MERKABAH (= CHARIOT) MYSTICISM developed primarily out of speculation on and expansion of the visions of Ezekiel (CHAPTERS 1, 8, and 10) and, to a lesser extent, Isaiah (CHAPTER 6) and Daniel (CHAPTER 2). This strain of mysticism meanders through the intertestamental pseudepigrapha\(^1\) and even touches corners of gnostic and Qumran texts.\(^2\)

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1 Enoch 14 is particularly important. Ithamar Gruenwald (in *AMM*, page 36) says, “…it is the oldest Merkavah vision we know of from outside the canonical Scriptures. … Indeed, one can consider this particular vision a model-vision of Merkavah Mysticism” (AMM\(_1\) = Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism—see below, 1980 • Gruenwald for the first edition, 2014 • Gruenwald for the second, revised edition, AMM\(_2\)). Gruenwald refines this statement in AMM\(_2\) (page 75): “These are a few samples taken from what might be the oldest Merkavah vision in post scriptural sources. They contain, on the one hand, several motives [motifs?] already found in the “Merkavah” visions in Scripture, and, on the other hand, considerable features in this vision became typical of later Merkavah visions. Indeed, one can consider this particular vision a model-vision of pre-Merkavah mysticism.”


Refer to the list below: “Regarding the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice,” page 16.
Merkabah material and references can be found in shreds, often more provocative than telling, in the Talmud and other rabbinic writings. However, the major concentrated expression of merkabah mysticism is the cluster of writings which has come to be called the hekhalot (= HEAVENLY HALLS) literature, which is the focus of this paper.

Arguments over the dating of this body of literature continue, but there is general agreement to a range of 200-800 C.E. The bounds and structure of these writings are also matters of dispute, for the notions of titles and fixed contents of a specific canon of hekhalot books appear to be more academic conveniences than reflections of the true nature of the literature.

Since the ’seventies, scholarly work on the hekhalot texts has increased dramatically, as the publication dates of the books and articles discussed below attest. Before this spate of academic activity, there were in English little more than Gershom Scholem’s works and Hugo Odeberg’s attempt at a critical edition of one of the hekhalot texts to shed light on this oblique collection of writings. Even as this lament is being recalled, no time should be lost in acknowledging Scholem’s inescapable influence on this and all other aspects of the study of Jewish mysticism. Some of Scholem’s conclusions regarding the hekhalot literature have been challenged, and some of his observations on and characterizations of the hekhalot texts have come to seem convenient, imposing order on that which is, in fact, near chaos. Yet, Scholem’s writings on this subject remain some of the clearest and best supported; they have also been among the most accessible, not only in their style but in their actual availability.

As for Odeberg, his lone work is more problematic. As significant as it was, Odeberg’s treatment of Sefer ha-Hekhalot (BOOK OF THE HEKHALOT, dubbed by Odeberg “3 Enoch”) is now considered unreliable and misleading on many points. But, as contemporary scholar David Halperin has pointed out, Odeberg’s work has “proved easier to criticize than to emulate.”

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4 A list of Scholem’s works is given below, page 4.

Morton Smith’s “Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati,” in Biblical and Other Studies, edited by Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963) was another early notice. Also, Smith translated Hekhalot Rabbati into English—a project which began in the ’forties and lasted until the ’eighties, when Smith worked on the translation in collaboration with Ithamar Gruenwald. At some point, the typescript was corrected by Gershom Scholem, who mentions Smith’s translation in Jewish Gnosticism…, page 11, note 4. This translation circulated among a few scholars in the field but was not published until recently: a full transcription of Smith’s translation of Hekhalot Rabbati is now available online at http://www.digital-brilliance.com/contributed/Karr/HekRab/index.php. See below, “TRANSLATIONS & REFERENCES,” § A.


6 FACES, page 364. (See below, 1988 • Halperin).
Today, however, we are in pretty fair shape to study merkabah mysticism and hekalot texts, though some of the leading scholars in this field publish in German and, of course, Hebrew. Nevertheless, from the texts and studies now available in English, the persistent reader can certainly gain firm impressions of

(i) the contents of the hekalot texts,
(ii) the issues captivating contemporary scholarship regarding the hekalot texts,
(iii) the place of the hekalot texts in the history and development of Judaism, early Christianity, and their mysticism.  

In the following pages, books, sections of books, and articles on merkabah mysticism and hekalot literature—including translations—are described. I discuss the various texts associated, however loosely, with the hekalot corpus, with indications of sources for translations and studies.

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7 For the most part in German, there is the work of Peter Schäfer and his team, which includes Margarete Schlüter and Hans Georg von Mutius. Certainly, the most significant work which Schäfer has overseen is *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1981), which presents in the original Hebrew and Aramaic an array of manuscript readings side by side. *Synopse* was followed by *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* by the same team (Mohr [Siebeck], 1984). Soon after, several volumes of German translations of *Synopse*, as Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur, appeared (Mohr [Siebeck], 1987-1995). Schäfer has also published a collection of his articles—ten in German, three in English—as *Hekhalot-Studien* (Mohr [Siebeck], 1988).

The contents of *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* are outlined below, page 51.

*Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* includes 23 texts: “six texts from Greater Hekhalot (frag. 1—6); five from Shi'ur qomah (frag. 4, 6—11); two from Lesser Hekhalot (frag. 7, 18); two concerning Metatron (frag. 9, 19); one from the Book of the Hekhalot (3 Enoch) (frag. 12); seven are magical adjurations and incantations (frag. 13—17, 20, 21); one refers to the Ascension of Moses (frag. 21), and another to Perq shirah (frag. 23). Finally, *Geniza-Fragmente* offers two include unique merkavah texts (frag. 8, 22), which are “probably the most important texts offered in this collection” (—Rachel Elior, REVIEW: “Schäfer’s Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur, in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 80, no. 1/2 [University of Pennsylvania, 1989, pages 142-145], page 144).


“The nature of the sources of the so-called Heikalot literature and its avatars are topics that still await detailed scholarly analysis”: thus begins Moshe Idel’s article, “Holding an Orb in His Hand: The Angel 'Anafi and a Late Antiquity Helios Mosaic,” in *Ars Judaica: The Bar-Ilan Journal of Jewish Art*, Volume 9 (Ramat Gan: Department of Jewish Art, Bar-Ilan University, 2013), pages 19-44.  

Idel notes “Three Possible Sources for Heikalot Literature”:

1. “earlier Jewish sources, works related to the Jewish temple traditions and its priests as the preservers, as well as to the Dead Sea literature”
2. “concepts and ideals found in Christianity”
3. “developments in late antiquity Judaism as a confrontation with the Greek-Roman pagan culture”

It is the last of these which Idel addresses in some detail.
Studies in English
LISTED CHRONOLOGICALLY – 1960 to 2018

1960


The studies of Gershom Scholem form the basis of contemporary scholarship on Jewish mysticism, and, hence, provide the foundation of subsequent work on merkabah mysticism and hekhalot texts. Other works by Scholem address this subject at length:

  - LECTURE 2: “Merkabah Mysticism and Jewish Gnosticism”


  - CHAPTER 1. “Shi’ur Komah: The Mystical Shape of the Godhead”

  - pages 8-21
  - pages 373-6: § MERKABAH MYSTICISM
  - pages 377-81: § METATRON

These works (Major Trends…, Mystical Shape…, Origins…, and Kabbalah) are given notice here not only to establish the starting point for “modern” scholarship on hekhalot-merkabah mysticism but to demonstrate Scholem’s development in appraising the subject.\(^9\)


All but the first of these, which is in Hebrew, are outlined below.
1980

Refer below to 2014* Gruenwald for the second, revised edition of this book (AMM).

The first half of Gruenwald's pioneering book analyzes the major features of the merkabah tradition, beginning in Jewish apocalyptic then developing into “the literature that first gives a full-scale presentation of Merkavah mysticism” i.e., the hekhalot literature, “composed in Eretz-Yisrael (circa 200-700),” thus ending “as a creative literary stream … sometime in the Geonic period.”

The second half of AMM describes the hekhalot texts one by one, including Re’uyot Yehezkel and Sefer ha-Razim, items now not generally considered part of the hekhalot corpus.

Two appendices by Saul Lieberman follow: (1) “Metatron, the Meaning of His Name and His Functions,” and (2) “The Knowledge of Halakha by the Author (or Authors) of the Heikhalot.”

Refer to Gruenwald's article:
- “Jewish Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism,” in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, edited by Joseph Dan and Frank Talmage (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 1982), which is reprinted in Gruenwald’s *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* (see below: 1988).


Halperin investigates the references to the merkabah tradition in Mishnah Hagigah 2:1, Tosefta Hagigah 2:1-7, Palestinian Talmud Hagigah 77a-d, and Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 11b-16a. Halperin states,

I believe that I have shown that Scholem’s position is not securely supported by the rabbinic sources on the merkabah, which, taken by themselves, provide little reason to believe in the existence of the ‘merkabah mysticism’ envisioned by Scholem. (–page 184)


1982

This series of essays shows the relationship between merkabah mysticism and rabbinic midrashim following, generally, two motifs: the revelation on Mount Sinai and the eschatological rewards of the world to come.

Refer also to Chernus’ articles:

1983

1984

The “three types” discussed in this brief work are (i) ascent to the divine world, (ii) the mysticism of Hebrew letters, and (iii) Sar Torah (PRINCE OF THE TORAH) revelations. *Three Types...* is reprinted in Dan’s *Jewish Mysticism*, Volume I: LATE ANTIQUITY (Northvale – Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998), pages 27-76.


See below, “TRANSLATIONS & REFERENCES,” § F. Shi’ur Qomah.


CHAPTER 3. “From the Ancient East to the European Middle Ages”—pages 77-91.


This volume, in both the Hebrew and English sections, is devoted to hekhalot literature and related topics. Articles in English include

- Chernus, Ira. “The Pilgrimage to the Merkavah: An Interpretation of Early Jewish Mysticism”
- Goldberg, Arnold. “Quotations from Scripture in Hekhalot Literature”
- Halperin, David J. “A Sexual Image in Hekhalot Rabbati and Its Implications”
- Hayman, A. P. “Sefer Yesira and the Hekhalot Literature”
- Schlüter, Margarete. “The Eulogy Hakham ba-Ra’zim va-Adon ba-Setarim in Hekhalot Literature”
- Van Uchelen, N. A. “Tosephta Megillah III, 28: A Tanaitic Text with a Mystic Connotation?”


*From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* is a collection of twelve articles (along with an introductory essay), most previously published. Four of the articles are new, and one appears in English for the first time.

CONTENTS:

Introductory Essay: The Cultural Milieu of Apocalypticism

Chapter 1 Prophecy, Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and the Problem of the Uncanonical Books

Chapter 2 Two Types of Jewish Esoteric Literature in the Time of the Mishnah and Talmud

Chapter 3 Knowledge and Vision: Towards a Clarification of Two “Gnostic” Concepts in the Light of Their Alleged Origins

Chapter 4 Priests, Prophets, Apocalyptic Visionaries, and Mystics

Chapter 5 Angelic Songs, the Qedushah and the Problem of the Origin of Hekhalot Literature

Chapter 6 Literary and Redactional Issues in the Study of the Hekhalot Literature

Chapter 7 Jewish Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism

Chapter 8 Jewish Sources for the Gnostic Texts from Nag Hammadi?

Chapter 9 Aspects of the Jewish-Gnostic Controversy

Chapter 10 The Problem of the Anti-Gnostic Polemic in Rabbinic Literature

Chapter 11 Manichaeism and Judaism in Light of the Cologne Mani Codex

Chapter 12 Halakhic Material in Codex Gnosticus V, 4: *The Second Apocalypse of James*?

Gruenwald comments,

The traditions and writings which are discussed in this collection of studies crystallized among people whose intellectual horizons were not as clearly and sharply outlined as those of the modern mind. For those people, the demarcation lines between dreams and dream-like situations, on the one hand, and
rational wakefulness, on the other, were rather flexible and likely to be altogether ignored. (—PREFACE, page i)

Refer also to Gruenwald’s article:

• Halperin, David J. The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel’s Vision. [TEXTE UND STUDIEN ZUM ANTiken JUDENTUm, Volume 16] (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1988), hereafter FACES.

FACES is a thorough study which challenges many conclusions and assumptions of previous scholars, tracing merkabah material from the Bible, through the apocalypses and rabbinic literature, concluding with the hekhalot texts. Translations of the text Re’iyot Yezkiel (VISIONS OF EZEKIEL) and other important segments of hekhalot material are included.

Halperin concludes that the hekhalot tradition grew out of interpretations of mythic aspects of third-century Palestinian sermons connected with Šabuwrat which combined the stories of Ezekiel’s vision and the reception of the Torah at Mt. Sinai with Psalm 68, which was interpreted to refer to Moses’ ascent to heaven.

I suggest that certain people, nurtured on the stories of how Moses climbed to heaven and seized Torah from the angels, used these images to express and to satisfy their own yearning to have Torah made accessible to them. (FACES, page 385)

These “certain people,” according to Halperin, turn out to be not the rabbis but rather sam ba’ares, i.e., “folk without the rabbi’s expertise,” (FACES, page 437) looking for a shortcut to Torah knowledge and wisdom.

FACES is valuable in a way that few books of this ilk are in that Halperin invites the reader to engage in his entire scholarly process, which he lays out in great detail in his 450-page text, two-tiered notes (footnotes and endnotes), seven informative appendices (Appendix I: “Orientation to Rabbinic Sources” is especially helpful), and full reference list (which is divided into sixteen sections according to topic).

Refer to Halperin’s articles:


Of the thirteen articles, ten are in German; the three in English are

Poetics of Ascent offers a translation of Ma’aseh Merkabah with a speculative analysis regarding the functions of this text’s “ritual language.”

Further, see Janowitz’ article:

1990


Revelation and Mystery outlines the forerunners of merkava mysticism (namely, ancient Judaism, apocalyptic literature, Qumran, wisdom literature, Philo, Josephus, and early rabbinic literature), which brings us to the brink of the hekhalot literature. Bockmuehl instead follows the line of Pauline Christianity via Paul’s gospel and letters.

1991


Mystical Prayer…gives a full treatment and translation of Ma’aseh Merkabah (WORK OF THE CHARIOT).

Mystical Prayer is a revised and expanded version of Swartz’ Ph.D. dissertation, LITURGICAL ELEMENTS IN EARLY JEWISH MYSTICISM: A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF “MA’ASEH MERKABAH” (New York: New York University, 1986).

1992


After a discussion of the ironic errors of this lecture’s title, Dan identifies the “distinctively mystical elements in Hekhalot literature” as residing in only five texts: Hekhalot Rabbati, Hekhalot Zutarti, Sefer Hekhalot (or 3 Enoch), Ma’aseh Merkabah, and Shi’ur Qomah.

Revelation… has been reprinted in Dan’s Jewish Mysticism, Volume One: LATE ANTIQUITY (Northvale – Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998), pages 77-108.


HMG is a detailed look at a selection of hekhalot texts. Instead of summarizing each text in turn, Schäfer organizes his analysis thematically, considering each text’s notion of God, angels, and man. He clarifies the roles of two distinct motifs: (i) ascent through the hekhalot to the throne of glory, and (ii) the adjuration—either to God or to one of his angels.

Refer to Schäfer’s article:

1993

Further elaborating on the topics covered in *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism* is the collection of articles which comprises Dan’s *Jewish Mysticism*, Volume One: LATE ANTIQUITY (Northvale – Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998—hereafter JM1), in which the following articles by Dan have been reprinted.


1994


This book … is an attempt to treat in a comprehensive manner the problem of visionary experience in some of the main texts of the classical period of medieval Jewish mysticism. I have isolated the problem of vision and visualization since this constitutes one of the essential phenomenological concerns in the various mystical corpora produced by Jewish authors throughout history. I make no claim that mysticism is identical to or collapsible into the phenomenon of vision. I do, however, maintain that the examination of this issue provides an excellent speculum through which to view the religious experience of different Jewish mystics.

While the major focus of this book, from a chronological perspective, is the High Middle Ages… (chapters 5 to 7), in chapter 3 I discuss the nature of the vision of the glory in the ancient Jewish mystical corpus known as the Hekhalot or Merkabah literature. The justification for including this chapter is both historical-textual and phenomenological. (—page 9) [my ellipses—DK]

After providing a summary of scholarship on *hekhalot* literature, CHAPTER 3, “Visionary Ascent and Enthronement in the Hekhalot Literature,” discusses the vision of God as presented therein, citing *Hekhalot Rabhab* most often. Wolfson explores problematic aspects, namely “The Paradox of Seeing the Hidden God,” eroticism, and anthropomorphism, which bear upon the import of the texts: Did actual experiences determine the texts, or did the texts determine the experiences? Are the experiences themselves “real” or “imagined”? Does the *hekhalot* literature represent experience or exegesis? Are such distinctions useful in understanding the intent of the *hekhalot* authors? Through the chapter, Wolfson remains in dialogue with other scholars who have treated the *hekhalot* material, Scholem, Schäfer, and Halperin in particular.

From a phenomenological perspective as well, it is obvious that the Hekhalot corpus is an intrinsic part of such a study [*i.e.*, of visionary experience in medieval Jewish mysticism], insofar as the vision of glory and the chariot served as a paradigm for visionary experience in later Jewish mysticism, influenced in particular…by the philosophical reinterpretations of this religious experience, as will be discussed in chapter 4 [“Theories of Glory and Visionary Experience in Pre-Kabbalistic Sources”]. To be sure, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the various ‘trends’ of Jewish mysticism took shape in such a way that the chariot vision is hermeneutically transformed. It is nevertheless the case that the major mystical ideologies of the period to be discussed in this monograph, the German Pietists [CHAPTER 5: “Haside Ashkenaz: Vertical and Docetic (≈ “real” or “imagined”) Interpretations of the Chariot Vision”] and the Provençal-Spanish kabbalists of the theosophic trend [CHAPTERS 6 and 7, “Visionary Gnosis and the Role of the Imagination in Theosophic Kabbalah” and “The Hermeneutics of Visionary Experience: Revelation and Interpretation in the Zohar”] orient themselves in terms of the chariot. In that sense we can speak of these schools as hermeneutical transformations of the Hekhalot mysticism. (—pages 9-10) [my brackets and ellipses—DK]
Further, refer to Wolfson’s articles


1995

- Kuyt, Annalies. The ‘Descent’ to the Chariot. Towards a Description of the Terminology, Place, Function and Nature of the YERIDAH in Hekhalot Literature [TEXTE UND STUDIEN ZUM ANTIKEN JUDENTUM, Volume 45] (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1995), hereafter DESCENT.

1996


Swartz translates and analyzes the Sar Torah (PRINCE OF THE TORAH) texts with an eye toward the cultural environment which produced them.

See below, “Translations & References,” § A.

Abrams treats and translates the *Sod ha-Egoz* texts, “the earliest known commentaries on Ezekiel’s Chariot (*Ma’aseh Merkabah*),” which are, on the one hand, apparent latter-day developments of *hekhalot* literature while, on the other hand, “proto-kabbalistic.”


In chapters 4 through 7, passages from Shi’ur Qomah, 3 Enoch, *Razo shel Sandalphon* (SECRET OF SANDALPHON, a *hekhalot*-related text), and *Hekhalot Rabbati* are translated and analyzed.


The first half of the book (Parts 1 and 2) provides an excellent survey of *merkabah* material and the apocalyptic, non-apocalyptic—including Qumran material—and Christian literature clustered around it from Hellenistic times through the first century. Part 2 examines *merkabah* mysticism in some detail to set up an analysis of its connections with Johannine mysticism. Kanagaraj concludes

In short, John, in his peculiar way, has intertwined the two aspects of Jewish mysticism, *Ma’aseh Merkabah* and *Ma’aseh Bereshit*, by using the Logos-concept. By so doing, he seeks to confront and persuade the mystics of his time to come to faith in Jesus, the Logos-Son, who is the revelation of God’s glory on earth and who embodies the reality behind God's creation. (—page 300)


... *Aseneth* displays significant affinities with traditions about the adjuration of angels and ‘ascent’ to heavens as known to us from the problematic *hekhalot* and related materials. ... Given the nature of our sources, it seems impossible to know what if any actual connections might exist between *Aseneth* and *hekhalot* traditions. But if the longer version of *Aseneth* in particular does stand in some self-conscious relationship to the *hekhalot* traditions, gender may well be a significant factor in the differences. (—page 173)

Refer especially to CHAPTER 4, “Aseneth and the Adjunction of Angels,” and CHAPTER 5, “Aseneth and Mystical Transformation in the Hekhalot Traditions.”


Lesses concentrates on the adjuration sections of the *hekhalot* material. Along with an analysis of these “ritual performances,” Lesses presents a survey of current scholarship, covering many of the authors mentioned in the present paper. Further, she attempts to set the adjurations of the *hekhalot* into the milieu of the Greco-Egyptian ritual literature of late antiquity.
Refer to Lesses’ articles:


1999


  Within Merkabah mysticism, God is frequently depicted as an exalted and highly remote figure. Thus, Scholem was partly right when he described the gulf between humans and the God in Merkabah mysticism. Yet, Scholem erred when he emphasized the impossibility of closing this gulf—that is, when he defined the God of Merkabah mysticism as absolutely inaccessible or transcendent. How was the distance between human beings and God breached in Merkabah mysticism? The answer to this question requires an appreciation of the paradoxical nature of the angelic vice regent. (Guardians of the Gate, page 9).

  Deutsch discusses Metatron in this role, with comments on Akatriel. He then examines similar figures in Gnosticism (Sabaoth) and Mandaeism (Abathur).

  Further, refer to Deutsch’s article:


2000


  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 descendants of Rashi, who are conventionally considered to have been inclined exclusively toward study of the Talmud.

2001


  In the first chapter, Davila provides an excellent summary of the issues and debates in hekhalot scholarship. He then makes his case for understanding the hekhalot texts not as being mere literary constructs but as describing the experiences of real practitioners, whom Davila likens to shamans, i.e., “religious functionaries,” “intermediaries” seeking “to gain power over the spiritual world.”

  Further, see Davila’s articles


Eskola says in the introduction (page 17), “…it will be the main purpose of this work to investigate the relationship between Jewish merkabah mysticism and New Testament exaltation Christology by focusing on the central metaphor of the throne. In this study our interest lies in the occupants of the throne, in enthronements, and in the function of the throne in different contexts.”


Chapter 5, “Using Names, Letters, and Praise: The Language of Ascent,” focuses on *Hekhalot Rabbati*. Chapter 6, “Combining Words and Deeds: Angelic Impreration in *The Book of Secrets*,” discusses *Sefer ha-Razim*. The *beekhalot* practitioners are considered within the broader setting of the prevailing assumptions—Jewish, Christian, and pagan—of the culture in Late Antiquity concerning religion and ritual.


Thereafter, Morray-Jones offers an in-depth analysis of the “water vision episode” within the context of the *beekhalot* literature, *i.e.*, *Hekhalot Rabbati* and, especially, *Hekhalot Zutarti*. An extensive appendix discusses “Solomon and the Queen of Sheba,” a story which “appears to derive from the same traditional background and to be related in some manner to the water vision episode itself” (—page 230).

Refer to Morray-Jones’ articles


Arbel’s summary of *beekhalot* and *merkabah* literature and scholarly approaches to it is not as engaging or detailed as, for instance, the introduction in Davila’s *Descenders to the Chariot* (see 2001 above). However, Arbel nicely treats the question, “What is MYSTICAL about *beekhalot-merkabah* mysticism?” *i.e.*, what are its “mystical” characteristics and intentions?

FROM THE SUNY PRESS CATALOGUE (Spring 2003):

While previous scholarship has demonstrated the connection between Hekhalot and Merkavah mysticism and parallel traditions in Rabbinical writings, the Dead Sea Scrolls, apocalyptic, early Christian, and Gnostic sources, this work points out additional mythological traditions that resonate in this literature. Arbel suggests that mythological patterns of expression, as well as themes and models rooted in Near Eastern mythological traditions are employed, in spiritualized fashion, to communicate mystical content.
See also Arbel’s articles


2004


Elior details the traditions and literature leading up to the *hekhalot* texts. She writes,

Heikhalot literature preserves the living continuation of the sacred service by recovering it from the realm of space and time: the Temple/hekhal is lifted up to the heavens, and the priests serving therein become the ministering angels in the supernal Temples; the sacred service in these heavenly sanctuaries is described explicitly in terms of the rituals of the earthly Temple. This metamorphosis is implemented through the terminology of Merkavah mysticism, combining the hallowed memory of ritual with creative imagination and visionary inspiration, creating a bridge between the ‘revealed’ and the ‘hidden.’ (—INTRODUCTION, pages 14-15).

Elior attempts to show that merkabah/hekhalot mysticism grew out of practices described in the writings of the Qumran sect.

Refer, however, to the critical comments about Elior’s *Three Temples* made by presenters Nehemia Polen, Alan F. Segal, Jonah Steinberg, and Lawrence H. Schiffman at the 36th Annual Conference of the Association for Jewish Studies (Chicago: December 19-21, 2004), § 4.5, HEAVENLY SECRETS AND HUMAN AUTHORITY IN THE THOUGHT OF SECTARIANS, SAGES, AND EARLY JEWISH MYSTICS, Chair: Rebecca Lesses (CDs and tapes available from Content Management Corporation, 3043 Foothill Blvd., Suite #2, La Crescenta, CA 91214: 818-857-0874).

Find also the “devastating critique of most of [Elior’s] major theses” (—quoting Peter Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*, page 14, note 51) by Martha Himmelfarb in “Merkavah Mysticism since Scholem: Rachel Elior’s *The Three Temples*,” in *Weg Mystischer Gotteserfahrung: Judentum, Christentum und Islam / Mystical Approaches to God: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, edited by Peter Schäfer (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2006). Ironically, Elior reiterates arguments from *The Three Temples* in a paper which appears immediately before Himmelfarb’s in the same volume (see the last entry on the list of Elior’s articles immediately below).


Also, see Elior’s articles


2005


My emphasis on the situated nature of “Merkavah mysticism” [as opposed to a “radical alternative or esoteric counterpart of ‘normative’ rabbinic Judaism”] represents, at least in part, a reaction to the scholarly literature that stems from this homogenizing tendency [which is to “routinely conflate later applications or elaborations on Heikhalot texts with the Jewish ‘mystical’ or ‘magical’ literatures of Late Antiquity”]. To this end, this study aims to illuminate the particular historical circumstances and ideological motivations that led the creators of Heikhalot Rabbati to formulate their novel conception of heavenly ascent as an esoteric ritual discipline. I thereby pointedly emphasize the role of Heikhalot literature in the transformation of Jewish religious thought from its largely decentralized roots in Late Antiquity to its gradual drive towards systematization in the High Middle Ages. (—PREFACE, pages viii-ix)


PART ONE, “Evolution of the Roles and Titles of the Seventh Antediluvian Hero in Mesopotamian, Enochic, and Merkabah Tradition” [Chapter Three deals primarily with Sefer Hekhalot (3 Enoch)]

PART TWO, “Polemical (Adamic, Mosaic, and Noachic) Developments and Their Role in the Evolution of Enoch’s Roles and Titles in the Slavonic Apocalypse (= 2 Enoch)”

Orlov fills a gap in scholarship by reintroducing the Slavonic pseudepigrapha (THE APOCALYPSE OF ABRAHAM, THE LADDER OF JACOB, and, particularly, 2 Enoch) into the progression from Second Temple apocalypticism to hekhalot literature (which progression, borrowing from Hugo Odeberg’s analysis, can be epitomized as 1 Enoch → 2 Enoch → 3 Enoch). Orlov refers to 2 Enoch as “proto-hekhalot,” which indicates, in Orlov’s assessment, the degree to which rabbinic mystical and hekhalot literature relied upon it.

Find Orlov’s article,

2006


Alexander treats “Heikhalot Mysticism and Qumran” in CHAPTER 5, stating,

…comparison of Qumran mysticism with Heikhalot mysticism draws Qumran into the larger discipline of the study of Jewish mysticism, and puts it in a broader intellectual context. It is probably not unfair to say that the study of the Scrolls has been somewhat marginalized within the study of Judaism, and its significance underestimated by mainstream Jewish Studies scholars (see Schiffman 1994 [Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls—noted immediately below]). … It is only recently that attempts have been made to integrate the Qumran evidence into the general history of Jewish mysticism (e.g., Elior 2004 [The Three Temples—noted above]). As we shall see, this evidence arguably challenges Scholem’s paradigm of Jewish mysticism [as in Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism—noted above], and forces a revision of it…. (—pages 121-2)
Regarding the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* and other “mystical” texts from Qumran:

- ______. Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Last Library of Qumran (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994): Chapter 22, “Mysticism and Magic.”


  In an effort to determine the relationship of Paul’s ascent in 2 Cor. 12 to other early ascent accounts, a range of texts is considered, including 4QBerakhot and the Slavonic Enoch. *Hekhalot* literature, in particular *Sefer Hekhalot* (3 Enoch) and *Hekhalot Rabbati*, is discussed in chapter 8.

  Note Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones’ objections to Gooder in *The Mystery of God*, pages 402-404 (listed below: 2009 • Rowland/Morray-Jones).


  These eighteen articles, gathered from symposia of the Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism unit of the Society of Biblical Literature conducted over a ten-year span commencing in 1995, are described in DeConick’s preface as “a pioneering volume, the first ever to collect international voices that are mapping this field of study” (page xx).
CONTENTS:
Abbreviations

PREFACE

PART 1: HERMENEUTICS AND EXPERIENCE
• Alan F. Segal, “Religious Experience and the Construction of the Transcendent Self”
• Christopher Rowland, with Patricia Gibbons and Vicente Dobroruka, “Visionary Experience in Ancient Judaism and Christianity”
• Seth L. Sanders, “Performance Exegesis”

PART 2: COMMUNAL IDENTITIES
• Rachel Elior, “The Emergence of the Mystical Traditions of the Merkabah”
• James R. Davila, “The Ancient Jewish Apocalypses and the Hekhalot Literature”
• Ra’anan S. Bousan, “Rabbi Ishmael’s Priestly Genealogy in Hekhalot Literature”

PART 3: COSMOLOGY
• Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, “The Temple Within”
• Andrei A. Orlov, “God’s Face in the Enochic Tradition”
• Cameron C. Afzal, “Wheels of Time in the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ”
• Kevin Sullivan, “Sexuality and Gender of Angels”

PART 4: APOCALYPTICISM
• Frances Flannery-Dailey, “Lessons on Early Jewish Apocalypticism and Mysticism from Dream Literature”
• Kelley Coblentz Bauch, “Situating the Afterlife”

PART 5: PRACTICES
• Celia Deutsch, “The Therapeutae, Text Work, Ritual, and Mystical Experience”
• Andrea Lieber, “Jewish and Christian Heavenly Meal Traditions”
• Charles A. Gieschen, “Baptismal Praxis and Mystical Experience in the Book of Revelation”
• Daphna Arbel, “Divine Secrets and Divination”

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Indices


Smith’s CHAPTER 3, “Jewish Mysticism,” concentrates on the early development of Merkabah mysticism in the pseudepigrapha, Philo, Qumran literature, and Revelation. From his research on the first-century ascetical material, Smith concludes that Paul’s letter to the Colossians is a response to the “super-spirituality” of ascent practitioners, for “such practices showed a faith that was more dependent on human effort than divine grace, and was thereby a denial of Paul’s gospel.” (—page 73)


CHAPTER 3 “The Ethics of Gazing: The Attitude of Early Jewish Mysticism toward Seeing the Chariot; andCHAPTER 4 “Concealment and Power: Magic and Esotericism in the Hekhalot Literature.”

Toward the end ofCHAPTER 4, Halbertal writes,

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. (—page 33)


In the introduction to the articles in PART TWO, Orlov writes

It should be noted that 2Enoch, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and the *Ladder of Jacob* represent a unique group of texts that share a theophanic and mediatorial language that, in my view, is as different from the mainstream of early apocalyptic and pseudepigraphic writings as it is from later Hekhalot materials. This group of materials gives evidence of the lost practical and literary development that could very well represent an important transitional stage in early Jewish mystical testimonies, serving as a bridge from the matrix of early Jewish Apocalypticism, as it was manifested in early Enochic literature, to the matrix of early Jewish mysticism as it became manifest in rabbinic Merkabah and Hekhalot materials. The articles gathered in this volume intend to illustrate this transitional character of the Slavonic pseudepigraphic evidence by exploring theophanic and angelological imagery found in 2Enoch, the *Ladder of Jacob*, the Slavonic version of 3 Baruch and other pseudepigraphical texts preserved in Slavonic. It appears that the theophanic and angelological developments found in these documents occupy an intermediary stage between Second Temple Apocalypticism and Hekhalot mysticism and thus exhibit its own distinctive, one might say ‘proto-Hekhalot,’ mystical mold. (—page 105)


The major divisions of this 685-page volume could form three books:

**PART I** THINGS INTO WHICH ANGELS LONG TO LOOK: APPROACHING MYSTICISM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE JEWISH APOCALYPSES (*Christopher Rowland*)

**PART II** DIVINE NAMES, CELESTIAL SANCTUARIES, AND VISIONARY ASCENTS: APPROACHING THE NEW TESTAMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MERKAVAH TRADITIONS (*Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones*)—includes “A Version of Hekhalot Zutarti” (see notes below, TEXTS & REFERENCES, § B)

**PART III** THE BODY OF GLORY: APPROACHING THE NEW TESTAMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SHI’UR KOMA TRADITIONS (*Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones*) (see notes below, TEXTS & REFERENCES, § F. Shi’ur Qomali)

Many scholars have dealt with Merkavah mysticism and its ramifications for classical rabbinic Judaism … as well as with the origins of the Kabbalah in the Book Bahr, but very few have paid full attention to the evidence of the Hebrew Bible, the apocalyptic literature, Qumran, and Philo. It is this gap between the Hebrew Bible and Merkavah mysticism that the present book wishes to address in a systematic and reflective manner. (ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS—page XI)

In his introduction, Schäfer surveys previous research on the forerunners of Merkavah mysticism, in particular the studies of Gershon Scholem and Rachel Elior (see above, 1965 • *Jewish Gnosticism*… etc., and 2004 • *The Three Temples*). He commences with Ezekiel (CHAPTER 1), then to the Enoch literature and related material (CHAPTERS 2 and 3). The section on Qumran (CHAPTER 4) addresses “Communion with Angels” while the section on Philo (CHAPTER 5) concentrates on “The Ascent of the Soul.” CHAPTER 6, “The Rabbis I,” takes up the “Cycle of Seven Stories” from the Tosefta (the four who entered *pardes*, Ben Zoma on the upper and lower waters, etc); “The Rabbis II” (CHAPTER 7) discusses the Merkavah passages in *Yerushalmi* and *Bavli* (the same *Haqqah* sections considered by Halperin—see above, 1980 • *Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*). CHAPTER 8 treats “The Merkavah Mystics,” focusing, in particular, on *Hekhalot Zutarti*. CHAPTER 9 offers Schäfer’s conclusions and observations.

See also, Schäfer’s articles

2011


Koren’s PART I: EARLY JEWISH MYSTICISM discusses *Beraita d’Niddah* (TEACHINGS ON THE MENSTRUANT) and its connections with *hekhalot* literature. Refer below, TEXTS & REFERENCES, § Q, for a brief passage from *Forsaken* regarding *Beraita d’Niddah.*

2012


ABSTRACT from Brill’s website:

This book focuses on the additional liturgical and alternative readings of *Targum of Ezekiel*, the so-called *Targumic Toseftot*. The critical text, translation, and commentary are presented with special reference to the long segments of unique mystical lore that are preserved in the *Targumic Toseftot* to Ezekiel 1, the chapter which describes the prophet’s vision of the celestial chariot. This unique manuscript material sheds light on a relatively dark chapter in the reception history of early Jewish mystical lore, being closely related to the Hekhalot literature, and to the *Shi’ur Qomah* tradition in particular. The volume concludes with a systematic treatment of the *Targumic Toseftot* to Ezekiel in relation to their Aramaic dialect, date and provenance, as well as their historical and social setting.

Damsma takes up not only “The Order of the Heavens in Rabbinic Literature” but also “The Order of the Underworlds….”

“The role of Jewish apocalypticism in [Epistle to the] Hebrews has been vastly underappreciated, and the role of Jewish apocalyptic mysticism, even more so. In the field of New Testament studies generally, the aforementioned sporadic engagement with Jewish apocalyptic traditions appears to have passed, at least for the moment, and it is now more common for NT scholars to draw upon these rich and fascinating traditions in an attempt to elucidate the NT documents. Moreover, certain major recent publications suggest that research in this area will no longer be able to so easily marginalize the mystical dimension of apocalyptic traditions. Numerous desiderata remain, however, and among them is the role of Jewish apocalyptic mysticism in the epistle to the Hebrews, the subject of the present study.” (INTRODUCTION, page 2)

The “certain recent publications” that Barnard refers to are *The Mystery of God…* by Christopher Rowland and Christopher R. A. Murray-Jones and *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* by Peter Schäfer (both listed above: 2009).

Barnard does say, however, “Although I have made occasional reference to the Hekhalot literature, this study is not an attempt to explore the relationship between Hebrews and the Hekhalot traditions” (INTRODUCTION, page 21).

2013

• *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, edited by Ra’anana S. Boustan, Klaus Herrmann, Reimund Leicht, Annette Y. Reed, and Giuseppe Veltri, with the collaboration of Alex Ramos, Volume 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

Part IV: Hekhalot and Magical Studies (pages 327-713)

- Kuyt, Annelies. “Visions in Hekhalot Literature: Reflections on Terminology”
- Shavit, Yaacov. “‘He was Thoth in Everything’: Why and When King Solomon Became Both *Magister omnium physicorum* and Master of Magic”
- Bohak, Gideon; and Geller, Mark. “Babylonian Astrology in the Cairo Genizah”
- Salzer, Dorothea M. “How to Use the Hebrew Bible to Harm Your Neighbor: The Use of Biblical Quotations in Curse Texts Found in the Cairo Genizah”
- Bohak, Gideon; and Herrmann, Klaus. “*Tefillat Rav Hammuna Sava*: Genizah Fragments and Medieval Manuscripts”
- Hirschfelder, Ulrike. “*Torat ha-Mashiakh* in the Context of Apocalyptic Traditions in Ashkenazi Hekhalot Manuscripts”
- Rebiger, Bill. “Non-European Traditions of Hekhalot Literature: The Yemenite Evidence”

Another article of interest within *Envisioning Judaism*, Volume 1:

- Boustan, Ra’anan S. “The Contested Reception of *The Story of the Ten Martyrs* in Medieval Midrash” (pages 369-393)


**CONTENTS:**

- Ra’anana Boustan, “Introduction”

**PART I. THE FORMATION OF HEKHALOT LITERATURE: LINGUISTIC, LITERARY, AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS**

- Noam Mizrahi, “The Language of Hekhalot Literature: Preliminary Observations”
- Peter Schäfer, “Metatron in Babylonia”
- Alexei Sivertsev, “The Emperor’s Many Bodies: The Demise of Emperor Lupinus Revisited”
• Klaus Herrmann, “Jewish Mysticism in Byzantium: The Transformation of Merkavah Mysticism in 3 Enoch”
• David M. Grossberg, “Between 3 Enoch and Bavli Haggiga: Heresiology and Orthopraxy in the Ascent of Elisha ben Abuyah”
• Moulie Vidas, “Hekhalot Literature, the Babylonian Academies, and the Tanna’im”

PART II. THE TRANSMISSION & RECEPTION OF HEKHALOT LITERATURE: TOWARD THE MIDDLE AGES
• Peter Schäfer, “The Hekhalot Genizah”
• Gideon Bohak, “Observations on the Transmission of Hekhalot Literature in the Cairo Genizah”
• Ophir Münz-Manor, “A Prolegomenon to the Study of Hekhalot Traditions in European Piyyut”

PART III. EARLY JEWISH MYSTICISM IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: THEMES & PATTERNS
• Reimund Leicht, “Major Trends in Rabbinic Cosmology”
• Rebecca Lesses, “Women and Gender in the Hekhalot Literature”
• Andrei A. Orlov, “‘What is Below?’ Mysteries of Leviathan in the Early Jewish Accounts and Mishnah Haggiga 2:1”
• Michael Meerson, “Rites of Passage in Magic and Mysticism”
• Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Rethinking (Jewish-)Christian Evidence for Jewish Mysticism”


(INTRODUCTION, page 19).

See my comments on Davila’s Hekhalot Literature in Translation below on page 24.


Between Temple and Torah reprints twenty of Himmelfarb’s papers originally published between 1984 and 2011. Refer, in particular, to the section entitled “Heavenly Ascent,” which contains

• “Merkavah Mysticism since Scholem: Rachel Elior’s The Three Temples,” from Wge Mystischer Gotteserfahrung: Judentum, Christentum und Islam / Mystical Approaches to God: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, edited by Peter Schäfer (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2006), pages 19-36.

Himmelfarb observes,

A first attempt at reading through the hekhalot literature can be an unsettling experience, and not only because of the difficulties inherent in the texts. Anyone whose picture of this literature was shaped primarily by Scholem’s account comes to it expecting to find the continuation of the tradition of heavenly ascent from the Jewish apocalypses. For while Scholem by no means ignored other aspects of the hekhalot literature, he consistently places ascent at its center. Thus it comes as a surprise to discover how small a place descriptions of heavenly ascent occupy in these texts. (—Between Temple and Torah, page 257)
2014


With the surge of books treating the *hekhalot* covered in the previous pages, which all of necessity refer to the first edition of Gruenwald’s work, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* itself fell out of print, became difficult to find, and grew prohibitively expensive to obtain. However, for Brill simply to reprint the book would have proven the original edition to be out-of-date on more than a few points in light of all of the important work done on *hekhalot* literature since 1980. Yet, for Gruenwald to compose a wholly new book in response to the research of the intervening years would sacrifice the solid presentation he offered in his original effort. Hence, a revised edition, the two editions being perfect bookends to a field—and a career—devoted to apocalyptic, ancient ritual, and mysticism.

It was my privilege to read and comment on the final draft of the second edition of *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* before publication. My role was primarily to make suggestions regarding form and clarity in English.

While not penned by me, the publisher’s description shows traces of my hand:

This is a new and revised edition of the book first published 1980. It contains new introductory and concluding chapters as well as a bibliography and updated index. Furthermore, substantial corrections, updates, and changes have been made in the original text. The changes concern matters of language and style, they nuance the line of argumentation, and they update the discussion of major issues. The new chapters fill several scholarly gaps that have opened since the initial publication of this book in 1980. The new introductory chapter explores new venues and issues in the study and assessment of the *hekhalot* literature and relevant passages in apocalyptic literature, and this in light of epistemological and ontological considerations. The concluding chapter discusses the ritual praxis of the experience of the *hekhalot* mystics and its affinity to magic, and this in terms of new approaches to ritual theory.10

2016


In the Hekhalot literature, God is both transcendent and present; but this dualism must be understood epistemologically. God is not so transcendent as to be unimaginable, unthinkable, unknowable, but what we can know of God must be tempered by a knowledge of our own minds’ tendency to reduce and compress information into a subjective form. That is to say, all human knowledge of God takes the shape of human knowledge, which is linguistic: it is *language-shaped*. This does not invalidate it. This bringing into the subjective realm, or *making-knowable* of the divine is essential in any theology which claims revelation. However, the knowledge must not be mistaken for the thing-itself. (—page 94)

2017


While he focuses on the image of the heavenly double in works like the *Animal Apocalypse, Book of the Watchers, 2 Enoch, Ladder of Jacob*, and *Joseph and Aseneth*, Orlov persistently draws the *hekhalot* material into the discussion, especially *Sefer Hekhalot (= 3 Enoch)*.

Reviewer Alexander Kulik states (on the back cover),

[This book] is particularly important for many scholars who do not have control of the Slavonic originals of the *Ladder of Jacob* and 2 Enoch. Orlov also draws on a broad range of unfamiliar sources, including

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Manichaean and Mandaean materials, which were often neglected by experts who previously investigated the heavenly counterpart imagery.


  In this work, Andrei A. Orlov examines Jewish apocalyptic traditions about the angel Yahoe, tracing their conceptual impact on the development of later rabbinic and Hekhalot beliefs concerning the supreme angel Metatron. The author argues that the figure Yahoe, who became associated in Jewish apocalypticism with the distinctive aural ideology of the divine Name, provides an important conceptual key not only for elucidating the evolution of the Metatron tradition, but also for understanding the origins of the distinctive aural ideology prominent in early Jewish mystical accounts. Andrei A. Orlov suggests that the aural mold of Jewish apocalypticism exercised a decisive and formative influence on the development of early Jewish mysticism. (—Mohr book description)

  Orlov states in his introduction,

  …one of the tasks of this study will be the exploration not only of the ideological proclivities of Hekhalot materials, wherein Metatron’s mediatorial profile came arguably to its conceptual fore, but also a thorough investigation of the peculiar apocalyptic mold found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, from which Yahoe’s figure appears in full blown conceptual complexity.

  The comparative analysis of the imagery found in an early Jewish apocalyptic text, which was preserved by Eastern Orthodox Christians in its Slavonic translation, and the traditions attested in some Hekhalot macroforms circulating in later Jewish rabbinic and mystical circles, inevitably raise the question of the possible channels of transmission between these different ideological and cultural milieus. This issue, without a doubt, represents a most difficult challenge for students of early Jewish mysticism, as it had already been encountered by Gershom Scholem, who faced the great difficulty of attempting to provide historical links between apocalyptic traditions and later molds of Jewish mystical tradition, including Hekhalot literature. (pages 4-5)

  In that Orlov focusses on Metatron, the primary *hekhalot* text he treats is *Sefer Hekhalot*, i.e., 3 Enoch.

2018


  The sixteen chapters of *Mechanics...* are in two sets: Part I, Magic, and Part II, Mysticism. These chapters are based on Swartz’ papers which were previously published in a variety of journals and compendia.

  Each section of the volume begins with a survey of the main issues and types of evidence … and programmatic essays on the concepts of magic and mysticism…. The two sections then proceed to studies in the evidence for each category, with an eye to sorting out the problems raised by the textual and material dimensions of the subject…, and especially the complex network of symbols, effects, and internal logic that drives each one…. These studies emphasize close readings of ritual and literary-historical studies as ways of analyzing them. Each section concludes with a translation of a brief text which exemplifies some of the dynamics described in the body of the book. (—INTRODUCTION, page 1)

  The texts given are *The Book of the Great Name* (Schäfer, *Synopsis*, §§ 489-495—see below, The “Core Group” of *Hekhalot Texts*, § A) and “The Seal of the Merkavah” (AKA the “Ozlayah fragment”—Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, pp. 97-111).

  Swartz’ surveys of issues and scholarship at the heads of the two sections are excellent—and the most up-to-date—introductions to ancient Jewish magic and mysticism.

Busi states early in the book (p. 3),

> My aim is to dismantle the symbolic mechanism that makes the narrative move, and that leads the actors of the divine journey to behave a certain way and not otherwise.

Without sacrificing any of the requirements of scholarship, Busi has composed a book that can be enjoyed by the non-academic. His prose reaches out to the reader with statements like the following about “there,” the term set up to represent the goal of the mystic, the “celestial dimension”:

> “There” is the place where every time becomes visible to us, where memories and hopes touch and interpenetrate. “There” is a glowing city of light. (p. 11)

Busi starts his narrative sweep with the visions of the biblical Ezekiel and Isaiah then proceeds to place the *be'khalot* texts in a broad context—similar in range to that represented in Schäfer’s *Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (see above: 2009). Breaking down various themes and images along the way, Busi approaches the *be'khalot* mystics by asking, “What were they doing?” and “Why were they doing it?”

While offering a humanized, albeit analytical, take on the *be'khalot* literature, Busi casts the net wider by comparing the seven heavens of ancient Jewish mysticism with “The palaces of the Sabians” and “Seven palaces in Malaysia and in the heaven of China.”

Excerpts of significant source texts are provided (in English) throughout.
Translators & References

The Hekhalot Corpus

The number of *hekhalot* texts in translation has grown, albeit slowly, over the years, culminating with James R. Davila’s *Hekhalot Literature in Translation* (2013—see above, page 21), which includes all of the major works except

- *3 Enoch*, for which Davila defers to P. S. Alexander’s “excellent English translation” (—Davila, page 7) in Charlesworth’s *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*
- *Masekhet Hekhalot*, in that “it is doubtful that this text should be included in the Hekhalot corpus” (—ibid., page 9)
- much of the *Shi’ur Qomah* corpus, given that “its relationship to the other Hekhalot texts is somewhat tangential” (—ibid.). Davila refers the reader to the work on *Shi’ur Qomah* by Martin Cohen (1983 and 1985).

Here we enter directly into the question of what *is* and what *is not* a member of the *hekhalot* family; the canons offered by various scholars differ. For instance, Schäfer’s *Synopse* includes some items which many commentators find dubious, namely, *THE SWORD OF MOSES* and *Seder Rabba di Bereshit.*

One well-known text, *THE VISIONS OF EZEKIEL,* while almost always included on lists of *hekhalot* texts, is clearly of a character different from the so-called “core group.” Davila’s exclusion of *Masekhet Hekhalot* from the canon is certain to draw some criticism.

Discussions on which texts belong to the *hekhalot* canon have progressed along several lines:

1. Texts which have long been counted among the *hekhalot* are now thought not to belong, for example, *THE VISIONS OF EZEKIEL.*
2. Magical works, such as *THE SWORD OF MOSES* and *Sefer ha-Razim*, are being drawn closer to the *hekhalot* writings.
3. Some works are being wholly reconsidered in that they might not be *works* at all but rather of one genre or another, as, for instance, the *Shi’ur Qomah* and *Sar Torah* texts.

As mentioned, even the titles of these “books” are late inventions which have become *conventions,* used even by the scholars who refute their validity.

Drawing on the lists of *hekhalot* given by a number of contemporary scholars, below is a reference outline of sources on various *hekhalot* titles, erring generously in favor of inclusion.

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11 See APPENDIX 2, below, on the contents of *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur.*

12 *Masekhet Hekhalot* is a mixture of *hekhalot* and other materials, which its author/compiler blends and alters rather freely. There is indeed an *after-the-fact* quality to this text.
The “Core Group” of *Hekhalot* Texts

§ numbers given in braces { … } are section (microform) numbers established in *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1981)

Refer to APPENDIX 2 below on the contents of *Synopse.*

A. *Hekhalot Rabbati* [The Greater Palaces] (HR) {§§ 81-277}

* Sar Torah* [Prince of the Torah] {§§ 278-306}

Translations:


- HR chapters 15-29 {§§ 206-298}, prepared by Lauren Grodner—which includes §§ 281-287 from *Sar Torah*—in David R. Blumenthal’s *Understanding Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1978), where it is referred to as “Pirkei Heikalot.”

- HR chapters 1, 2, and 16-26, in Aryeh Kaplan’s *Meditation and Kabbalah* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1982).


- *Sar Torah* {§§ 278-280 and §§ 281-306 (from HR mss), §§ 307-314 (which fall outside the text usually incorporated into HR), §§ 560-570 (which appear in *Ma’aseh Merkavah*), and §§ 675-697 (from *Merkavah Rabba*)}, along with other *Sar Torah* rituals and related texts, in English translation in Michael Swartz’ *Schrölastic Magic, Chapters 4 and 5*.


- HR chapters 5 and 6 {§§ 107-121} (*The Story of the Ten Martyrs* up to the *First Apocalypse*), “annotated translation” = APPENDIX C of Ra’anani Abuschi’s dissertation, FROM MARTYR TO MYSTIC (listed above: 2005 • Boustan).

References to HR run throughout the following: Gruenwald’s AMM1,2, Schäfer’s HMG, Kuyt’s DESCENT, and Lesses’ Ritual Practices. See also

  “Chapter four investigates the early mystical treatise *Hekhalot Rabbati,* which captures the worldview of those Jews most preoccupied with angels. Jewish mystics strove to live in synchronicity with the angels, to achieve angelic status, and even to command the angels.” (from the abstract)


https://www.academia.edu/19801563/He_Who_Sits_Crowned_On_the_Throne_of_His_Glory_Body_Posture_in_Hekhalot_Rabbati_and_in_Rabbinic_Literature

• Wolfson. SPECULUM, chapter 3.

Helen Spurling treats the David Apocalypse {§§ 122-126} among the “Hebrew Visions of Hell and Paradise” in Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures, Volume 1, edited by Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013). She notes (page 701), “This work is found embedded in manuscripts of the mystical Hekhalot literature, usually in a work called the Hekhalot Rabbati, but it clearly is a separate composition.” It constitutes the first of three apocalypses which appear in the midst of HR (as in Smith’s translation).

Often appended to HR in manuscripts is “The Book of the Great Name” {§§ 489-495}. For an introduction and translation, see Michael D. Swartz, “The Book of the Great Name,” in


[13] Davila, in Hekhalot Literature…, page 38, 40, and 189, refers to §§ 489-495 simply as “an Aramaic magical handbook.”

B. Hekhalot Zutreti, or Zutarti [The Lesser Palaces] (HZ) {§§ 335-374, 407-419}


HZ in English is in James Davila’s Hekhalot Literature in Translation.


The version of HekhZ that follows includes all of the material included by both Schäfer and Elior (§§ 335-374 and 407-419) plus § 375 (included by Elior but not by Schäfer) and the Akiva ‘postscript’ (422-424). § 347 (Ms. Munich 40 only), where the copyist has mistakenly repeated the first words of § 337, is disregarded.

Owing to the redactional complexity of the HekhZ macroform, it cannot be claimed that this version represents an ‘original’ or ‘authoritative’ text of HekhZ. Schäfer’s contention that no such text ever existed is basically correct. It is therefore necessary to take account of the different sources and layers of literary activity found in the manuscripts, including the distinctive literary tradition represented by passages of Ms. New York. It can, however, be said that the materials included in this version are the basic ingredients of the early HekhZ literary tradition, that they were amalgamated with each other in something like this form during the early centuries of the common era, and that at least some of the materials preserved in this collection must be very old indeed.

In Transparent Illusion, Morray-Jones’ analyzes in detail two sections of HZ: the “ancient midrash … which includes the water vision episode” (§§ 407-412) in CHAPTER THREE, and the “throne midrash” (§§ 368-375) in CHAPTER EIGHT, section 2.

Many important passages from HZ are translated and discussed in Halperin’s Faces and Schäfer’s Origins of Jewish Mysticism (§ HEKHALOT ZUTARTI, pages 282-306).

References: AMM1,2, FACES, HMG, DESCENT, Ritual Practices, Scholem’s Jewish Gnosticism, and

C. *Sefer Hekhalot* [Book of Palaces] = Hebrew Book of Enoch = 3 Enoch (3E) {§§ 1-80}

Translators (listed chronologically):


- Dan, Joseph. *The Heart and the Fountain*, CHAPTER 3: 3E CHAPTERS I-XVI.

- Lumpkin, Joseph B. *The Books of Enoch: The Complete Volume Containing 1 Enoch (The Ethiopic Book of Enoch), 2 Enoch (The Slavonic Book of Enoch), and 3 Enoch (The Hebrew Book of Enoch)* (Blountsville: Fifth Estate, 2010).

  The back cover of Lumpkin’s *Books of Enoch* claims that “[u]ntil now, the Hebrew Book of Enoch has not been available to the general public since 1928,” indicating no knowledge of either the 1973 Ktav reprint of Odeberg or Alexander’s translation within Charlesworth’s *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (1983), which contains all three “Books of Enoch” with full scholarly treatment, pages 5-315. In fact, Lumpkin’s version of 3E appears to be merely a slight reworking of Odeberg’s translation and notes.


References: AMMI1, HMG, *Ritual Practices*, and the following articles by P. S. Alexander:


See also the following books and articles.


- ______. *Yabnoel and Metatron* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); Chapter III “deal[s] extensively with the Hekhalot materials, and especially with Sefer Hekhalot” (—page 141).

Saldarini, Anthony J. “Apocalypses and ‘Apocalyptic’ in Rabbinic Literature and Mysticism,” in *Semeia* 14; an outline of apocalyptic content in 3E (citations following Odeberg) appears on pages 192-193.


See above, 2006 • *Paradise Now*: articles by Rebecca Lesses and Daphna Arbel; and Schäfer’s *Origins of Jewish Mysticism*: § 3 ENOCH (pages 315-327).

**D. Merkabab Rabba [The Great Chariot] (MR) {§§ 655-708}**

A complete MR in English is offered in Davila’s *Hekhalot Literature in Translation*. Some few paragraphs of MR are translated in

- APPENDIX ONE of Janowitz’ *Poetics of Ascent* {§§ 675-678}, noted above.
- Swartz’ *Scholastic Magic* {§§ 675-676, §§ 680-687}
- Cohen’s *Shi’ur Qomah* {§§ 688-708}; see below: F. *Shi’ur Qomah*.

We must then turn to Schäfer’s HMG, Kuyt’s outline in DESCENT, and Lesses’ references in *Ritual Practices*.

Gruenwald’s chapter on MR in AMM1,2 begins with a description of material which may represent a sub-genre within *hekhalot* literature, namely, a portion of the *Sar ba-Panim* (ShP, PRINCE OF THE PRESENCE, or COUNTEANCE) {§§ 623-639}. Peter Schäfer treats ShP as an independent text in “Die Beschwörung des *Sar ba-panim*: Kritische Edition und Übersetzung” (THE ADJURATION OF THE PRINCE OF THE COUNTENANCE: CRITICAL EDITION AND TRANSLATION), originally published in *Frankfurter Judaische Beitrage*, vol. 6 (1978); reprinted in Schäfer’s *Hekhalot-Studien*. Of course, Schäfer’s translation is in German, but all is not lost. The same text has been put into English a number of times; refer to Section O, below.

Back to Gruenwald: Unlike AMM1, AMM2 goes on to systematically describe the text, quoting it frequently. Indeed, the account of MR in AMM2 greatly improves on the parallel section of AMM1 and addresses the issues posed in Schäfer’s *Hidden and Manifest God* and in the article just mentioned from *Hekhalot-Studien*.

Refer also to Anthony J. Saldarini’s “Apocalypses and ‘Apocalyptic’ in Rabbinic Literature and Mysticism,” in *Semeia* 14, page 192, for an outline of apocalyptic in MR.

**E. Ma’aseh Merkabab [Work of the Chariot] (MM) {§§ 544-596}**

Translations:

- Dan, *The Heart and the Fountain*, CHAPTER 2:  
  §§ 554-555 (= Janowitz’ Section 6; Swartz’ pages 231-233)  
  §§ 583-586 (= Janowitz’ Sections 24-26; Swartz’ pages 242-243)
- Davila, *Hekhalot Literature in Translation*, translates §§ 544-596
- Janowitz, Naomi. *The Poetics of Ascent*, translates §§ 544-596
- _______. *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism*, translates §§ 544-596
- _______. *Scholastic Magic*, translates §§ 571-578

References: Along with the five books listed under “Translations,” the last three of which offer a full analysis of the text, see AMM1,2, HMG, *Ritual Practices*, and the following articles:

• Murray-Jones, Christopher R. A. “The Temple Within” (in Paradise Now, page 161) translates a passage from MM (Scholem’s Gnosticism… APPENDIX C: § 6 / Schäfer’s Synopse §§ 544-45)

• Saldarini, Anthony J. “Apocalypses and ‘Apocalyptic’ in Rabbinic Literature and Mysticism,” in Semeia, outline of apocalyptic content in MM on page 196.


• _______. “Three-Dimensional Philology,” in Envisioning Judaism; analysis of MM MSS. on pages 542-545.

F. Shi’ur Qomah [MEASURE OF THE HEIGHT {of the Divine Body}] (SQ)

David Halperin suggests (FACES, page 364) that SQ “probably ought to be considered a generic term for materials describing God’s organs rather than a single text.” Martin S. Cohen (in his book listed immediately below) holds out for SQ’s having been an independent, freestanding work, complete with a lost urtext looming in back of the extant versions. SQ has been included here in the “Core Group” because nearly all of the texts discussed so far contain SQ material: HR, HZ, 3E, and MR.

Translations:


• Morray-Jones, Christopher R. A. THE BODY OF GLORY: APPROACHING THE NEW TESTAMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SHI‘UR QOMAH TRADITIONS, which is Part III of The Mystery of God (see above, 2009• Rowland/Morray-Jones)

• Orlov, Andrei A. “The Watchers of Satanael [or Satanael]: The Fallen Angels Traditions in 2 (Slavonic) Enoch,” § III. THE TRANSITIONAL TEMPLATE AND ITS AFTERLIFE IN THE SHI‘UR QOMAH AND HEKHALOT ACCOUNTS, in

• Saldarini, Anthony J. “Apocalypses and ‘Apocalyptic’ in Rabbinic Literature and Mysticism,” in Semeia; outline of apocalyptic content in SQ on page 196.


Texts Associated with the *Hekhalot* Corpus

The texts listed in the following set (G-J) are those which are usually included in summaries and lists of *hekhalot* literature.

G. *Reʻuyot Yehezkiel* [VISIONS OF EZEKIEL] (RY)

Translations:
- Halperin, David. *FACES*: Chapter VIII, § A.


H. *Masekhet Hekhalot* [TREATISE OF THE PALACES] (MH)

Gruenwald’s chapter (AMM1.2) on MH begins with these encouraging words: “Masekhet Hekhalot is the most frequently published Hekhalot text we have.” Alas, this comment reflects the state of the text in Hebrew, though there are two German translations: (i) by August Wunsche in *Aus Israelis Lehrhallen* III (1909); and (ii) by Klaus Herrmann, *Massakhet Hekhalot: Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar* [TEXTE UND STUDIEN ZUM ANTiken JUDENTUM, 39] (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1994). There is also a French translation by Nicolas Sed within his “Deux documents sur la kabbale: *Le Commentaire sur le Sepher Yesirah* de Moïse ben Nahman et le *Traite des Heykalot*,” in *Documents oubliés sur l’alchimie, la kabbale et Guillaume Postel*, offerts, à l’occasion de son 90e anniversaire, a François Secret par ses eleves et amis, “Scientific editor”: Sylvain Matton (Geneva: Librarie Droz, 2001).

Gruenwald’s chapter describes the contents of MH in some detail. MH is listed in Anthony J. Saldarini’s “Apocalypses and ‘Apocalyptic’ in Rabbinic Literature and Mysticism,” in *Semeia*, an outline of MH’s apocalyptic content is on page 196.

James Davila did not include MH in *Hekhalot Literature in Translation*, stating that “it is doubtful that this text should be included in the Hekhalot corpus” (page 9).

I. *Hekhalot* fragments, or Cairo Geniza(h) fragments (CG)

In 1968-1969, Ithamar Gruenwald published (in Hebrew) “New Passages from Hekhalot Literature,” in *Tarbiz*, vol. 38, no. 4; these were the newly-discovered Geniza fragments. These were published subsequently in Peter Schäfer’s *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (see note 7 above), and a selection has been put into English by James Davila, in *Hekhalot Literature in Translation*. See also Michael D. Swartz, *The Mechanics of Providence*, CHAPTER 16, for a fragment called “The Seal of the Merkavah.” (pp. 279-287).
Further see FACES, DESCENT, Ritual Practices, Swartz’ Scholastic Magic, and

- A paper by Gideon Bohak and Klaus Herrmann in Envisioning Judaism (pages 637-655) treats “Tefillat Rabbenu Saba: Genizah Fragments and Medieval Manuscripts,” saying of the Tefillat,

In spite of its obvious connections with the Hekhalot literature, it happens not to be attested in any of the European manuscripts used by Peter Schäfer in his Synopsis zur Hekhalot Literatur, and has thus remained outside the scholarly limelight. (page 637)

J. Fragments on Physiognomy, Chiromancy, and Metoposcopy

A number of these fragments have been published by Gruenwald (in Tarbiẓ, vol. 40, 1970) and Scholem in Sefer Assaf (Jerusalem: 1953) [Hebrew]. One fragment is discussed and translated into German by Schäfer in “Ein neues Fragment zur Metopskopie und Chiromantik” (in Hekhalot-Studien). Not only is there next to nothing of these texts in English translation, but Gruenwald (in AMM1,2) never really gets around to detailing their contents, though he does address the problems attending these shreds of texts.

Refer to

- Scholem’s article, “Chiromancy,’ in Kabbalah.

The list of hekhalot texts up to this point contains all items listed by Scholem in Jewish Gnosticism (pages 5-7), plus the Genizah fragments, which Gruenwald includes in his account in AMM1,2. Gruenwald also addresses the following:

K. Sefer ha-Razím [BOOK OF THE MYSTERIES] (ShR)

Translation:


References:

- AMM1, pages 225-234; AMM2, pages 255-263.


The following items are frequently associated with the hekhalot cluster:

I. Baraita de Ma’aseh Bereshit, OR Seder Rabbah di Bereshit [TEACHING ON THE WORK OF CREATION, or GREAT ORDER OF CREATION] (BMB) {§§ 428-467, §§ 743-820}

Translations:

• In David Meltzer’s Secret Garden, pages 3-20. This translation appears to have been done from the French of N. Sed: “Une cosmologie juive du haut moyen age: La Béïrata di Ma’aœh Berœsit,” in Revue des Études juives, vol. 123 (1964); also in Sed’s La mystique cosmologique juive (Paris: Éditions de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1981). Peter Schäfer points out (in a note to the article “In Heaven as It Is in Hell”—listed immediately below—page 233, note 4) that “Sed did not, however, have all the relevant manuscript evidence at his disposal.”


References:


M. Harba de Moshe [Sword of Moses] (HdM) {§§ 598-622, §§ 640-650}

Translations:
  This translation is online at Joseph Peterson’s TWILIT GROTTO: ARCHIVES OF WESTERN ESOTERICA (http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/sword.htm), where Peterson has restored the “holy” or “mysterious” names omitted by Gaster.

References:

N. Otiyot [Alphabet] of Rabbi Akiba (ORA)

Translations (excerpts):


Online, see Kaufmann Kohler’s article from the 1906 edition of *Jewish Encyclopedia*, “Akiba ben Joseph, Alphabet of (called also Otiot de-Rabbi Akiba, Midrasb or Haggadab de-R. Akiba)” at http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1034-akiba-ben-joseph-alphabet-of

O. Sar ba-Panim [PRINCE OF THE PRESENCE, or COUNTENANCE] (ShP) {§§ 623-639}

Translations:
- Michael Swartz in *Scholastic Magic* (described above, page 11) on pages 135-147.
Further, see


Refer to § D above (MR).

P. *Tosfeța* to the *Targum* on Ezekiel (TE)

- Halperin’s FACES, pages 278-283.

Q. *Beraita d’Niddah* [TEACHING OF THE MENSTRUANT] (BdN)


Saul Lieberman was the first scholar to associate the strict purity laws of the BdN with the legal philosophy formulated in Hekhalot literature, and Michael Stone [Scholastic Magic, pages 182-185] and Rebecca Lesses [Ritual Practices, pages 134-144] have noted a connection between the BdN and the ascetic rituals required for Sar Torah adjurations. I believe that there is an even stronger connection. The BdN not only informs the ascetic rituals in some Hekhalot texts but also independently reflects a mystical consciousness. The authors of traditions in the BdN, like the authors of Hekhalot literature, were trying to discover a viable spiritual solution to a Judaism without a Temple.

On all this, there is also Jennifer Brown’s “No Menstruating Mystics: The Intensification of Niddah Laws after the Destruction of the Second Temple and Their Application in the Hekhalot Literature,” in *Axis Mundi*, an online journal edited and maintained by Religious Studies graduate students at the University of Alberta (2005-2006—at [https://sites.google.com/a/ualberta.ca/axis-mundi/] > ARCHIVES).

R. *Sefer Zeh Sefer Toledot Adam* [(THIS) BOOK OF THE HISTORY OF ADAM] (SZ)

SZ is a mystical midrash on Genesis from the Geonic period which includes passages on the celestial realm and physiognomy which are very close to passages in hekhalot literature, in particular 3 Enoch. Among the German Pietists, SZ was likely viewed as a text in the hekhalot corpus.

In *Hekhalot Literature in Translation*, James Davila includes a chapter on shorter hekhalot texts ("Some Shorter Macroforms") which “may be counted as macroforms in their own right” (—Davila, page 350). These include:

- **The Chapter of Nebuniah ben HaQanah {§§ 307-314}**, which has also been translated and analyzed by David Halperin in FACES (pages 378-380) and Michael Swartz in *Scolastic Magic* (pages 67-74), even previously by Davila in *Descenders to the Chariot* (pages 110-113), and translated by Rebecca Lesses in *Ritual Practices* (pages 412-415)
- **The Great Seal—Fearsome Crown {§§ 318-321}**
- **The Ascent of Elisha ben Auyah {§ 597}**, also covered briefly by Halperin in FACES (page 410)
- **Sar Panim {§§ 623-639}**, sources for which have been outlined above in Section O
- **The Youth {§§ 384-400}**, also treated elsewhere most significantly by
  - Davila in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in their Historical Context*, edited by T. Lim *et al* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), pages 249-264,
A Selection of Books & Articles


Himmelfarb, Martha. *The Apocalypse: A Brief History* [BLACKWELL BRIEF HISTORIES OF RELIGION SERIES] (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); see especially CHAPTER 6, “Tours of Paradise and Hell and the Heikalot Texts.”


“The articles in [the] ‘Heavenly Ascent’ [section] consider the relationship between the ascent apocalypses of the Second Temple period and later works involving heavenly ascent, particularly the heikalot texts’—from the book description at the Mohr Siebeck website.


Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought—see “Dan, Joseph (ed)”


Smith, Morton. “Ascent to the Heavens and the Beginning of Christianity,” in


See in particular CHAPTER 11, “Abu Yazid and the Hekhalot Theurgists.”


Appendix 1:
Jewish Magic

WITH THE INCLUSION of such items as Sefer ha-Razim, the SWORD OF MOSES, and the Sar ha-Panim material in clusters of texts associated with merkabah/bekhalot material, Jewish magic takes several steps closer to the mystical core of these traditions. Certainly, the convenient notion of a neat separation between ascent texts and magic texts can no longer be sustained. Of late, the tendency among scholars is to dismiss such loaded terms as “magic” (a negative term—vs “theurgy” or “religion,” positive terms) and “mysticism” to concentrate on the methods and aims of Jewish, usually along with early Christian and pagan (Greco-Roman), rituals and how these reflect the mindset and beliefs of their eras. On this trend, see, for example, Rebecca Macy Lesses’ Ritual Practices to Gain Power (summary statement on pages 11-13), James R. Davila’s Descenders to the Charriot (CHAPTER 2, where Davilla discusses the difficulties of the words “mysticism,” “magic,” and “shamanism”), and Naomi Janowitz’ Icons of Power (INTRODUCTION).

To begin an approach to antique Jewish magic, refer to the following:


A “Jewish Magic Bibliography” which, at 134 pages, is far more extensive than mine here—and which is not limited to English sources—has been prepared by Alex Jassen, Mary Gates, and Jacob Rennaker, under the supervision of Scott Noegel of University of Washington [Seattle]—online at http://fac_ultr.washington.edu/snoegel/JewishMagicBibliography.pdf

Works to 2010 are divided according to period and topic.
There is also a bibliography of “Practical Kabbalah” at

F. Levine, the apparent author of the PRAXICAL KABBALAH site, notes of this bibliography,

I select my sources very carefully, sticking as exclusively as possible with translations of original material and works by noted Judaic scholars (fiction excepted). In order to truly understand this complex tradition, I strongly suggest you stay away from certain 19th-century occult and 20th century-to-current “New Age” interpretations, as well as titles which mix Kabbalah with other religious, mystical and occult genres. For a quick point of reference, examine how “Kabbalah” is spelled; with only a couple of exceptions in my experience, purely Judaic sources spell the word with a “K”, not a “Q” or a “C.” Also check a book’s bibliography: Does it have one? If so, are the sources peer-reviewed journals, original texts, and academic books spanning a significant period of time?

You will not find any information here about the Hermetic Order, the Society of the Golden Dawn, Christian Kabbalah, Freemasonry, etc.

At this site, see Levine’s article, “Why Practical Kabbalah Isn’t Considered ‘Magic.’”

The bibliography below does not include works on the Christian Raziel traditions or Solomonic grimoires. On these see Sepher Raziel – Liber Salomonis: A Sixteenth-Century English Grimoire, edited by Don Karr and Stephen Skinner (Singapore: Golden Hoard Press, 2010): Skinner’s excellent foreword on the various Raziel traditions (pages 13-23) and my survey of printed works in English on Solomonic magic (page 25-42); the latter is also online at Colin Low’s Hermetic Kabbalah:
Jewish Magic—A Selection of Sources in English

Titles in **bold type** are noted as principal works or collections on Jewish magic.

Alexander, Philip S. “The Talmudic Concept of Conjuring (‘Abiżat ‘Einyanim) and the Problem of the Definition of Magic (Kishuf),” in *Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought* [Festschrift in Honor of Joseph Dan on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday], edited by Rachel Ellor and Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).


Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday, edited by Ra’an An S. Boustan, Klaus Herrmann, Reimund Leicht, Annette Y. Reed, and Giuseppe Veltri, with the collaboration of Alex Ramos, Volume 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).  
Part IV: Heikhalot and Magical Studies (pages 327-713)  
• Meerson, Michael. “Physiognomy and Somatomania: The Ways That Never Crossed”  
• Shavit, Yaacov. “He was Thoth in Everything: Why and When King Solomon Became Both Magister omnium physiocrum and Master of Magic”  
• Bohak, Gideon; and Geller, Mark. “Babylonian Astrology in the Cairo Genizah”
Salzer, Dorothea M. “How to Use the Hebrew Bible to Harm Your Neighbor: The Use of Biblical Quotations in Curse Texts Found in the Cairo Genizah”

Bohak, Gideon; and Herrmann, Klaus. “Tefillat Rav Hamnuna Sara: Genizah Fragments and Medieval Manuscripts”


- VOLUME 1, pages 288-337, “The Sword of Moses”
- VOLUME 1, pages 338-355, “Wisdom of the Chaldeans”
- VOLUME 1, pages 365-368, “A Note on a Hebrew Amulet”
- VOLUME 1, pages 387-461, “Samaritan Phylacteries and Amulets”
- VOLUME 2, pages 1005-1038, “Two Thousand Years of a Charm against a Child-Stealing Witch”


Goldmanstein, L. “Magical Sacrifices in the Jewish Kabbala,” in Folklore 7 (London: The Folklore Society, 1896); includes a translated extract of Sefer Raziel Hamalakh.


Hirschman, Jack. The Book of Noah [TREE TEXTS: 1] (Berkeley: Berkeley/Tree, 1975); selections, including two hymns, from Sefer Raziel.


________. Jewish Aramaic Curse Texts from Late-Antique Mesopotamia: “May These Curses Go Out and Flee” (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2013).


Scholem, Gershom. “Some Sources of Jewish-Arabic Demonology,” in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 16 (The Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, 1965); English introduction to Hebrew texts.


Smith, Morton. “The Jewish Elements in the Magical Papyri,” in
- *Society of Biblical Literature 1986 Seminar Papers*, no. 25; and

_____., “A Note on Some Jewish Assimilationists: The Angels (P. Berlin 5025b, P. Louvre 2391)” in
- (idem) *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, Volume 2 (see above)

**Societas Magica Newsletter**, Issue 10, Spring 2003: *JEWISH MAGIC: A PERSPECTIVES SYMPOSIUM* (online at http://www.societasmagica.org/), which contains the following articles:

- Kanarfoleg, Ephraim. “Magic in the Rabbinic Culture of Medieval Ashkenaz”
- Lesses, Rebecca. “Jewish Magic and Multiculturalism in the Ancient World”
- Swartz, Michael D. “A Magic All Its Own”

**Societas Magica Newsletter**, Issue 19, Spring 2008 (online at http://www.societasmagica.org/):


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### APPENDIX 2

**Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur**

In Zusammenarbeit mit Margarete Schlüter und Georg von Mutius

herausgegeben von Peter Schäfer

[Text und Studien zum antiken Judentum herausgegeben von Martin Hengel und Peter Schäfer 2]

(Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1981)

Of the “Textcorpus” in Synopse, the first five “undisputedly belong to the Hekhalot literature” (Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, page 7):

1. *Hekhalot Rabbati* (including *Sar Torah*)
2. *Hekhalot Zutrati* or *Zutreti*
3. *Ma’aseh Merkavah*
4. *Merkavah Rabba*
5. *3 Henoch* (*3 Enoch*), also called *Sefer Hekhalot*
6. *Sha’ur Qomah*
7. *Seder Rabba deBere’shit*, also called Baraia de Ma’aseh Bereshit
8. *Harba deMoshe*

Not contained in the *Synopse* manuscripts but counted as affiliated with the *Hekhalot* literature are:

9. *Re’uyyot Yehezqel*
10. *Hekhalot* fragments
11. *Maskeket Hekhalot*
12. *Sefer ha-Razim*
13. *Physiognomic fragments*
14. *Pereq Shirah*

The distribution of texts in the *Synopse*:

| §§ 1-80 | *3 Henoch* | §§ 598-622 | *Harba deMoshe* |
| §§ 81-306 | *Hekhalot Rabbati* | §§ 623-639 | *Sar ha-Panim* |
| §§ 307-314 | *Pereq Rabbi Nehunyah ben Haqanah* | §§ 640-650 | *Harba deMoshe* |
| §§ 315-317 | *Metratton* | §§ 651-654 | *Seal/Crown* |
| §§ 318-321 | *Seal/Crown* | §§ 655-708 | *Merkavah Rabba* |
| §§ 322-334 | *Great Treasure* | §§ 709 | *Great Treasure* |
| (lit. special material) | | | |
| §§ 335-374 | *Hekhalot Zutrati* | § 713 | *Yishmael* |
| §§ 375-386 | *Sha’ur Qomah/Metratton* | §§ 714-727 | *Seder Rabba deBere’shit* |
| §§ 387-388 | *3 Henoch* | §§ 728-739 | *Metratton* |
| §§ 389-402 | *Metratton* | §§ 740-741 | *Yishmael* |
| §§ 403-404 | *Yishmael* | § 742 | *Adjuration* |
| § 405 | *3 Henoch* | §§ 743-820 | *Seder Rabba deBere’shit* |
| § 406 | *Aqiva* | §§ 821-824 | *Midrash Rabba* |
| §§ 407-426 | *Hekhalot Zutrati* | §§ 825-831 | *Adjuration* |
| § 427 | *Great Treasure* | §§ 832-853 | *Seder Rabba deBere’shit* |
| §§ 428-467 | *Seder Rabba deBere’shit* | § 854 | *Yisrael* |
| §§ 468-488 | *Sha’ur Qomah* | §§ 855-871 | *3 Henoch* |
| §§ 489-495 | *Book/Names* | § 872 | *Great Treasure* |
| §§ 496-497 | *Hekhalot Zutrati* | §§ 873-874 | *Ma’aseh Merkavah* |
| §§ 498-517 | *Adjuration/Names* | §§ 875—881 | *Great Treasure* |
| §§ 518-540 | *Seder Rabba deBere’shit* | §§ 882-938 | *3 Henoch* |
| § 541 | *Great Treasure* | § 939-973 | *Sha’ur Qomah/Metratton* |
| §§ 542-543 | *Adjuration/Great Treasure* | §§ 974-977 | *Hekhalot Rabbati* |
| §§ 544-596 | *Ma’aseh Merkavah* | §§ 978-985 | *Great Treasure* |
| § 597 | *Akatriel* | | |
Appendix 3

[THE 1982 VERSION OF]

Notes on the Study of Merkabah Mysticism and Hekhalot Literature


Additions from the slightly expanded version in Collected Articles on the Kabbalah, volume 1, by D. Karr (Ithaca: KoM #5, 1985), pages 17-20, are shown in brackets.

1. Merkabah mysticism is the name of a mystical movement within Judaism’s Talmudic and Gaonic Periods (ca. 100-1000 c. e.). This school produced what is called the Hekhalot literature.

2. This mysticism, ma’aseh merkabah (work of the chariot), is mentioned in the Mishna itself (in Hagigah 2:1):

   The work of creation (ma’aseh bereshit) may not be expounded in the presence of two or more. The description of the chariot (merkabah) may not be expounded even in the presence of one, unless he is a sage who already understands out of his own insights.

   (quoted from Lipman, Eugene. THE MISHNAH, ORAL TEACHING OF JUDAISM. [New York:] Schocken, 1974, page 150)

3. Implied in this quote is that merkabah mysticism, though guarded, was not outside of the rabbinic tradition. One gets the impression that it was even thought of as the supreme mystery.

4. Just as the work of creation comprised mystical speculation on the first part of Genesis, work of the chariot comprised mystical speculation on, and amplification of, the first chapter of Ezekiel.

5. The literature of this school describes the mystical journey through various heavens and palaces (hekhalot) leading to the ultimate vision of the throne and chariot, and, in some cases, “the figure in the form of a man” (Ezekiel 1:26).

6. It is not the purpose of this short paper to go into detail about the development of the merkabah school or the contents of the Hekhalot texts. To a greater extent than I am capable, this work has already been done. My purpose is to inform the reader of where to look for information on the various facets of study pertaining to merkabah mysticism. I have limited myself to English sources.

7. Historical and scholarly overviews: as it is with any study in the field of Jewish mysticism, the best place to start the investigation
of merkabah mysticism is in the works of Gershom Scholem. Two of his works give excellent synopses of the subject:

MAJOR TRENDS IN JEWISH MYSTICISM (1941, Schocken repr.) Lecture 2. Merkabah Mysticism and Jewish Gnosticism.

KABBALAH (1974, Meridian repr.) pages 8-21, and article: Merkabah Mysticism, pages 373-6.

For a closer look at some of the topics and scholarly concerns in merkabah mysticism, see Scholem’s

JEWISH GNOSTICISM, MERKABAH MYSTICISM, AND TALMUDIC TRADITION (1965, Jewish Theological Seminary).

KABBALAH (as above), articles:
Meditation, pages 369-72.
Metatron, pages 377-81.

[Add to these

Gruenwald, Ithamar. APOCALYPTIC AND MERKAVAH MYSTICISM (1980, E. J. Brill).]

8. There are a few articles [and one book] that analyze the connections of merkabah mysticism with the rabbinic (i.e. Talmudic, etc.) tradition:

Talmudic “work of the chariot” segments are translated and introduced.]

[Halperin, David J. THE MERKABAH IN RABBINIC LITERATURE. (1980, American Oriental Society)
This is a close scholarly analysis of the references to merkabah mysticism in the Mishna: Hagigah 2:1, the Tosefta: Hagigah 2:1-7, the Palestinian Talmud 77 a-d, and the Babylonian Talmud 11b-16a.]

This takes a look at the strange case of Rabbi Simeon ben Zoma, who entered into PRDS (paradise) but came out of it “stricken.”

Four versions of the story of Yohanan ben Zakkai and the merkabah-sermon of his disciple Eleazer ben Arakh are presented and compared to demonstrate that such a story accumulates more and more detail as it passes from earlier to later versions.

9. In JEWISH GNOSTICISM… Scholem lists eight texts belonging to the Hekhalot literature. I shall list them here, adding one (Shiur Qoma), indicating research sources, if any exist:
a) The Visions of Ezekiel, a mystical midrash on Ezekiel 1:1, see:

   Jacobs, Louis. JEWISH MYSTICAL TESTIMONIES (1977, Schocken)
   Chapter Three: The Riders of the Chariot and Those Who Enter
   the Heavenly Halls. Introduction and text of Visions...

   Marmorstein, A. A Fragment of the Visions of Ezekiel, in
   JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, New Series #8 (1917-18). Translation
   and discussion.

b) The Lesser Hekhalot, possibly the oldest. In English, there are
   only spot translations in Scholem’s JEWISH GNOSTICISM...
   and MAJOR TRENDS...

c) The Greater Hekhalot, the best covered of the texts for our
   purposes. Besides spot translations (see Scholem as listed in b)
   there are

   Blumenthal, David R. UNDERSTANDING JEWISH MYSTICISM: A Source
   Reader (1978, Ktav) [pages 53-91] Blumenthal introduces and
   presents translations of The Greater Hekhalot, Chapters 15-
   29:5.

   [Kaplan, Aryeh. MEDITATION AND KABBALAH. (1982, Weiser) pages
   41-54. Kaplan introduces the Greater Hekhalot and translates
   Chapters 1, 2, and 16-26.]

   Schiffman, Lawrence. The Recall of Rabbi Nehuniah ha-Qanah
   from Ecstasy in the Hekhlaot Rabbati, in AJS REVIEW vol I,
   1976.
   In Hekhalot Rabbati, R. Nehuniah is pulled out of his ecstasy
   by his disciples by making him ever-so-slightly ritually
   impure. This tale is given scholarly treatment in Schiffman’s
   article.

   Smith, Morton. Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati, in BIBLICAL
   This [article] summarizes and analyzes the contents [of
   Hekhalot Rabbati], presenting a translated excerpt of The
   Great Magical Papyrus of Paris for the sake of comparison.
   (M. Smith has translated The Greater Hekhalot in its entirety,
   but it has not been published. Indeed, it exists, as far as I
   know, in typescript, with corrections jotted in the margins
   and scribbled over the text by Gershom Scholem.)

d) Merkabah Rabbah. I know of no English sources for this.

e) A titleless Hekhalot. Scholem gives a transcription of this text
   in Hebrew in an appendix to JEWISH GNOSTICISM..., but I know of no
   other sources for information on this.

f) Chapter on physiognomics and chiromancy, published in Hebrew by
   Scholem, but no English translation. See, however, Scholem’s
   article: “Chiromancy” in KABBALAH.
g) Book of the Hekhalot, called also 3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch. One of the latest of the texts. Full scholarly treatment and translation of this appear in

Odeberg, Hugo. 3 ENOCH or THE HEBREW BOOK OF ENOCH (1928, Ktav repr. [1973])

h) The Treatise of the Hekhalot, the latest of the texts. Published, and translated into German, but not into English.

i) Shiur Qoma, a strange treatise listing the dimensions and secret names of the deity’s various members. See


For scholarly studies on Shiur Qoma, see

Loewe, Raphael. The Divine Garment and Shi’ur Qomah, in HARVARD THEOLOGICAL REVIEW 58 (1965)

Scholem. JEWISH GNOSTICISM... (as above) chapter VI: The Age of Shiur Komah Speculation and a passage in Origen.

A 14th-century commentary on Shiur Qoma by Moses b. Joshua b. Mar David of Narbonne is translated in


Shiur Qoma’s symbolism is based on the details of “the beloved” in Song of Songs 5:11-16. The basis of the dimensions given is derived from Psalm 147:5; since the phrase in that passage adds up to 236, via gematria, this is the root of Shiur Qoma’s calculations.