
• Mottolese, Maurizio. Analogy in Midrash and Kabbalah (noted above, page 2-3).


4. R. Jacob ben Sheshet


• Dauber, Jonathan. Knowledge of God, noted above, p. 2.

• ______. STANDING ON THE HEADS OF PHILOSOPHERS, noted above, page 3.


5. **Sefer ha-Temunah [ShT]**

A treatise often cited by the Gerona circle, ShT expounds upon the doctrine of the shemittot (COSMIC CYCLES). References: OK pp. 460-75; and G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 77-86.

Refer also to

6. **Sefer ha-Yashar [ShY]**

Scholem placed this tract “in the circle of the Kabbalists of Gerona in approximately 1260.” Indeed, it is generally believed that ShY was written by a kabbalist who attempted to render his kabbalistic ideas more acceptable—and accessible—by using the language of ethics and philosophy. Shimon Shokek argues for Rabbi Jonah Gerondi (13th century) as the possible, if not probable, author. Some traditions attribute ShY to Rabbenu Tam from the end of the 14th century.

References:

7. **A Commentary to the Ten Sefirot**

In “A Commentary to the Ten Sefirot from Early Thirteenth-Century Catalonia” (in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, vol. 30, edited by Daniel Abrams, Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2013), Abrams offers a synoptic edition of six manuscripts, with an English translation, based on MS London Reg. 16 A x (Margolioth 755), chosen “because it lacks many of the scribal errors that mar the other manuscripts” (page 15). “In some manuscripts there is an attribution to Nachmanides which was quite common with short, anonymous texts which were copied in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries” (p. 11).

1.d. **Castile:**

In the second half of the 13th century, a circle of kabbalists grew around the brothers R. Jacob and R. Isaac ha-Cohen (or Kohen), along with their pupil Moses ben Solomon ben Simeon of Burgos. Scholem refers to their developments as “the Gnostic...
reaction”—reaction, that is, to the philosophic leanings of the Gerona mystics (ref. Scholem, *Kabbalah* [1974], pp. 55-6). Joseph Dan points out, however, that

The two brothers presented two different conceptions of the celestial and divine worlds. While Rabbi Jacob followed the traditions of the merkavah exegesis of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms and other earlier Jewish scholars, Rabbi Isaac adopted the basic concepts of the ten divine emanations, the *sefirot*, as described in the writings of Rabbi Isaac the Blind of Provence and Rabbi Azriel of Gerona. To their teachings, Rabbi Isaac added a new, revolutionary dimension: he claimed that parallel to the *sefirot* on the holy side, the right, there are evil *sefirot* on the left. (—Dan, “Conflicting Views of the Origins of Evil...,” in *Envisioning Judaism* [noted immediately below], page 823)

References to the Cohens:

- EK pp. 36-7; translations 151-182, “Explanations of the Letters” and “Treatise on the Left Emanation”; OK pp. 355-64
  
  Dan devotes the last half of his paper to “The Theodicy of Rabbi Moses of Burgos in *The Pillar on the Left*,” offering a comparative analysis of this work and Rabbi Isaac’s *Treatise on the Emanations on the Left*.


On Castilian *kabbalah* further, see


Kanarfogel’s article leads us to a later phase of Castilian *kabbalah*—the subject of Hartley Lachter’s *Kabballistic Revolution* (see above, page 3), which treats the writings of Joseph Gikatilla, Moses de Leon, Joseph of Hamadan, and David ben Yehudah he-Hasid—what we call here the “Developmental Period.”
Developmental Period

2. a. Abraham Abulafia: Abulafia is the focus of Scholem’s 4th lecture in Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. Unlike the developing theosophical stream of kabbalah, Abulafia sought a system of ecstatic experiential kabbalah. Refer to the following:

TEXTS:

  “From Sha’eri Zedek [Gates of Justice],” “The Question of Prophecy,” and selections from Haye Olam ha-Ba [The Book of Eternal Life or The Book of the Life of the Afterlife], and Sefer ha-Ot [The Book of the Letter].
  See also the section on Abulafia (§ 9) in Tree: A = ו, edited by David Meltzer (Santa Barbara: Christopher Books, Winter 1970), which contains an article on Abulafia by Gershon Scholem, the same translation of Sha’eri Zedek as in the Path of the Names, the fourth, fifth and final section of the sixth sections of Sefer ha-Ot, “Be Prepared for Thy God” and “2 Prophetic Poems” by Abulafia.
  While, it is apparent that this work reflects his teachings, Abulafia did not write this work, which is generally referred to as “the anonymous Sefer ha-Tseruf” (e.g., by Moshe Idel, “TA’ANUG: Erotic Delights from Kabbalah to Hasidim,” in Hidden Intercourse, page 126—see below under “Idel”). Even so, Aryeh Kaplan states, Abulafia wrote much about permutation and combination of letters, devoting his entire Sefer Ha-Tseruf (BOOK OF BLENDINGS) to the subject. There, however, he writes very little regarding the actual method in which one makes use of such permutations. There is, however, one place where Abulafia goes into this at length, and this is in his Otzar Eden HaGanuz.
  (—Meditation and Kabbalah, page 83)
• _____. Sheva Netivot Ha-Torah – The Seven Paths of Torah, integral edition in English and Hebrew (Belize City: Providence University, 2006).
• _____. Sitrei Torah: Secrets of the Torah, volumes 1 and 2, translated by Yaron Eden Hadani and Alexandru Munteanu (ENGLISH EDITION – Belize City: Providence University, 2009).
• _____. Ve-Zot Li-Yehuda – And This Is for Yehuda, edited by Fabrizio Del Tin (eUniversity.pub, 2018).


“In particular, Rabbi Albotini followed a system advanced by Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia that is generally referred to as ‘ecstatic’ or ‘prophetic’ Kabbalah, as outlined in Abulafia’s Sefer ha-Or (Book of the Sign).”


—passages from “[Abulafia’s unpublished] writings,” from Hayyei ha-Olam ha-Ba, and from Sha’arei Tzedek, which was written by a disciple of Abulafia’s.


Includes passages from Otzar Eden ha-Ganuz, Metzaref la-Shekel, and Sefer ha-Or.


Matt includes excerpts from Abulafia’s works: Mafteh ha-Tokhahot (p. 21), Hayyei ha-Olam ha-Ba (pp. 103-104), Sha’arei Tzedek (by an anonymous student of Abulafia’s, pp. 105-107), Otsar Eden Ganuz (p. 111)


“As Moshe Idel demonstrated, this book is incorrectly attributed to Rabbi Shem Tov de Leon. Its apparently true author is a direct disciple of Avraham Abulafia, Natan ben Saadyah Harar.”

(Fabrizio Lanza’s PREFACE, page vi).

STUDIES


While Abraham Abulafia is not the only mystic discussed in this book, he figures most prominently throughout. See in particular, CHAPTER 3, “The One Out There: Autoscopic Phenomena in Jewish Mysticism” (pages 35-84).

• Arzy, Shahar; Idel, Moshe; Landis, Theodor; and Blanke, Olaf. “Speaking with One’s Self: Autoscopic Phenomena in Writings from the Ecstatic Kabbalah,” in Journal of Consciousness Studies: Controversies in Science & the Humanities, Volume 12, Number 11 (Exeter: Imprint Academic, November 2005), pages 4-29.

  1. Essays in Life and Thought Presented in Honor of S. W. Baron, edited by J. L. Blau (New York, Columbia University Press, 1959);
Grateful acknowledgment is made to those who have influenced my work and to those who have helped me in my research.

   Quotes the studies of Adolph Jellinek and Gershom Scholem on Abulafia.
   • Bokser, Ben Zion. The Jewish Mystical Tradition (1981), § 9: “Abraham Abulafia”
     Quotes the studies of Adolph Jellinek and Gershom Scholem on Abulafia.
   • Hames, Harvey J. “A Seal within a Seal: The Imprint of Sufism in Abraham Abulafia’s Teachings,” in Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue, Volume 12, Number 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2006).
   • _____. Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder: Abraham Abulafia, the Franciscans, and Joachimism (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).
     - CHAPTER 2. Abraham Abulafia and Ecstatic Kabbalah
     - CHAPTER 3. Abraham Abulafia’s Activity in Italy
     - CHAPTER 4. Ecstatic Kabbalah as an Experiential Lore
     - CHAPTER 5. Abraham Abulafia’s Hermeneutics
     - CHAPTER 6. Eschatological Themes and Divine Names in Abulafia’s Kabbalah
     - CHAPTER 7. Abraham Abulafia and R. Menahem ben Benjamin: Thirteenth-Century Kabbalistic and Ashkenazi Manuscripts in Italy
•. “Ta’anug: Erotic Delights from Kabbalah to Hasidism,” in Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism [ARIES BOOK SERIES, vol. 7], edited by Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2008); see especially § DELIGHT IN ECSTATIC KABBALAH (pages 123-130).


Kiener, Ronald. “From Ba’al ha-Zohar to Prophet to Ecstatic: The Vicissitudes of Abulafia in Contemporary Scholarship,” in Gershom Scholem’s MAJOR TRENDS IN JEWISH MYSTICISM 50 Years After (1993).


Wolfson, Elliot R. Abraham Abulafia—Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy and Theurgy [SOURCES AND STUDIES IN THE LITERATURE OF JEWISH MYSTICISM, 7] (Culver City: Cherub Press, 2000). This work incorporates the following articles:


2. b. Moses ben Shem Tov de Leon: Listed here are items which fall distinctly outside the discussion of the Zohar and take up de Leon’s other works.


2. c. David ben Yehuda he-Hasid


  “An important feature of *The Book of Mirrors* is the large number of passages from the Zohar which Rabbi David translates into Hebrew from the original pseudo-Aramaic. His renderings represent the first lengthy translations of the Zohar. Through them we see how a contemporary Kabbalist read and understood (sometimes misunderstood) the seminal Work of Kabbalah” (—HUCA 51, p. 129, article given notice immediately below).


  A revision of Matt’s English introduction appears as “David ben Yehuda Hehasid and His Book of Mirrors” in *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 51 (Cincinnati: 1980).

2. d. **Joseph Gikatilla**


  Blickstein’s study focuses on Gikatilla’s *Ginnat ‘Egoz*.


  “Insofar as modern cartomancy is indebted to Etteilla, it is also indebted to Gikatilla.”—p. 223.


2. e. Menahem Recanati: “The first kabbalist to quote frequently and at length from the Zohar was Italian, Rabbi Menahem Recanati” (—Tishby, _The Wisdom of the Zohar_, vol. 1, pages 20-21). Recanati also drew on the Gerones kabbalists.

  A page-and-a-half excerpt from Recanati’s _Commentary on the Torah_ (ff. 3”) 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.”
  “This chapter is a transcription of Rabbi Menahem Recanati’s view on the nature of the Sefirot, whether they are co-substantial with God or only vessels” (—Part 4, CHAPTER 1, ¶1)
- Idel, Moshe. There are numerous references to Recanati in Idel’s English works.* See, in particular,
  Recanati is mentioned throughout Ogren’s book. On Recanati as source for Elia Hayyim ben Binyamin of Genazzano, see CHAPTER FIVE, pages 181-184.
  This two-volume set offers the only translation of a complete text by Recanati in English; the introduction contains the only substantial discussion of Recanati in English.
  In the process of identifying sources for points of Pico della Mirandola’s kabbalah, Wirsuwsbki quotes—in English—Recanati’s _Commentary on the Torah_ dozens of times. These translations, however, are not rendered from the Latin translation of Mithridates (Pico’s translator), which is lost, but rather from Recanati’s Hebrew text.

* In Hebrew, there is Moshe Idel’s _R. Menahem Recanati, ha-mekubal_ (Tel Aviv, Schocken, 1998), which is the first of an intended two-volume study.
2. f. Isaac of Acre (or Acco): Isaac of Acre is of particular interest given that he drew from both the Abulafian ecstatic school and the Catalanian/Castilian theosophic school, which included Nahmanides and the Zohar.

- idem. The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia. Numerous references to Isaac of Acre throughout.
- idem. Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah, especially CHAPTER 7, “Hitbodedut as Concentration in Ecstatic Kabbalah.”

2. g. Bahya ben Asher of Sargossa

- Mottolese, Maurizio. Analogy in Midrash and Kabbalah (noted above, pages 2-3).
Other books, chapters, and articles on Early Kabbalah


  Touches on Isaac the Blind, Ezra ben Shlomo, Azriel of Gerona, Jacob bar Sheshet, and the treatise Iggeret HaKodesh.


  “The Commentary of the Sefirot is a veritable treasury of Kabbalistic, pseudepigraphic, and literary works of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a few of which are not preserved elsewhere.”

  (—page 22)


• _____, “Samael and the Problem of Jewish Gnosticism,” in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, edited by Alfred L. Ivry, Elliot R. Wolfson, and Allan Arkush (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998); also in Dan’s JMII.


• _____, “Jewish Mysticism among the Jews of Arab/Moslem Lands,” in *The Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry*, edited by Zion Zohar (February 2007); on-line at [http://sephardic.fiu.edu/journal/JSSMJinsidecover.htm](http://sephardic.fiu.edu/journal/JSSMJinsidecover.htm) [DEFUNCT LINK]

• _____, “Kabbalah and Elites in Thirteenth-Century Spain,” in *Mediterranean Historical Review*, Volume 9, Number 1 (London: Frank Cass/Tel Aviv University, 1994).


• Kiener, Ronald. “The Status of Astrology in the Early Kabbalah: From the Sefer Yesirah to the Zohar,” in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, vol. 6, nos. 3-4: PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECOND


- _____, “Negative Theology and Positive Assertion,” in Daat, nos. 32-33 (Ramat-Gan: Bal-Ilan University, 1994).


Addendum: Pre-Kabbalistic Streams of Jewish Mysticism*

TO FILL THE SPAN between the close of the Old Testament and early Kabbalah, a much-simplified selection of streams representative of—or having influence upon—Jewish mysticism can be outlined thus:

1. Early beginnings
   a. Apocalypses/Pseudepigrapha (ca. 200 BCE onward)
   b. Philo (ca. 20 BCE to 50 CE)
   c. Qumran (= Dead Sea Scrolls: 100 BCE onward)
   d. Rabbinic and synagogue traditions (100 CE onward)
   e. Miscellaneous magic texts and other “occult” works
2. Merkabah and hekhalot (200 CE onward)
3. Sefer Yezirah (between 200 and 900 CE)
4. Transition
   a. Geonic period (600-1000)
   b. Rishonic period (1000-1500)
   c. Early commentaries on Sefer Yezirah
   d. Religious philosophers
      i. Solomon ibn Gabirol (1020-1070)
      ii. Judah Halevi (1075-1141)
      iii. Abraham ibn Ezra (1089-1164)
5. Hasidei Ashkenaz (German Hasidism: ca 1170-1240)

1. Early beginnings

Since Jewish mysticism is ultimately based on the Hebrew Bible, the beginning, really, is the Tanakh, parts of which are more “mystical” than others. More important to our line of inquiry is that certain themes were developed more than others for a variety of mystical purposes. By Talmudic times, two branches of the mysteries were well known and defined: the work of creation, i.e. developments of the first chapters of Genesis, and the work of the chariot, developments of Ezekiel and, to a lesser extent, Isaiah.†

a. Apocalyptic, Wisdom Literature, Pseudepigrapha‡

Radicalizations of Bible themes appeared in the intertestamental apocalypses, which, when grouped together with a somewhat irregular splay of wisdom literature, psalms, testaments, prayers, and other material, are referred to as the pseudepigrapha.

Two fine introductions to apocalyptic are


* Refer to my “Kabbalah Study: Jewish Mysticism in English” (1993-1996), appended below, where there is a section offering suggestions for a survey of Jewish mysticism, one segment of which parallels the outline presented here. Alternative titles are discussed.

† Note Daniel M. Horowitz’ anthology, A Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism Reader (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2016) which commences not with Sefer ha-Bahir but with the Bible, the apocalypses, and the Talmud.

‡ With his chapters on Ezekiel, Enoch literature and related material, Qumran, Philo, the rabbinic “Cycle of the Seven Stories,” merkabah passages in the Talmud(s), and the merkabah mystics, Peter Schäfer covers our §§ 1. a, b, c, d and § 2 in The Origins of Jewish Mysticism (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).
Another strand begun in the Bible, including Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and certain of the Psalms, is *wisdom literature*, which traces its way through the standard extra-canonical set called The Apocrypha (in Ecclesiasticus), through the Pseudepigrapha, and on into the Talmudic Sayings of the Fathers (*Pirqe Aboth*). An enduring treatment of all this is O. S. Rankin’s *Israel’s Wisdom Literature* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1936; rpt 1954 and 1964; rpt. New York: Schocken Books, 1969).†


b. Philo

Philo, who has a somewhat anticlimactic relationship with Jewish mysticism, was the most important Jewish philosopher of the first century. Thoroughly Hellenized, he begins for us the long, and rather strained, counterpoint between Neoplatonism and Judaism—and, indeed, Jewish mysticism—which simmers right on up to Spinoza and beyond. Of particular use in the present context are the following:


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‡ Charles’ APOT includes two items not in Charlesworth: “Pirke Aboth” and “The Fragments of a Zadokite Work.” “[T]he former [is omitted from OTP] because it is rabbinic, the latter because it is now recognized to belong among the Dead Sea Scrolls” (—Charlesworth, page xxvi).


On Neoplatonism:


On Qumran:


The most “mystical” of the Qumran texts—those having the most in common with subsequent *hekhalot* literature—are the *Berakhot* and the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. On these, see James R. Davila, Liturgical Works (Grand Rapids – Cambridge: Wm. B.

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* Four other works on the Qumran materials are of interest in the present context, especially the fourth:
- Schiffman, Lawrence H. Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls. The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1994).

Studies on the relationship of Qumran to merkabah/hekhalot mysticism are touched on in my paper in Jewish Studies 52, and at HERMETIC KABBALAH: “Notes on the Study of Merkabah Mysticism and Hekhalot Literature in English”; see entries under “2004 • Elior” and “2006 • Alexander.” (This article is given fuller notice below in § 2.)

d. Rabbinic and synagogue traditions

Bits and pieces of the “mystery” are scattered throughout the rabbinic writings following the themes mentioned (creation and chariot), along with others (angels and demons, mystical exegesis on various topics, etc.) Some material might be cast more into the category of “legend,” but here the allusions can be suggestive and significant. It is difficult to pin down a few books to represent this phase of development; with recent publications on midrashim and other rabbinic literature, a full list might contain dozens of titles. Given our track, however, see the following:

  - Chapter VI. “Magic and Miracle”
  - Chapter VII. “The Power of the Divine Name”
  - Chapter VIII. “The Celestial Retinue”
  - Chapter IX. “He Who Spoke and the World Came into Being”
  - pp. 578-80.

Refer also to

  Chernus presents a series of essays on the relationship between merkabah mysticism and rabbinic midrashim.


e. Miscellaneous magic texts & other “occult” works


* Noticeably absent here is reference to the Talmud. See the recommendations in my 1996 essay, “Kabbalah Study – Jewish Mysticism in English” (appended below), page 46.
For a detailed bibliography on Jewish magic, see the one maintained by Scott Noegel at [http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/JewishMagicBibliography.pdf](http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/JewishMagicBibliography.pdf) (University of Washington) or the appendix to my “Notes on the Study of Merkabah Mysticism and Hekhalot Literature in English.” For starters, refer to the following survey articles:


2. **Merkabah and hekhalot literature**

Refer to my bibliographic essays,


3. **Sefer Yezirah**


4. **Transition**

   a. **Geonic period**

   It is generally thought that the Geonic period left little evidence of theosophical development. Apocalyptic, merkabah, and rabbinic writings continued to exercise authority, this material being compiled and redacted with little being added to the existing traditions. In this period, however, magical works circulated and grew. Joseph Dan writes, “The Geonic period, from the sixth to tenth centuries, is a period which seems to be outside the realm of the history of Jewish thought. ... [I]t still retains the image of being a half-millennium almost completely devoid of any Hebrew works on theology or ethics. This image is not completely true.”*


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* The ‘Unique Cherub’ Circle (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), page 17.
An example of a work from this period is *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (CHAPTERS OF RABBI ELIEZER), which has been translated and annotated by Gerald Friedlander (London: 1916; rpt. New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1981 [4th ed]).

b. Rishonic period

Among the Rishonim were the Tosafists, rabbis who developed “additions” to the Talmud, i.e., additions to Rashi. For our purposes, see “Peering through the Lattices”: Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period by Ephraim Kanarfogel (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000).

c. Commentaries on Sefer Yezirah

For a review of English sources on these commentaries, see my “Notes on Editions Sefer Yezirah in English,” PART 3, at http://www.digital-brilliance.com/contributed/Karr/Biblios/syie.pdf or https://www.academia.edu/22875900/Notes_on_Editions_of_Sefer_Yezirah_in_English

d. Religious philosophers*


In Spain the Caballah assumed a more philosophical form, due to the influence of the religious philosophy which was already fully developed in that country. There are numerous points of contact between it and the work of the three great thinkers Jehudah Halevi, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, and Abraham Ibn Ezra. The first-named devoted some space to the Sefer Yezirah in his great work Cuzari. Gabirol as a neo-Platonist has many resemblances with the Caballah. ... Finally Abraham Ibn Ezra made mystical numerical and literal analyses of the Name of God, particularly in his writing Yesod Mora...

* According to Abraham Abulafia, Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* is a profound mystical text. Be that as it may, Maimonides is not generally ranked among those who contributed to the development of the kabbalah. Nonetheless, he is considered *esoteric*—a euphemism perhaps for *elite* or elitist. See James Arthur Diamond’s Maimonides and the Hermeneutics of Concealment, Deciphering Scripture and Midrash in THE GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), and Marvin Fox’s excellent Interpreting Maimonides (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).


In his brief foreword to Six Treatises Attributed to Maimonides, translated and annotated from the Hebrew editions by Fred Rosner, MD (Northvale – London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1991), Rabbi Moshe Greenes argues that Maimonides was “steeped in Kabbalah.”
i. On ibn Gabirol, refer to
     An analysis of ibn Gabirol's life and writings. Included is a full translation of *Keter Malkut* (ROYAL CROWN), which Müller calls Gabirol's great “cosmological hymn.”

Also see
     - Dillon, John M. “Solomon Ibn Gabirol’s Doctrine of Intelligible Matter”
     - Mathis, C. K. “Parallel Structures in the Metaphysics of Iamblichus and Ibn Gabirol”

ii. Judah Halevi’s principal work, *Kuzari* (or *Cuzari*), has been put into English a few times, but not all versions include the commentary on *Sefer Yezirah* (in § 4:25). Two that do are

Also see

  Originally published as *Jehuda Halevi: Zweiundneunzig Hymnen und Dedichte* (Berlin: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1927).


• Sirat, Colette. *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages: Chapter 4*.


### iii. Works by Abraham Ibn Ezra translated into English:


• The Secret of the Torah (Sefer Yesod Mora ve-Sod ha-Torah) translated by Norman Strickman (Northvale – Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995).

Studies:

  - CHAPTER 5, “Esotericism and Commentary: Ibn Ezra and the Exegetical Layer”
  - CHAPTER 6, “Concealment and Heresy: Astrology and the Secret of the Torah”
  —includes a translation of Introduction to the Torah.
  Ibn Ezra’s Yesod Mora and his commentaries on Exodus and Ecclesiastes were inserted into Hokhmah Ha-Nefesh, presumably by Eleazar of Worms.
5. Hasidei Ashkenaz

The Hasidei Ashkenaz (≈ GERMAN PIETISTS) were active in the Jewish communities of the Rhineland (major city: Regensburg) in the years 1170-1230. Leaders of this group were from the Kalonymus family.

Key figures include (1) Samuel ben Kalonymus the Pious of Speyer, his son (2) Judah the Pious (or Yehuda he-Hasid, 1150-1217), who wrote the best-known tract of this school, Sefer Hasidim (BOOK OF THE PIOUS), and (3) Eleazar ben Judah of Worms (1176-1238), Judah’s main student, known for several works, foremost among these Sefer ha-Roqeah (BOOK OF THE PERFUMER), Hokhmah Ha-Egoz (WISDOM OF THE NUT), and Sodei Razaya (SECRET OF SECRETS, or SECRETS OF RAZIEL).

The fundamental unit for the transmission of esoteric oral knowledge is the family. According to the testimony of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms, the termination of his family line, as a result of the early death of his son and combined with the diminution of his students, moved him to commit the secrets of the Torah to writing. The fear of the loss of the secret as a result of the diminution of the line of transmission justified the writing down of the secret; thus, the knowledge could be passed on without relying on the continuous chain of oral tradition.*

While not considered part of the early kabbalah in the strictest sense, the Hasidei Ashkenaz must be seen as a bridge between the earlier merkabah/hekhalot and name mysticism and important aspects of the kabbalah which was to follow.†

General‡


Passages: from a prayer from the Ashkenazi liturgy (pp. 98-100).


† For instance, one can track techniques in the use of names from Eleazar of Worms through Abraham Abulafia to Hayyim Vital and Israel Sarug, and on into Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto and Shalom Sharabi.

‡ Works on the general list on Hasidei Ashkenaz inevitably treat Yehuda he-Hasid and Eleazar of Worms, given that a majority of the principal writings of this movement come from them.
   Also in Gershom Schlem’s MAJOR TRENDS IN JEWISH MYSTICISM 50 Years After, edited by P. Schäfer and J. Dan (Tübingen: J. B. C. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993), pages 87-101.


_______. “The Emergence of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Germany” = JMII: Chapter 2.

_______. “The Emergence of Mystical Prayer” = JMII: Chapter 10.
   Also in Studies in Jewish Mysticism edited by Joseph Dan and Frank Talmage (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 1982).

_______. “The Language of the Mystics in Medieval Germany,” in Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism—noted below under “Grözinger, Karl Erich; and Dan, Joseph (eds).”

_______. ”The Seventy Names of Metatron” = JMI*: Chapter 10.

_______. The ‘Unique Cherub’ Circle. A School of Mystics and Esoterics in Medieval Germany [TEXTS AND STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN JUDAISM, 15] (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).
   Dan distinguishes four major mystical circles from this period (12th and 13th centuries): (i) the Iyyun circle, (ii) the Kalonymus family (i.e. what we generally think of as the Hasidei Ashkenaz), (iii) Sefer ha-Bahir, and (iv) the ‘Unique Cherub’ Circle. The Iyyun and ‘Cherub’ circles, Dan insists, cannot be identified with the Hasidei Ashkenaz.

   Chapter Ten, “Medieval Reconsiderations”
   Chapter Eleven, “The Hymn of Glory”
   Chapter Twelve, “The Way to Kabbalah”

Grözinger, Karl Erich. “Between Magic and Religion – Ashkenazi Hasidic Piety,” in Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism—noted immediately under “Grözinger, Karl Erich; and Dan, Joseph (eds),” pages 43-84.

   The first eight articles (of twenty) treat the Hasidei Ashkenaz. See listings in this bibliography under Alexander, Baskin, Dan, Grözinger, Gruenwald, Hallamish, Marcus, and Wolfson.

Herrmann, Klaus, “An Unknown Commentary on the Book of Creation (Sefer Yezirah) from the Cairo Genizah and Its Re-Creation among the Haside Ashkenaz,” in Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought [FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOR OF JOSEPH DAN ON THE OCCASION OF HIS SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY], edited by Rachel Elior and Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).


_______. “Prayer Gestures in German Hasidim,” in Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism—noted above under “Grözinger, Karl Erich; and Dan, Joseph (eds.).”


Development of Merkavah/Hekhalot

Abrams, Daniel. Sexual Symbolism and Merkavah Speculation in Medieval Germany: A Study of the SOD HA-EGOZ Texts [TEXTS AND STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN JUDISM: 13] (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1997). Abrams treats and translates the Sod ha-Egoz texts, “the earliest known commentaries on Ezekiel’s Chariot (Ma’aseh Merkavah),” which are, on the one hand, apparent latter-day developments of heikalot literature while, on the other hand, “proto-kabbalistic.”


Kanarfogel tracks the influence and use of hekhalot and other mystical and magical material to 12th- and 13th-century Germany and France. He argues that esoteric teachings and practices spread beyond the Hasidei Ashkenaz to the tosafists, rabbinic descendents of Rashi, conventionally considered to have been inclined exclusively toward study of the Talmud.


________. “Metatron and Shi’ur Qomah in the Writings of the Haside Ashkenaz,” in Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism—noted above under “Grözinger, Karl Erich; and Dan, Joseph (eds),” pages 60-92.


Yehuda he-Hasid [Judah the Pious] & Sefer Hasidim

Alexander, Tamar. “Rabbi Judah the Pious as a Legendary Figure,” in Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism—noted above under “Grözinger, Karl Erich; and Dan, Joseph (eds),” pages 123-138.


Baskin, Judith R. “Images of Women in Sefer Hasidim,” in Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism—noted above under “Grözinger, Karl Erich; and Dan, Joseph (eds),” pages 93-105.


Passages from Sefer Hasidim (pp. 95-98).

Cronbach, A. “Social Thinking in the Sefer Hasidim,” in Hebrew Union College Annual 22 (Cincinnati: 1949), pages 1-147.


Shoham-Steiner, Ephraim. “The Humble Sage and the Wandering Madman: Madness and Madmen as Exemplum from Sefer Hasidim”

Soloveitchik, Haym. “Pietists and Kibbitzers” + APPENDIX


A partial translation of Sefer ha-Hasidim.


Eleazar of Worms


Dan traces scientific and mystical ideas starting with the Sefer Yezirah, 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.’


Ch. 7 The Voice of God over the Water – The Worship of the Holy Name and Ch. 8 The Rokeah – Devotion in Prayer, excerpt of Eleazar’s Sodey Razaya § Sefer ha-Shem and Sefer ha-Rokeah.


———. Sefer ha-Shem – The Book of the Name (the final part of Sodei Razaya), two volumes, translated by Avraham Broide, Alexandru Munteanu and Sharron Shatil ([n.p.]: David Smith, LLC, 2016/eUniversity.pub, 2018).

———. Sodei Razaya in English, four volumes (all [n.p.]: David Smith, LLC, 2016/eUniversity.pub, 2018).

• Secrets of Raziel: Book of Desire – Sefer ha-Chesek, translated by Yaron Ever Hadani
• Secrets of Raziel: Book of the Alphabet – Sefer Alfa Beta, translated by Alexandru Munteanu
• Secrets of Raziel: Book of Unity – Sefer ha-Yihud, edited by Fabrizio Del Tin
• Secrets of Raziel: Commentary on the Book of Formation – Peirush al Sefer Yetzirah, translated by Avraham Broide


See in particular pp. 52-54.


“The selection from Sefer Raziel is from the edition printed in Medzibezh in 1818, pp. 9b—10a.”


Excerpts from Eleazer of Worms’ Rokeach.


A.

In an article reviewing the then-current (1970s) state of scholarship on the history of early rabbinic Judaism, Jacob Neusner complained, in particular, about E. E. Urbach’s study concerning “the sages, their concepts and beliefs” (Neusner’s italics) as revealing “remarkably little variation, development or even movement,” where “[d]ifferentiation among the stages” and “among schools and circles within a given period” was all but neglected.

More recently, similar complaints have been leveled against “establishment” historians of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah: In the last fifteen-or-so years, the neat linear history offered by Gershom Scholem and those following his lead has been seriously challenged.

In the proceedings of a conference marking the fiftieth year since the publication of Scholem’s landmark book, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941), Ithamar Gruenwald argues that this work (i.e., *Major Trends...*) “appears to be too limited in its conceptual framework, as well as in its actual treatment of the subject matter.” Scholem saw certain developments in antique Judaism as a mystical phase which followed well after the writing of the Hebrew Bible; he also saw expressions of mysticism, once present, as separate and distinct, not just from the scriptural phase but from normal (common or popular) expressions of religion. Gruenwald makes a case for tracing “mystical, or quasi-mystical, elements in Scripture itself.” Further, he states that there are mystical elements in rabbinic literature to which Scholem did not give due attention.

Critical analyses focusing on Scholem’s treatment of ancient Jewish mysticism (i.e. *merkabah* mysticism and *hekhalot* literature) have also been offered in recent years. For the moment, our concern is with those developments which, by one rationale or another, claim the title “Kabbalah,” conventionally agreed to be a phenomenon begun in medieval times (though traditionally thought to be from antiquity). Our approach may at first appear to be at cross purposes, for, while there is a case supporting a definition for Kabbalah which is more inclusive (as in Gruenwald’s comments noted above or in the suggestions in Moshe Idel’s article noted
below), there are those of us who would like to see Kabbalah circumscribed sufficiently to salvage it from the excessive, near-generic use of the term, primarily in Christian and occult circles, to refer to mysticism and magic of all sorts. (The term kabbalah is itself a coinage with problems not unlike those of such related words as “mysticism,” “magic,” “myth,” and “gnosis/gnosticism.”)\textsuperscript{8}

The issue of defining—or redefining—Kabbalah has been addressed by Moshe Idel.\textsuperscript{9} He critiques the “prevailing assumption in the academic field” that Kabbalah is “a relatively homogeneous mystical phenomenon, more theoretical than practical.” Idel’s primary target is, of course, Scholem and his notion that Kabbalah is defined, and thus unified, by a certain “core question,” namely, the mystery of the Godhead—which question is “answered” by the doctrine of the sefirot. Idel discusses the various mystical uses of divine names as an alternative kabbalistic channel.

In the introduction to Essential Papers on Kabbalah, Lawrence Fine attempts to set up a working definition for kabbalah starting with a rejection of the “popular, noncritical use of the term” as referring to all “esoteric and occult phenomena, past and present.”\textsuperscript{10} Fine prefers to limit Kabbalah to “a discrete body of literature that became clearly identifiable beginning in Provence in the late twelfth century and northern Spain in the thirteenth.” However, in a book which has heated up the discussion on the origins of Kabbalah (and other topics) [Kabbalah: New Perspectives], Moshe Idel has argued that there is not such a definite separation between rabbinic literature and the conventionally circumscribed Kabbalah. Idel’s view suggests a more continuous, less neat development which gradually coalesced into a proto-Kabbalah.\textsuperscript{11} The medieval Jewish mystics referred to as “Kabbalists” did not abandon the mysticism—or any other part of the vast rabbinic literature—which came before them. The hekhalot writings, German hasidic material, Sefer Yezirah and the various commentaries on it, etc., along with the Talmud, midrashim, and the rest of the rabbinic writings, were all considered authoritative—all part of the same chain of tradition (kabbalah) of which the medieval and later Kabbalists considered themselves links.\textsuperscript{12}

Kabbalah did not spring up ex nihilo. It seems prudent to open channels for the origins and growth of Kabbalah back into the depths of ancient Judaism. Determining a starting line at Sefer ha-Bahir and the mystic circles at Languedoc does not match the facts. To begin with, the Bahir is itself a compilation, with sources in and references to earlier material, which immediately begins our search into the time before its appearance.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{B.}

To investigate Jewish mysticism, how is one to begin at the beginning? The documentary evidence is sprawling, yet incomplete. We cannot commence with Genesis 1:1 and travel a nice straight line to Kabbalah today. However, to set a broad stage for subsequent mystical endeavor, a fine first book is Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith, by Norman Cohn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), the second part of which charts the primal swirlings of the path which eventually leads to Jewish (and Christian) mysticism, beginning with Zoroastrian concepts, tracing their development in Jewish
apocalyptic, finally landing in the Book of Revelation. This last turn may seem to veer off track unless one keeps in mind the fundamentally Jewish character of this mystical apocalypse.

For grounding in the theme (i.e., the ascension to heaven) taken up by the ancient Jewish mystics associated with the merkabah and hekhalot, a most informative source is Martha Himmelfarb’s *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York/ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). On a somewhat different tack, though holding onto the thread begun with the last two selections, is Markus N. A. Bockmuehl’s *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* [WISSENSCHAFTLICHE UNTERSUCHUNGEN ZUM NEUEN TESTAMENT – 2. Reihe 36] (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1990).14

Assuming that the reader is reasonably familiar with the Hebrew Bible, the next step would be to acquire some knowledge of early rabbinic thought and method. *The Sages* by E. E. Urbach (see note 2) is an excellent start. Three anthologies serve as introductions to their respective texts:


At this juncture, it would be a good idea to read some of the more general books on Jewish mysticism in order to get an impression of its history and concepts. My recommendation is to study the following books—in the order in which they are listed:

1. Scholem’s *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (see note 3), some comments on which have already been noted16

A weakness of *Major Trends* is the absence of a chapter on the early Kabbalah. Two books nicely fill this void:


Paulist Press has provided two more titles which help round out our short list:

The final development of Jewish mysticism covered in Scholem’s *Major Trends* is Hasidism, on which I have not developed an extended bibliography.* However, I can suggest three works to provide a foundation:


Three of the books listed above (Dan and Kiener’s *Early Kabbalah*, Matt’s *Zohar*, and Fine’s *Safed Spirituality*) offer texts as well as introductions. There are some other anthologies:


There is a bit of redundancy among these titles; fortunately, all are available in low-cost paperback editions.

There are some collections of articles which can be recommended:


*Haredi* students of the Kabbalah might sneer at many of the works suggested here. For an overview, they would instead urge Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan’s *Inner Space: Introduction to Kabbalah, Meditation and Prophecy* (Brooklyn: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1990) or Rabbi Yechiel Bar-Lev’s *Song of the Soul* (Petach Tikva, 1994). Both, especially the latter, are serviceable introductions to Lurianic Kabbalah, which is somewhat thinly handled in our entry on Safed Kabbalah, though covered well in Scholem’s *Major Trends*.

For further advice on readings in Judaism, see *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*, edited by Barry Holtz (New York: Summit Books, 1984). There, one is guided by specialists through the issues and literature of the Bible, Talmud, Midrash, medieval commentaries and philosophy, kabbalistic texts, hasidic teachings and prayer books.

Another good overview of the literature of Judaism is *The Sacred Books of the Jews* by Harry Gersh (New York: Stein and Day, 1968).


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* This has been remedied to some extent; see above, Pre-Kabbalistic Streams of Jewish Mysticism, § 5 Hasidei Ashkenaz, [2016]
A very instructive set of anthologies (if you can get past the lame illustrations) is Louis Jacobs’ CHAIN OF TRADITION SERIES published by Behrman House (New York):

1. *Jewish Law* (1968)

To these could be added Jacobs’ *Jewish Mystical Testimonies* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977).

Notes (updated 2003):

For full bibliographic information on various stages of Jewish mysticism, refer to my series on sources in English:

- “Notes on the Study of Merkabah Mysticism and Hekhalot Literature in English”—with an appendix on Jewish magic
- “Sefer Yezirah in English”
- “Notes on the Study of Early Kabbalah in English” [the current paper]
- “Notes on the Zohar in English”
- “Notes on the Study if Later Kabbalah in English: The Safed Period and Lurianic Kabbalah”
- “The Study of Christian Cabala in English”

These papers can be accessed on-line at http://www.digital-brilliance.com/contributed/Karr/Biblios/index.php.

“Popular” books on Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism are numerous and quite varied in their quality and purpose. For readable, well-researched accounts, see


In several of Schäfer’s discussions (Gershom Scholem Reconsidered for one) and in David Halperin’s The Faces of the Chariot (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 1988), questions are raised about the titles and contents of hekhalot texts. The notion of fixed bodies of content forming a canon of “books” representing a coherent school of hekhalot mysticism appears unsustainable. A similar problem exists with the very term kabbalah (see note 7). A partial solution is suggested in such subheadings as the early Kabbalah of the Provence and Gerona circles, the ‘lyyun school, prophetic Kabbalah (of Abraham Abulafia), or Lurianic Kabbalah. However, should the German Hasidism be excluded so definitely from Kabbalah?

7. Until the thirteenth century, kabbalah referred to the whole body of oral religious teachings: the Talmud, the midrashim, etc. Indeed, anyone who picked up a copy of Sefer ha-Kabbalah (BOOK OF TRADITION) expecting it to expound upon kabbalistic mysteries would be sorely disappointed. See The Book of Tradition, translated by Gerson D. Cohen (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968).

8. On the terms “mysticism,” “symbol,” and “myth,” see Gil Anidjar’s article, mentioned in note 6. Words causing particular difficulty in the field of Jewish mysticism are “gnostic” and “gnosticism”; examples of discussions on these terms are


10. If one were to pick up any of a number of popular books on Kabbalah, one might come away with the impression that Kabbalah was primarily, if not solely, the doctrine of the sefirot, or divine emanations. In fact, Kabbalah involves a rich array of concepts and techniques, not the least of which are various types of letter and name mysticism (though many of the hermeneutic conventions concerning words and letters, such as gematria, are more accurately considered rabbinic, not kabbalistic). Topics are diverse: the progression of cosmic cycles, mystical explanations of the mitzvot, the interplay of humankind with the ultimate God, the source of and reason behind evil, creation and the end, the mystical significance of the holidays, angels and demons, the transmigration of souls—indeed, a ranging literature full of unpredictable interpretations of scripture.


13. See the various discussions of the Bahir:

- Gershom Scholem. *Origins of the Kabbalah*.


15. The more comprehensive English edition of the *Mishnah* by Herbert Danby (1933) is still available from Oxford University Press.


17. In *Essential Papers*, Arthur Green’s article, “The Zohar: Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Spain,” is a gem; it’s worth getting the book just for this. This fine article also appears in *An Introduction to the Mystics of Medieval Europe*, edited by Paul Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), which also contains David Biale’s article on the Safed Period, “Jewish Mysticism in the Sixteenth Century.”

18. Be careful with the Meltzer anthology. It is full of sloppy mistakes.