

Notes on the Study of Early Kabbalah in English

to which is appended

KABBALAH STUDY: JEWISH MYSTICISM IN ENGLISH

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Reviewers may quote brief passages.

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 (d. 1235)
 - ii. The *Iyyun* School (early to mid-1200s)
- c. Gerona (ca 1200-1250)
 - i. Ezra ben Solomon
 - ii. Azriel
 - iii. Nahmanides
 - iv. Jacob ben Sheshet
 - v. *Sefer ha-Temunah*
 - vi. *Sefer ha-Yashar*
- d. Castile (active 1260-80)
 - i. Jacob ha-Cohen
 - ii. Isaac ha-Cohen

2. Developmental Period

- a. Abraham Abulafia (1240-ca 1292)
- b. Moses de Leon (1240-1305)
- c. Joseph Gikatilla (1248-1325)
- d. Menahem Recanati (1250-1310)
- e. Isaac of Acre, or Acco (1250-1340)

* This outline is offered with full awareness that it gives an oversimplified picture of the development of early Kabbalah. The outline on page 15 below is similarly convenient.

Three books cover the FORMATIVE PERIOD; they can serve as the basis of any study of early Kabbalah in English.

- Scholem, Gershom. *Origins of the Kabbalah*. Philadelphia – Princeton: Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia/Princeton University Press, 1987. (hereafter OK)
OK is a translation of *Ursprung und Anfänge 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.
- Dan, Joseph. *Jewish Mysticism*, Volume II: *The Middle Ages*. Northvale – Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998. (hereafter JMII)
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).

To the above books, add the following dissertations:

- Brody, Seth Lance. HUMAN HANDS DWELL IN HEAVENLY HEIGHTS: WORSHIP AND MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY KABBALAH. Ph.D. dissertation, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1991.
“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)
- Dauber, Jonathan Victor. STANDING ON THE HEADS OF PHILOSOPHERS: MYTH AND PHILOSOPHY IN EARLY KABBALAH. Ph.D. dissertation, New York: New York University, 2004.
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.”
- Goldberg, Joel R. (= Yechiel Shalom Goldberg). MYSTICAL UNION, INDIVIDUALITY, AND INDIVIDUATION IN PROVENÇAL AND CATALONIAN KABBALAH. Ph.D. dissertation, New York: New York University, 2001.
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 4 § 1.b.
- Haskell, Ellen. METAPHOR AND SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION: THE IMAGE OF GOD AS SUCKLING MOTHER IN THIRTEENTH CENTURY KABBALAH. Ph.D. dissertation, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005.
See especially CHAPTER FOUR, “Suckling as Spiritual Transmission in Early Kabbalistic Literature.”
“The texts presented in this chapter, Isaac the Blind’s *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*, the early kabbalistic volume *Sefer ha-Bahir*, and Ezra of Gerona’s *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, will be examined in order to reveal the exegetical dynamics and theological concerns that prefigure the powerful imagery of *Sefer ha-Zohar*, in which the image of God as a suckling mother expresses an emotionally rich and textured form of spiritual communication.” (p. 167)

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 (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 strata 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:

- “A Journey of Initiation in the Babylonian Layer of *Sefer ha-Bahir*,” in *Studia Hebraica*, Issue no. 7 (Bucharest: The “Goldstein Goren” Center for Hebrew Studies, 2007), on-line at <http://www.cceol.com>
- “Middle Eastern Origins of Kabbalah,” § B. THE BABYLONIAN STRATUM OF THE BOOK *BAHIR*, in *The Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry*, Volume 1, Issue 1 (Summer 2007), edited by Zion Zohar, on-line at <http://sephardic.fiu.edu/journal/Summer2007.htm>

There are three English translations of *Sefer ha-Bahir*:

- Campanini, Saverio (ed). *The Book of Bahir: Flavius Mithridates’ Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version* [THE KABBALISTIC LIBRARY OF GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, Giulio Busi, General Editor]. Torino: Nino Aragno Editore, 2005.
The English version is from the Latin of Mithridates.
- Kaplan, Aryeh. *The Bahir: An Ancient Kabbalistic Text attributed to Nebuniah ben HaKana / 1st century C.E.* New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1979.
- Neugroschel, Joachim. “From the Bahir,” in *The Secret Garden*, edited by David Meltzer (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

Other references:

- Abrams, Daniel. “The Condensation of the Symbol ‘*Shekhinah*’ in the Manuscripts of the *Book Bahir*,” in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, vol. 16, edited by D. Abrams and A. Elqayam (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2007).
- Bokser, Ben Zion. *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1981: § 7. “*Sefer haBahir*” (translated excerpts).
- Dan, Joseph. *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History* [MODERN JEWISH MASTERS SERIES #2]. New York: New York University Press, 1988: Chapter 5. “The Enigmatic Book *Bahir*.”
- _____. “Midrash and the Dawn of Kabbalah,” in *Midrash and Literature*, edited by G. Hartman and S. Budick. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986; also in JMII: CHAPTER 1.
- Dauber, Jonathan Victor. STANDING ON THE HEADS OF PHILOSOPHERS (noted above, page 2):
 - 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

- Eylon, Dina Ripsman. *Reincarnation in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosticism* [JEWISH STUDIES, Volume 25]. Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003.
- Fishbane, Michael. *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): CHAPTER 10. A. I. THE MYTHIC DISCOURSE OF THE BAHIR (pages 256-260).
- Green, Arthur. *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997: Chapter Thirteen. “*Sefer ha-Bahir*.”
- Idel, Moshe. *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, and Ladders*. Budapest – New York: Central European University Press, 2005: Chapter 2, § 3, “The Pillar in the Book Bahir”
- Krzok, Paul. “A Look at the Bahir,” in *The Hermetic Journal*, Number 22, edited by Adam McLean (Edinburgh: Winter 1983).
- Neubauer, A. “The Bahir and the Zohar,” in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, ORIGINAL SERIES, vol. 4 (1892).
- Schäfer, Peter. *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Scholem, Gershom. *Kabbalah* [articles from *ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA*]. Jerusalem -New York: Keter Publishing House/Times Books, 1974; rpt. New York: Dorset Press, 1987: (article) “*Sefer ha-Bahir*.”
- _____. *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*. New York: Schocken Books, 1965: Chapter 3. “Kabbalah and Myth,” § II.
- Wolfson, Elliot R. “Before Alef/Where Beginnings End,” in *Beginning/Again: Toward a Hermeneutics of Jewish Texts*, edited by Aryeh Cohen and Shaul Magid. New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2002.
- _____. “Hebraic and Hellenic Conceptions of Wisdom in *Sefer ha-Bahir*,” in *Poetics Today*, volume 19, number 1 (Spring 1998): HELLENISM AND HEBRAISM RECONSIDERED: THE POETICS OF CULTURAL INFLUENCE AND EXCHANGE I, edited by David Stern (Durham: Duke University Press).
- _____. “The Tree That Is All: Jewish-Christian Roots of a Kabbalistic Symbol in *Sefer ha-Bahir*,” in
 1. *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, vol. 3, issue 1 [Special Issue: STUDIES IN JEWISH MYSTICISM, ESOTERICISM, AND HASIDISM] (Harwood Academic Publishers GmbH, 1993)
 2. (idem) *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism and Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

1. b. Provence:

The fragments of what was 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). Further, in *MYSTICAL UNION, INDIVIDUALITY, AND INDIVIDUATION IN PROVENÇAL AND CATALONIAN KABBALAH* (noted above, page 2), Yechiel Shalom Goldberg analyzes key passages from R. Isaac the Blind’s *Commentary on SEFER YEZIRAH* as well as from the works of R. Isaac’s nephew, R. Asher ben David, and R. Azriel of Gerona (see below).

Further references:

- Halbertal, Moshe. *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications*, translated by Jackie Feldman. Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press,

2007, CHAPTER 9, “From Transmission to Writing: Hinting, Leaking, and Orthodoxy in Early Kabbalah.”

- Koren, Sharon Faye. “Kabbalistic Physiology: Isaac the Blind, Nahmanides, and Moses de Leon on Menstruation,” *AJS Review*, vol. 28, no. 2 (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 2004)
- Zinberg, Israel. *A History of Jewish Literature*, Volume III: THE STRUGGLE OF MYSTICISM AND TRADITION AGAINST PHILOSOPHICAL RATIONALISM (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973): Chapter One, “The Mystics of Provence.”

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) and 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), 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,” throughout.
- Grozinger, Karl E. “Handling of Holy Traditions as a Path to Mystical Unity in the *Kitve ha-Iyyun*,” in *Rasbi 1040-1990: Congrès européen des Études juives*, ed. by Gabrielle Sed-Rajna (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1993).
- Verman, Mark. “The Evolution of the Circle of Contemplation,” in *Gershom Scholem’s MAJOR TRENDS IN JEWISH MYSTICISM 50 Years After*, edited by J. Dan and P. Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993).

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:
 - Altmann, Alexander. “A Note on the Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation,” in (*idem*) *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).
Includes excerpts from R. Ezra ben Solomon’s *Perush ‘al Shir ha-Shirim* and a letter to R. Abraham on God’s garments—in English.
 - Brody, Seth. *Commentary on the Song of Songs [= Perush ‘al Shir ha-Shirim]*. Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1999.
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).
 - Gavarin, Martelle. “Rabbi Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona,” PART 1, in *Kabbalah* (Newsletter) vol. 1, no. 2 (Jerusalem: Winter, 1985-6; PART 2: “Annotated Bibliography: Source Texts and Criticism,” in *Kabbalah* (Newsletter) vol. 1, no. 3 (Spring 1986). [Online at <http://queensu.ca/jewishstudies/kabbalah.html>]
 - Green, Arthur. “The Song of Songs in Early Jewish Mysticism,” in *Orim: A Jewish Journal at Yale*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Spring 1987).
 - Goldberg, Yechiel Shalom. “The Foolishness of the Wise and the Wisdom of Fools in Spanish Kabbalah: An Inquiry into the Taxonomy of the Wise Fool,” in *The Journal for*

the Study of Sephardic and Mizrabī Jewry, Volume 1, Issue 2 (October-November 2007), edited by Zion Zohar, on-line at <http://sephardic.fiu.edu/journal/>.

- _____ . “Spiritual Leadership and the Popularization of Kabbalah in Medieval Spain,” in *The Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrabī Jewry*, Volume 2, Issue 2 (Winter 2008/2009), edited by Zion Zohar, at <http://sephardic.fiu.edu/journal/>.
- Scholem, Gershom. “*Sod ‘Etz ha-Da’ath*” (The Secret of the Tree of Knowledge) in *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991).
A passage attributed to R. Ezra, on pp. 65-8.
- Travis, Yakov M. KABBALISTIC FOUNDATIONS OF JEWISH PRACTICE: RABBI EZRA OF GERONA - ON THE KABBALISTIC MEANING OF THE MIZVOT, INTRODUCTION / ANNOTATED TRANSLATION / CRITICAL HEBREW EDITION (Ph.D. dissertation, Waltham: Brandeis University, 2002).
R. Ezra’s detailed kabbalistic commentary on the meanings of the *mizvot*.

2. R. Azriel:

- EK pp. 87-108.
- Altman, Alexander. “Motif of the ‘Shell’ in Azriel of Gerona,” in (*idem*) *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (1969); originally in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. XI, nos. 1-2 (1958).
- Fishbane, Michael. *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): CHAPTER 10. A. II. SOME MYSTERIES OF THE AGGADAH ACCORDING TO R. AZRIEL (pages 260-266).
- 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*.
- Goldberg, Yechiel Shalom. “The Foolishness of the Wise and the Wisdom of Fools in Spanish Kabbalah: An Inquiry into the Taxonomy of the Wise Fool;” in *The Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrabī Jewry*, Volume 1, Issue 2 (Oct-Nov 2007), edited by Zion Zohar, on-line at <http://sephardic.fiu.edu/journal/>.
- Halbertal, Moshe. *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications*, translated by Jackie Feldman. Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007, CHAPTER 10 “Open Knowledge and Closed Knowledge: The Kabbalists of Gerona – Rabbi Azriel and Rabbi Ya’akov bar Sheshet”
- Pachter, Mordechai. “The Root of Faith is the Root of Heresy,” PART I of Pachter’s *Roots of Faith and Devequt: Studies in the History of Kabbalistic Ideas* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2004)
- Safran, Bezalel. “Rabbi Azriel and Nahmanides: Two Views of the Fall of Man,” in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, edited by Isadore Twersky (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

3. Nahmanides:

- Abrams, Daniel. “Orality in the Kabbalistic School of Nahmanides: Preserving and Interpreting Esoteric Traditions and Texts,” in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 1996).
- Dan, Joseph. “Nachmanides and the Development of the Concept of Evil in Kabbalah,” *Jewish Mysticism*, Volume III: *The Modern Period*. Northvale – Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998.
- Funkenstein, Amos. “Nahmanides Symbolical Reading of History,” in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, edited by J. Dan and F. Talmage (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 1982).
- Halbertal, Moshe. *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications*, translated by Jackie Feldman. Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007, CHAPTER 11 “Tradition, Closed Knowledge, and the Esoteric: Secrecy and Hinting in Nahmanides’ Kabbalah”
- Henoah, Chayim J. *Ramban: Philosopher and Kabbalist*. Northvale – Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998.

- Idel, Moshe. “Nahmanides: *Kabbalah, Halakbab, and Spiritual Leadership*,” in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the Thirteenth Century*, edited by M. Idel and M. Ostow (Northvale/ Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998).
 - Koren, Sharon Faye. “Kabbalistic Physiology: Isaac the Blind, Nahmanides, and Moses de Leon on Menstruation,” *AJS Review*, vol. 28, no. 2 (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 2004)
 - Pachter, Mordechai. “The Root of Faith is the Root of Heresy” = PART II of Pachter’s *Roots of Faith and Deceit: Studies in the History of Kabbalistic Ideas* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2004)
 - Schechter, Solomon. “Nachmanides,” in *Studies in Judaism: FIRST SERIES* [articles by S. Schechter] (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1896; rpt. 1945). Also in *Studies in Judaism: A Selection* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society / Cleveland - New York: Meridian Books, 1958).
 - Schwartz, Dov. “From Theurgy to Magic: Sacrifice in the Circle of Nahmanides and his Interpreters,” (= CHAPTER THREE) in *Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, translated by David Louvish and Batya Stein [THE BRILL REFERENCE LIBRARY OF JUDAISM, VOL 20] (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2005).
 - Shulman, Yaacov Dovid. *The Ramban: The Story of Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman*. New York – London – Jerusalem: C. I. S. Publishers, 1993.
 - Stern, Josef. *Problems and Parables of Law: Maimonides and Nahmanides on Reasons for the Commandments (TA’AMEI HA-MITZVOT)*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.
 - Twersky, Isadore (ed). *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations of His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.
 - Wolfson, Elliot. “By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides’ Kabbalistic Hermeneutic, in *AJS Review*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 1989)
 - _____ . “The Secret of the Garment in Nahmanides” in *Daat: A Journal of Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah*, #24 (Ramat-Gan: Bal-Ilan University, Winter 1990).
 - Weisblum, Moshe Pinchas. *The Hermeneutics of Medieval Jewish Thought: Understanding the Linguistic Codes of Rashi and Nahmanides*. Lewiston – Queenston – Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007.
 - Zinberg, Israel. “Nahmanides and His Followers,” in (idem) *A History of Jewish Literature*, Vol. III (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973).
4. R. Jacob ben Sheshet
- EK pp. 109-50.
 - Dauber, Jonathan Victor. STANDING ON THE HEADS OF PHILOSOPHERS (noted above, page 2)
 - Halbertal, Moshe. *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications*, translated by Jackie Feldman. Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007, CHAPTER 10 “Open Knowledge and Closed Knowledge: The Kabbalists of Gerona—Rabbi Azriel and Rabbi Ya’akov bar Sheshet”
 - Idel, Moshe. “Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism,” in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought* [STUDIES IN PLATONISM: ANCIENT AND MODERN, #7], edited by Lenn Goodman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
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
- Wolfson, Elliot R. “Murmuring Secrets: Eroticism and Esotericism in Medieval Kabbalah,” 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 pages 78-80.

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:

- Cohen, R. Seymour (trans/ed). *Sefer ha-Yashar. The Book of the Righteous*. New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973.
- Shokek, Shimon. *Jewish Ethics and Jewish Mysticism in SEFER HA-YASHAR [Sefer ha Yashar be-misgeret sifrut ha-musar ha-'Ivret ba-me'ah ba 13]* translated by Roslyn Weiss [JEWISH STUDIES, vol. 8] Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991.

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). 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). References to the Cohens:

- EK pp. 36-7; translations 151-182; OK pp. 355-64
- Dan, Joseph. “The Emergence of Messianic Mythology in 13th-Century Kabbalah in Spain,” in *Occident to Orient: A Tribute to the Memory of A. Scheiber*, edited by Robert Dan (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado/ Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988. Also JMII: Chapter 9.
- _____. “Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah,” in *AJS Review*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Association of Jewish Studies, 1980); in *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, edited by Lawrence Fine (New York: New York University Press, 1995). Also JMII: Chapter 11.

Further, see

- Kanarfogel, Ephraim. “Rabbinic Figures in Castilian Kabbalistic Pseudepigraphy: R. Yehudah He-Hasid and R. Elhanan of Corbeil,” in *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Harwood Academic Publishers GmbH, 1993).

Developmental Period

- 2.a. Abraham Abulafia: Abulafia is the focus of Scholem’s 4th lecture in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. Further, refer to the following:

- Abulafia, Abraham ben Samuel. “The Book of the Sign,” in *Revelation and Redemption: Jewish Documents of Deliverance from the Fall of Jerusalem to the Death of Nahmanides*, translated & edited by George W. Buchanan (Dillsboro: Western North Carolina Press, 1978): pp. 293-307.
- _____. *Chaye Ha-Olam Ha-Ba: Life in the World to Come*. Translated by Yaron Ever Hadani and Sharron Shatil. Belize City: Providence University, 2007. For information, go to www.everburninglight.org.
- _____. *Get Ha-Shemot : Divorce of the Names*. Translated by Sharron Shatil. Belize City: Providence University, 2007. For information, go to www.everburninglight.org.
- _____. *Ner Elohim: Candle of God*. Translated by Sharron Shatil. Belize City: Providence University, 2007. For information, go to www.everburninglight.org.
- _____. *Ohr Ha-Shechel – The Light of the Intellect*. Integral edition in English and Hebrew, translated by Avi Solomon, Adam Shohom, and Sharron Shatil. Belize City: Providence University, 2008. For information, go to www.everburninglight.org.
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 “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-Ot* (Book of the Sign).” —PREFACE, page viii
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 “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).
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 1. “The Doctrine of the Sefirot in the Prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia,” Parts I and II, in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 4 AND vol. 3, no. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995 and 1996).
 2. “Mystical Rationalization of the Commandments in the Prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia,” in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, edited by A. Ivry, E. Wolfson, and A. Arkush (1998).
 - _____ . “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence—Angelic Embodiment and the Alterity of Time in Abraham Abulafia,” in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, Volume 18, edited by Daniel Abrams. (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2008).
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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.
- Fishbane, Eitan P. “Mystical Contemplation and the Limits of the Mind: The Case of *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*,” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 93, Nos. 1—2 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, July–October 2002)
 - Kaplan, Aryeh. *Meditation and Kabbalah*. pp. 122-4 (excerpt of *Shekel ha-Kodesh*).

- Koren, Sharon Faye. “Kabbalistic Physiology: Isaac the Blind, Nahmanides, and Moses de Leon on Menstruation,” *AJS Review*, vol. 28, no. 2 (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 2004).
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 Wolfson prepared a critical edition of *Sefer ha Rimmon: The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de Leon’s SEFER HA-RIMMON* [BROWN JUDAIC STUDIES, no. 144], Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988—a revised version of Wolfson’s Ph.D. dissertation (Waltham: Brandeis University, 1986). The text is given in Hebrew; the 71-page introduction is in English.

2. c. Joseph Gikatilla

- Blickstein, Schlomo. BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND MYSTICISM: A STUDY OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL-QABBALISTIC WRITINGS OF JOSEPH GIQATILA (1248-C.1322). Ph.D. dissertation, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1983.
 Blickstein’s study focuses on Gikatilla’s *Ginnat ’Egoz*.
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- Gikatilla, Joseph ben Abraham. *Gates of Light* [SHA’ARE ORAH] translated by Avi Weinstein. San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994.
- Kaplan, Aryeh. *Meditation and Kabbalah*. Ch. 4, § 2: “Gates of Light.”
- Mopsik, Charles. “The Secret of the Marriage of David and Batsheva” (Introduction, Text and Annotated Translation), in (*idem*) *Sex of the Soul: The Vicissitudes of Sexual Difference in Kabbalah*. Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2005.
- Morlok, Elke. *Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla’s Hermeneutics*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010.
- Scholem, Gershom. *Kabbalah*. pp. 409-11 and other citations.

2. d. 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 Geronese kabbalists.

- Chaim Wirszubski’s *Pico della Mirandola’s Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*. Cambridge – London: Harvard University Press, 1989.
 In the process of identifying sources for points of Pico della Mirandola’s *kabbalah*, Wirszubski 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.
- A page-and-a-half excerpt from Recanati’s *Commentary on the Torah* (ff. 3^{r-v}) is given in English (pages 217-8) and Hebrew (page 233), and “thematically summarized” (pages 218-9) in CHAPTER SEVEN, “The Beginning and End: *Bereshit* and the Sabbath,” in Crofton Black, *Pico’s HEPTAPLUS and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2006).
- *Menahem Recanati – Commentary on the Daily Prayers: Flavius Mithridates’ Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, edited with introduction and notes by Giacomo Corazzol, two volumes. [THE KABBALISTIC LIBRARY OF GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA 3, Giulio Busi, general editor] Torino: Nino Aragno Editore, 2008.
 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.
- “This chapter is a transcription of Rabbi Mena’hem Recanati’s view on the nature of the *Sefirot*, whether they are co-substantial with God or only vessels”: thus begins Part 4, CHAPTER 1 of

Moses Cordovero's *Pardes Rimonim: Orchard of Pomegranates, Parts 1-4* (integral edition in English, Hebrew, and Aramaic, translated by Elyakim Getz, Belize City: Providence University, 2007).

- There are numerous references to Recanati in the English works of Moshe Idel.* See, in particular, *Absorbing Perfections* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2002), CHAPTER 4, § IV: GOD AS TORAH OR TORAH AS GOD and § V: SOME REFLECTIONS ON DECONSTRUCTION (pages 122-8); *Kabbalah and Eros* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2005), CHAPTER 3, § 5: MENAHEM RECANATI'S TREATMENT OF THE DIVINE CONCUBINE (pages 122-5).
- On Recanati as source for Elia Hayyim ben Binyamin of Genazzano, see CHAPTER FIVE of Brian Ogren's *Renaissance and Rebirth: Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2009: pages 181-184.

2. e. 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*.

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- _____. *As Light before Dawn: The Inner World of a Medieval Kabbalist*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, which is a reworking of CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE AND THE TRANSMISSION OF KABBALAH: A STUDY OF ISAAC OF ACRE'S *ME'IRAT 'EINAYIM*. Ph.D. dissertation, Waltham: Brandeis University, 2003.
- Huss, Boaz. "NISAN—The Wife of the Infinite: The Mystical Hermeneutics of Rabbi Isaac of Acre," in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, vol. 5, edited by D. Abrams and A. Elqayam (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2000).
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- _____. *Kabbalah and Eros*. New Haven – London: Yale University Books, 2005: CHAPTER 4. "Contemplating a Female: From Platonic Eros to Jewish Mysticism."
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- _____. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*. Numerous references to Isaac of Acre throughout.
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* In Hebrew, there is Moshe Idel's *R. Menahem Rekanati, ha-mekubal* (Tel Aviv, Schocken, 1998), which is the first of an intended two-volume study.

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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. 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 Yetzirah* (between 200 and 900 CE)
4. Transition
 - a. Geonic period (600-1000)
 - b. Early commentaries on *Sefer Yetzirah*
 - c. Religious philosophers
 - i. Solomon ibn Gebirol (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†

1. Russell, D. S. *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964.
2. Collins, John J. *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*. New York: Crossroad, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984; rpt. 1998.

* Refer to my “Kabbalah Study: Jewish Mysticism in English” (1996-8), 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.

** 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).

† We might add Norman Cohn’s *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1993), which is recommended in my “Kabbalah Study...” below.

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 (Ecclesiasticus), through the Pseudepigrapha, and on into the Talmudic Sayings of the Fathers (*Pirke 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.)

A generous compendium of pseudepigrapha (which includes some material which does not really belong under this heading) is *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H. Charlesworth: Volume 1: APOCALYPTIC AND TESTAMENTS; Volume 2: EXPANSIONS... LEGENDS, WISDOM... PRAYERS, ODES, PSALMS, FRAGMENTS (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1983 and 1985). It is a collection of utmost value, far more inclusive than the previous standard, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament (APOT)*, edited by R. H. Charles (2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913; rpt 1973).*

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:

On Philo:

- Bockmuehl, Markus N. A. CHAPTER FOUR: "Philo," in *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)
- Borgen, Peder. "Heavenly Ascent in Philo: An Examination of Selected Passages," in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation*, edited by J. Charlesworth and C. Evans (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).
- Lewy, Hans (ed). "Philo: Selections," in *Three Jewish Philosophers* (New York/Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society/Meridian Books, 1960).
- Niehoff, Maren R. "What Is in a Name? Philo's Mystical Philosophy of Language," in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 3 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, [Paul Siebeck], 1995).
- Philo of Alexandria. *The Contemplative Life, The Giants and Selections*, translated by David Winston, preface by John Dillon. New York – Ramsey – Toronto: Paulist Press, 1981.
- _____. *The Works of Philo*, translated by Charles Duke Yonge. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993; Una Upd edition 2006.
- Schäfer, Peter. CHAPTER 5: "Philo: The Ascent of the Soul," in *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009.
- Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi. "Philo and the Zohar" Parts 1 and 2, in *Journals of Jewish Studies*, vols. X and XI (1959 and 1960).
- Winston, David. "Was Philo a Mystic?" in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, (1982).

* Charles' APOT includes two items not in Charlesworth: "Pirke Aboth" and "The Fragments of a Zadokite Work." "[T]he former [is omitted] because it is rabbinic, the latter because it is now recognized to belong among the Dead Sea Scrolls" (Charlesworth, page xxv). See "Pseudepigrapha as Antecedents of Kabbalah: A Selected Bibliography," by Andreas Lenhardt, in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 1997). Refer also to the important but rarely cited article by Charlesworth, "In the Crucible: The Pseudepigrapha as Biblical Interpretation," in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation*, edited by J. Charlesworth and C. Evans (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

On Neoplatonism:

- Goodman, Lenn E. (ed). *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

c. Qumran

Since so much has been written on the Dead Sea Scrolls, let me suggest just three books to make short work of getting a reliable impression of the Qumran material:*

- Garcia Martinez, Florentino. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated. The Qumran Texts in English*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994.
- Shanks, Hershel (ed). *Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls. A Reader from the BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY REVIEW*. New York: Random House, 1992.
- VanderKam, James C. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994.

The most “mystical” of the Qumran texts—those having the most in common with subsequent *bekhalot* literature—are the *Berakhot* and the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. On these, see James R. Davila, *Liturgical Works*. Grand Rapids – Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000; and Philip Alexander, *The Mystical Texts: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Related Manuscripts* [COMPANION TO THE QUMRAN SCROLLS, 7 / LIBRARY OF SECOND TEMPLE STUDIES, 61]. London – New York: T&T Clark International, 2006.

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 often be suggestive and significant. It is difficult to pin down a few books to represent this phase of development; what with recent publications on *midrashim* and other rabbinic literature, a full list might have dozens of titles. Given our track, however, see the following:

- Urbach, Ephraim E. *The Sages. Their Concepts and Beliefs*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975; rpt. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1987; see especially 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”; and pp. 578-80.
- Chernus, Ira. *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982.
Chernus presents a series of essays on the relationship between *merkabah* mysticism and rabbinic *midrashim*.

* Three other works on the Qumran materials are of interest in the present context, especially the third:

- Boccaccini, Gabriele. *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis. The Parting of Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.
- Davidson, Maxwell J. *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1 Enoch 1-36, 72-108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran* [JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF PSEUDEPIGRAPHA SERIES, 11]. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992.
- 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/bekhalot* mysticism are treated in “Notes on the Study of *Merkabah* Mysticism and *Hekhalot* Literature in English” at <http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/karr/mmhic.pdf> : 2004 • Elior AND 2006 • Alexander, respectively.

- Halperin, David. *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* [AMERICAN ORIENTAL SERIES, vol. 62]. New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980.
- _____. *The Faces of the Chariot* [TEXTE UND STUDIEN ZUM ANTIKEN JUDENTUM, 16]. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1988.
- Patai, Raphael. *Gates to the Old City: A Book of Jewish Legends*. New York: Avon Books, 1980: the *midrash* sections.

e. Miscellaneous magic texts and other “occult” works

For a detailed bibliography on Jewish magic, see the one prepared by Alex Jassen and Scott Noegel at <http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/jmbtoc.htm>* (University of Washington) or the appendix to my “Notes on the Study of *Merkabah* Mysticism and *Hekhalot* Literature in English.’ For starters, though, refer to the following survey articles:

- Alexander, P. S. “Incantations and Books of Magic,” in Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.—A.D. 135)*, A New English Version revised and edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Goodman (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1986): volume III, part 1, pp. 342-79.
- Idel, Moshe. “On Judaism, Jewish Mysticism and Magic,” in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, edited by P. Schäfer and H. Kippenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1997).
- Schäfer, Peter. “Jewish Magic Literature in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages,” in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. XLI, no. 1 (1990).
- _____. “Magic and Religion in Ancient Judaism,” in *Envisioning Magic*.

For a full study, see Gideon Bohak’s *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

2. *Merkabah* and *hekhalot* material, & 3. *Sefer Yezirah*

Refer to my “Notes on the Study of *Merkabah* Mysticism and *Hekhalot* Literature in English” and “Notes on Editions *Sefer Yezirah* in English” at <http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/karr/index.htm>

4. Transition

a. Geonic period

It is generally thought that the Geonic period left little by way of 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.”** See Klaus Herrmann, “Jewish Mysticism in the Geonic Period: The Prayer of Rav Hamnuna Sava,” in *Jewish Studies between the Disciplines: Papers in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2003). Refer also to Scholem’s *Kabbalah*, pp. 30-5: “Mysticism in the Geonic Period.” An example of a

* NOT FOUND : January 20, 2010.

** *The ‘Unique Cherub’ Circle* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), page 17.

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. Commentaries on *Sefer Yesirah*

For a review of English sources on these commentaries, see my “Notes on Editions *Sefer Yesirah* in English,” PART 3, at <http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/karr/index.htm>

c. Religious philosophers*

A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy by Isaac Husik (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916; rpt. 1941) is considered a classic, but Husik grants only perfunctory mention to Kabbalah in the opening strains of his conclusion. *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* by Colette Sirat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) serves our purpose better, for it pays some attention to how Kabbalah fits in. See also Elliot R. Wolfson, “Jewish Mysticism: A Philosophical Overview,” in *History of Jewish Philosophy* edited by Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (London – New York: Routledge, 1997), and Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, “Philosophy and Kabbalah: 1200-1600,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Ernst Müller, in *History of Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford: East and West Library, 1946; rpt. New York: Yesod Publishers, n.d.), writes (pp. 73-74):

In Spain the Cabbalah 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 Yesirah* in his great work *Cuzari*. Gabirol as a neo-Platonist has many resemblances with the Cabbalah. ... Finally Abraham Ibn Ezra made mystical numerical and literal analyses of the Name of God, particularly in his writings *Yesod Mora*...

i. On ibn Gabirol, refer to

- Raphael Loewe’s *Ibn Gabirol* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), an analysis of ibn Gebirol’s life and writings. Included is a full translation of *Keter Malkut* (ROYAL CROWN), which Müller calls Gabirol’s great “cosmological hymn.”

* 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).

Further see Moshe Idel, “Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* and the Kabbalah,” in *Jewish History* Volume 18, nos. 2-3 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004)—an issue “Commemorating the Eight Hundredth Anniversary of Maimonides’ Death”; and Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides’ Confrontation with Mysticism* Oxford – Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007.

In his brief foreword to *Six Treatises Attributed to Maimonides* (translated and annotated from the Hebrew editions by Fred Rosner, M.D. [Northvale – London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1991]), Rabbi Moshe Greenes argues that Maimonides was “steeped in Kabbalah.”

- *The Improvement of the Moral Qualities: AN ETHICAL TREATISE OF THE ELEVENTH CENTURY BY SOLOMON IBN GABIROL...WITH A TRANSLATION...by Stephen S. Wise.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1902.

Also see

- Idel, Moshe. “Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah in Spain,” in *Sephardic & Mizrahi Jewry: From the Golden Age of Spain to Modern Times* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
 - *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, edited by Lenn E. Goodman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992):
 - Dillon, John M. “Solomon Ibn Gabirol’s Doctrine of Intelligible Matter”
 - Mathis, C. K. “Parallel Structures in the Metaphysics of Iamblichus and Ibn Gabirol”
 - McGinn, Bernard. “Ibn Gabirol: The Sage among Schoolmen”
- 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*. Two that do are

- Hirschfeld, Hartwig. *The Book of Kuzari*. New York: Pardes Publishing House, 1905; rpt 1946; rpt New York: Schocken Books 1964. The commentary on *Sefer Yezirah* is in § 4:25.
- Korobkin, N. Daniel. *The Kuzari: In Defense of the Despised Faith*. Northvale – Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998: pp. 232-248.

Also see

- Baneth, David Hartwig (Zwi). “Judah Halevi and Al-Ghazali,” in *Studies in Jewish Thought*, edited by Alfred Jospe (1981)
- Efros, Israel. *Studies in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1974: Part II. “Some Aspects of Yehuda Halevi’s Mysticism” and “Some Textual Notes on Yehuda Halevi’s *Kuzari*.”
- Lobel, Diana. *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of the Religious Experience in Judah Halevi’s KUZARI*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.
- Schwartz, Dov. “Judah Halevi and Abraham Ibn Ezra” (= CHAPTER ONE) in *Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, translated by David Louvish and Batya Stein [THE BRILL REFERENCE LIBRARY OF JUDAISM, VOL. 20] (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2005).
- Silman, Yochanan. *Philosopher and Prophet: Judah Halevi, the KUZARI, and the Evolution of His Thought*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.
- Sirat, Colette. *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*: Chapter 4.
- Strauss, Leo. “The Law of Reason in the *Kuzari*,” in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. XIII (New York: 1943).

iii. Some works by Abraham ibn Ezra have been translated into English:

- *RESHITH HOKHMAH*:
 1. *The Beginning of Wisdom: An Astrological Treatise by Abraham ibn Ezra*, edited by Raphael Levy and Francisco Cantera. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1939.
 2. *The Beginning of Wisdom / Resbith Hochma*, translated and annotated by Meira B. Epstein; edited with additional annotations by Robert Hand. [Bel Air?]: A[rchive for the] R[etrieval] of H[istorical] A[strological] T[exts], 1998.
- *Commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra on the Pentateuch*, translated by Jay F. Shachter. Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House, 1986.
- *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, translated and annotated by Norman Strickland and Arthur M. Silver. New York: Menorah Publishing Company, 1988
- *The Commentary of Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra on Hosea*, translated by Abe Lipshitz. New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1988.
- *The Secret of the Torah (Sefer Yesod Mora ve-Sod ha-Torah)* translated by Norman Strickman. Northvale – Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1995.
- *Rabbi ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Creation (Perush ha-Torah: Bereshit, Perek 1-6)* translated by Michael Linetsky. Jason Aronson, 1998.
- *Deconstructing the Bible: Abraham ibn Ezra's Introduction to the Torah*, translated by Irene Lancaster. Abingdon – New York: Routledge, 2003; rpt 2007.

Also see

- del Valle, Carlos. "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Mathematical Speculations on the Divine Name," in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics and Typologies*, edited by R. A. Herrera (New York: Peter Lang, 1993).
- Friedländer, M. *Essays on the Writings of Abraham ibn Ezra*. London: The Society of Hebrew Literature / Trübner and Co., 1873; rpt Yerushalayim, [Mits'huf], 724 [1963 or 4]
- Halbertal, Moshe. *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications*, translated by Jackie Feldman. Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007, CHAPTER 5 "Esotericism and Commentary: Ibn Ezra and the Exegetical Layer," and CHAPTER 6 "Concealment and Heresy: Astrology and the Secret of the Torah."
- Schwartz, Dov. "Judah Halevi and Abraham Ibn Ezra" (= CHAPTER ONE) in *Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, translated by David Louvish & Batya Stein [BRILL REFERENCE LIBRARY OF JUDAISM, vol. 20] (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2005).
- Sela, Shlomo. *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science*. Leiden – Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2003.
- _____. "Abraham Ibn Ezra's Appropriation of Saturn," in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, Vol. 10, edited by Daniel Abrams and Avraham Elqayam (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2004).

5. Hasidei Ashkenaz

While not considered part of the early Kabbalah in the strictest sense, the German Hasidim must be seen as a bridge between the earlier *merkavah/bekhalot* mysticism and the Kabbalah which was to follow—or certain aspects of it. A whole paper could be devoted to the German Hasidim; until such time that a full bibliography is developed, the following preliminary list is offered.

- Abrams, Daniel. “The Literary Emergence of Esotericism in German Pietism,” in *Shofar*, vol. 12, no. 2 (Lafayette: Purdue University, 1994).
- _____. *Sexual Symbolism and Merkavah Speculation in Medieval Germany: A Study of the SOD HA-EGOZ Texts* [TEXTS AND STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN JUDAISM: 13]. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1997.
- Altmann, Alexander. “Eleazer of Worms’ Symbol of the Merkavah,” in (*idem*), *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (1969).
- Baer, Yitzhak. “The Socioreligious Orientation of ‘Sefer Hasidim,’” in *Binah*, vol. 2 (1989).
- Bar-Levav, Avriel. “Death and the (Blurred) Boundaries of Magic: Strategies of Coexistence,” in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, vol. 7, edited by D. Abrams and A. Elqayam (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2002).
- Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. *Jewish Mysticism: An Anthology*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1995. Passages: from Eleazer of Worms’ *Secret of Secrets* (pp. 90-95); from *Sefer Hasidim* (pp. 95-98); a prayer from the Ashkenazi liturgy (pp. 98-100).
- Dan, Joseph. “Ashkenazi Hasidim, 1941-1991: Was there Really a Hasidic Movement in Medieval Germany?” = JMII: Chapter 13. Also in *Gershom Scholem’s MAJOR TRENDS...*, edited by P. Schäfer and J. Dan (1993).
- _____. “*The Book of Divine Glory* by Rabbi Judah the Pious of Regensburg,” in *Studies on Jewish Manuscripts* [TEXTS AND STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN JUDAISM, 14] (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).
- _____. “The Emergence of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Germany,” = JMII: Chapter 2. Also in *Mystics of the Book*, edited by R. A. Herrera (1993).
- _____. “The Emergence of Mystical Prayer,” = JMII: Chapter 10. Also in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism* (1982).
- _____. *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History*: Chapter 4. “The Ashkenazi Hasidic Movement.”
- _____. “*Hokmath ha-’Egoz*, Its Origin and Development,” = JMI: Chapter 9. Also in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. XVII (1966).
- _____. JMI = *Jewish Mysticism*, Volume I: LATE ANTIQUITY. Northvale/Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc, 1998.
- _____. JMII = *Jewish Mysticism*, Volume II: THE MIDDLE AGES. Northvale/Jerusalem: Jason Aronson, 1998.
- _____. *Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics*: Chapter 3, “Mysticism and Ethics in the Ashkenazi Hasidim.”
- _____. *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.

- Eleazer of Worms. *Three Tracts* [TREE TEXTS: 2], edited by David Meltzer. Berkeley: Berkeley Tree, 1975.
 1. THE BOOK OF PROPHECY
 2. THE BOOK OF THE WORD
 3. selections from *Hokhmah ha-Egoz*
- Finkel, Avraham Yaakov (trans/ed). *Sefer Chasidim: The Book of the Pious by Yebuda HaChasid*. Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1997.
- Green, Arthur. *Keter*. Chapter Ten, “Medieval Reconsiderations”; Chapter Eleven, “The Hymn of Glory”; Chapter Twelve, “The Way to Kabbalah.”
- Grozinger, Karl Erich; and Dan, Joseph (ed). *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism: International Symposium held in Frankfurt a. M. 1991* [STUDIA JUDAICA: Band XIII]. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995.

The first eight articles (of twenty) treat the *Hasidei Ashkenaz*; among these is Dan’s “The Language of the Mystics in Medieval Germany.” Note also Moshe Idel, “An Anonymous Commentary on Shir ha Yihud.”
- Harris, Monford. “Dreams in *Sefer Hasidim*,” in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 31 (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1963).

Also in Harris’ *Studies in Jewish Dream Interpretation* (Jason Aronson, 1994).
- 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 Elijor and Peter Schäfer. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.
- Idel, Moshe. *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* [SUNY SERIES IN JUDAICA]. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990: Chapter 5, “Ashkenazi Hasidic Views on the Golem.”
- Kanarfogel, Ephraim. “Mysticism and Asceticism in Italian Rabbinic Literature of the Thirteenth Century,” in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, vol. 6, edited by D. Abrams and A. Elqayam (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2001).
- Kuyt, Annelies. “Hasidut Ashkenaz on the Angel of Dreams. A Heavenly Messenger Reflecting or Exchanging Man’s Thoughts,” in *Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought* [FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOR OF JOSEPH DAN ON THE OCCASION OF HIS SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY], edited by Rachel Elijor and Peter Schäfer. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.
- _____. “R. El‘azar of Worms’s ‘Stairway to Heaven,’” *Jewish Studies Between the Disciplines* [PAPERS IN HONOR OF PETER SCHÄFER ON THE OCCASION OF HIS SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY] (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2003).
- Marcus, Ivan. “The Devotional Ideals of Ashkenazic Pietism,” in *Jewish Spirituality I: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, edited by Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986).
- _____. “Exegesis for the Few and the Many: Judah ha-Hasid’s Biblical Commentaries,” in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, vol. VIII [Proceedings of the

Third International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism: THE AGE OF THE ZOHAR], edited by Joseph Dan (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1989).

- _____ . “*Hasidei Ashkenaz* Private Penitentials: An Introduction and Descriptive Catalogue of their Manuscripts and Early Editions,” *Studies in Jewish Mysticism* (1982).
- _____ . “The Historical Meaning of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*: Fact, Fiction or Cultural Self-Image?” in *Gershom Scholem’s MAJOR TRENDS IN JEWISH MYSTICISM 50 Years After* (1993).
- _____ . “Judah the Pietist and Eleazer of Worms: From Charismatic to Conventional Leadership,” in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the Thirteenth Century* (1998).
- _____ . (trans) “Narrative Fantasies from *Sefer Hasidim*” (by Judah the Hasid), in *Fiction*, vol. 7, nos. 1 and 2: RABBINIC FANTASY (The City College of New York, 1983). Also in *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature*, edited by D. Stern and M. Mirsky (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990; rpt. New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1998).
- _____ . *Piety and Society. The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* [ÉTUDES SUR LE JUDAÏSME MÉDIEVAL: Tome X]. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981.
- _____ . “The ‘Song of Songs’ in German Hasidism and the School of Rashi: A Preliminary Comparison,” in *Rashi 1040-1990* (1993)
- Millgram, Abraham E. *An Anthology of Hebrew Literature*. 1961, Abelard-Schuman, New York: pp. 142-6, excerpts from Eleazer of Worms’ *Rokeach*.
- Rubin, A. “The Concept of Repentance among the *Hasidei Ashkenaz*,” in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. XVI (1965).
- Schäfer, Peter. “The Ideal of Piety of the Ashkenazi Hasidim and Its Roots in Jewish Tradition,” in *Jewish History*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Haifa: Haifa University Press / Leiden: E. J. Brill, Fall 1990).
- Scholem, Gershom. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Schocken Books, 1941; frequently reprinted: Third Lecture. “Hasidism in Medieval Germany.”
- Singer, Shalom Alchanan (trans.) *Medieval Jewish Mysticism*. Wheeling: Whitehall, 1971: a partial translation of *Sefer ha-Hasidim*.
- Soloveitchik, Haym. “The Midrash, *Sefer Hasidim* and the Changing Face of God,” 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.
- _____ . “Three Themes in the *Sefer Hasidim*,” in *AJS Review*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1976).
- _____ . “Topics in the *Hokhmah ha-Nefesh*,” in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. XXI (1970).
- Trachtenberg, Joshua. *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion*. New York: Behrman’s Jewish Book House, 1939; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1975.
- Van Uchelen, Nikolaas A. “*Ma’aseh Merkabah* in *Sefer Hasidim*,” in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, vol. VI (3-4) [proceedings of the Second International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism: THE BEGINNINGS OF JEWISH

MYSTICISM IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE], edited by Joseph Dan (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1987).

- Wolfson, Elliot. *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism, and Hermeneutics*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995: Chapter 1. “The Image of Jacob Engraved upon the Throne: Further Reflection on the Esoteric Doctrine of the German Pietists.”
- _____ . “The Mystical Significance of Torah Study in German Pietism,” in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 84, no. 1 (July 1993).
- _____ . *Through a Speculum That Shines*: Chapter Five. “Haside Ashkenaz: Verdical and Docetic Interpretations of the Chariot Visions.”
- Yassif, Eli. “The Medieval Saint as Protagonist and Storyteller: The Case of R. Judah he-Hasid,” 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.
- Zabolotnaya, Natasha-Esther. “Cosmology and Color Symbolism in R. Eleazer of Worms,” in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, Vol. 12, edited by Daniel Abrams and Avraham Elqayam (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2004).

Kabbalah Study
 Jewish Mysticism in English
 by Don Karr

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A.

In an article reviewing the then-current (1970s) state of scholarship on the history of early rabbinic Judaism,¹ Jacob Neusner complained, in particular, about E. E. Urbach's study² 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 Scholem³ 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),⁴ Ithamar Gruenwald argues⁵ 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. *merkavah* mysticism and *hekhalot* literature) have also been offered in recent years.⁶ 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 coinage⁷ with problems not unlike those of such related words as “mysticism,” “magic,” “myth,” and “gnosis/gnosticism.”)⁸

The issue of defining—or redefining—Kabbalah has been addressed by Moshe Idel.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.”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), 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.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.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 and references to earlier material, which immediately begins our search into the time before its appearance.¹³

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] (Tuebingen: 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:

1. *The Classical Midrash: Tannaitic Commentaries on the Bible*, translated and introduced with commentary by Reuven Hammer. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1995.
2. *The Mishnah: Oral Traditions of Judaism*, selected and translated by Eugene Lipman. New York: Schocken Books, 1974.¹⁵
3. *The Talmud: Selected Writings*, translated by Ben Zion Bokser. Paulist Press, 1989.

As a first approach to Jewish mysticism proper, an indispensable source is *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism* by Joseph Dan (Tel Aviv: MOD [Ministry of Defense] Books, 1993).

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
2. Moshe Idel's *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
3. Elliot R. Wolfson's *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

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

1. Scholem's *Origins of the Kabbalah*. Jewish Publication Society and Princeton University Press, 1987.
2. Joseph Dan and Ronald C. Kiener. *The Early Kabbalah*. Paulist Press, 1986.

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

1. Daniel C. Matt. *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment* (1983)
2. Lawrence Fine. *Safed Spirituality: Rules of Mystical Piety, The Beginning of Wisdom* (1984).

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:

1. Rachel Elijor. *The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
2. Moshe Idel. *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*. State University of New York Press, 1995.
3. Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer. *Hasidism as Mysticism. Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth-Century Hasidic Thought*. Princeton/ Jerusalem: Princeton University Press and Magnes Press, 1983.

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:

1. Daniel C. Matt. *The Essential Kabbalah* (see note 3).
2. Dan Cohn-Sherbock. *Jewish Mysticism: An Anthology*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1995.
3. Ben Zion Bokser. *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1981.
4. David Meltzer (ed). *The Secret Garden. An Anthology in the Kabbalah*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1976; rpt. Barrytown Ltd., 1998.¹⁸

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:

1. Lawrence Fine (ed). *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*. New York University Press, 1995.
2. Arthur Green (ed). *Jewish Spirituality: volume 1: FROM THE BIBLE THROUGH THE MIDDLE AGES*, 1986; volume 2: FROM THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY REVIVAL TO THE PRESENT, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987.

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).

One of the best general anthologies is Philip S. Alexander's *Textual Sources for the Study of Judaism* (Totowa: Manchester University Books/Barnes and Noble Books, 1984; rpt. University of Chicago Press, 1990). Alexander's introductions are particularly helpful.

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)
2. *Jewish Ethics, Philosophy and Mysticism* (1969)
3. *Jewish Thought Today* (1970)

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

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 of 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/kab/karr/>.

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

- Laenen, J. H. *Jewish Mysticism: An Introduction* [= JOODSE MYSTIEK. EEN INLEIDING] translated from the Dutch by David E. Orton. Louisville: Westminster Knox Press, 2001.
- Silberman, Neil Asher. *Heavenly Powers: Unraveling the Secret History of the Kabbalah*. New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1998.

Notes (updated 2003):

1. Jacob Neusner, “The History of Earlier Rabbinic Judaism: Some New Approaches,” in *History of Religions*, vol. 16, no. 3 (University of Chicago, February 1977).
2. Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* [original Hebrew: HAZAL, PIRKE EMUNOT VE-DE’OT, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1975], English translation by Israel Abrahams. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.
3. See Scholem’s *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Schocken Publishing House, 1941; frequently reprinted by Schocken Books, New York). A similar flaw plagues the recent anthology by Daniel C. Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1994). As nicely done as it is, Matt’s book gives the erroneous impression that the Kabbalah can be summarized and distilled into a single, comprehensive volume. This problem of homogenization burdens other areas of Jewish studies; see Barry Holtz’s comments regarding *midrashim* in *Back to the Sources* (New York: Summit Books, 1984), pp. 177-9.
4. *Gershom Scholem’s MAJOR TRENDS IN JEWISH MYSTICISM 50 Years After: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism*, edited by Peter Schäfer and Joseph Dan. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1993.
5. “Reflections on the Nature and Origins of Jewish Mysticism,” in *Gershom Scholem’s MAJOR TRENDS...* (see note 4).
6. In particular see Peter Schäfer, *Gershom Scholem Reconsidered: The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism* [THE TWELFTH SACKS LECTURE DELIVERED ON 29TH MAY 1985] (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1986) and Nathaniel Deutsch, *The Gnostic Imagination: Gnosticism, Mandaicism, and Merkabah Mysticism* [BRILL’S SERIES IN JEWISH STUDIES, vol. XIII] (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995). An essay which takes a critical look at contemporary “Kabbalah Studies” in general, but with a rather different approach from that of the present discussion, is Gil Anidjar’s “Jewish Mysticism Alterable and Unalterable: On

Orienting Kabbalah Studies and the 'Zohar of Christian Spain,' in *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, Fall 1996). Regarding Anidjar's central theme, namely Moslem influence on Kabbalah, see Moshe Idel's leveling response, "Orienting, Orientalizing or Disorienting the Study of Kabbalah: 'An Almost Absolutely Unique' Case of Occidentalism," in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 2 (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 1997).

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 *hekhlot* texts. The notion of fixed bodies of content forming a canon of "books" representing a coherent school of *hekhlot* mysticism appears unsupportable. 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 *'Iyyun* 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
 - P. S. Alexander. "Comparing Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism: An Essay in Method," in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1984)
 - Joseph Dan. "Jewish Gnosticism?" in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1995)
 - Ithamar Gruenwald. "Jewish Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, edited by J. Dan and F. Talmage (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 1982).
9. "Defining Kabbalah: The Kabbalah of the Divine Names," in *the Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, and Typologies*, edited by R. A. Herrera (New York: Peter Lang, 1993).
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 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.
11. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). See in particular Chapters 6, 7, and 8.
12. On considering the German *Hasidim* an important source for non-*sefirotic* Kabbalah, see Daniel Abrams, "From Germany to Spain: Numerology as a Mystical Technique," in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. XLVI, no. 1 (Spring 1996).

13. See the various discussions of the *Bahir*:
- Gershom Scholem. *Origins of the Kabbalah*.
 - Joseph Dan. *The Early Kabbalah*.
 - _____. “Midrash and the Dawn of Kabbalah,” in *Midrash and Literature*, edited by G. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); and in Dan’s *Jewish Mysticism*, Volume II: THE MIDDLE AGES (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998). See especially the introduction to *Jewish Mysticism II*, where Dan argues against Scholem’s description of the history of Jewish mysticism as having a “linear development from its beginnings” (“Introduction: § III”).
 - Elliot R. Wolfson. “The Tree That Is All: Jewish-Christian Roots of a Kabbalistic Symbol in *Sefer ha-Bahir*,” in Wolfson’s *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism, and Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).
14. To pursue the development of Christian mysticism, see *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, by Bernard McGinn ([New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991] 1995)—the best work on this topic which I have seen. *Foundations* is the first of a four-volume series. An interesting supplement to McGinn is Guy G. Stroumsa’s *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* [STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS (NUMEN BOOK SERIES), Volume LXX] (Leiden – New York – Köln, E. J. Brill, 1996).
- Following mystical trends inevitably leads through apocryphal Christianity into Gnosticism. For an overview of this complex subject, see *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, by Kurt Rudolph (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1984; New York: Harper and Row, 1987). For texts, see (forgive the titles) *The Gnostic Scriptures: Ancient Wisdom for the New Age*, translated, annotated, and introduced by Bentley Layton (New York: Doubleday, 1987), and *The Gnostic Bible*, edited by Wallis Barnstone and Marvin Meyer (Boston & London: Shambhala, 2003).
15. The more comprehensive English edition of the *Mishnah* by Herbert Danby (1933) is still available from Oxford University Press.
16. A possible alternative to *Major Trends* is Scholem’s *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974, reprinted frequently).
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. It is full of sloppy mistakes.