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**New Study Tools From the Kabbalists of Today: Toward an
Appreciation of the History and Role of Collectanea,
Paraphrases and Graphic Representations in Kabbalistic
Literature***

Retour

Collectanea

Collectanea of Kabbalistic works date back at least to the 1280s (1). Anonymous editors excerpted passages from lengthy works apparently for convenience sake. Other known works contain lengthy quotations in their works include the various works of Isaac of Acre, Menahem Recanati, Meir Ibn Gabai and Abraham Arduziel. Other collectanea were assembled around a set structure such as the prayers or the Torah: Nafatali Herz's *Siddur* (Thiengen 1560), Menahem Zioni's *Commentary to the Torah* and portions of the *Book Bahir* in the first printing of the *Zohar* (2). The most famous collection of texts to be organized around the Torah is certainly the *Zohar*, at least certain manuscripts dating from the 16th and 17th centuries and through the two different printings of the *Zohar* in sixteenth-century Italy.

Some collections of Kabbalistic works display no apparent organizing principle and were in fact personal notebooks such as that of Yohanan Alemano (Ms. Oxford, Neubauer 2234) (3). In Prague 1660 the first thematic collection was published in *Yalqut Reuveni* which organized the various passages topically in alphabetic listings. This edition would later be expanded into an edition organized around the pericopes of the Torah (Wilhermsdorf 1681), perhaps demonstrating the tendency of Jewish literature and study to return to the formal structure of its canonical works.

Important questions need to be asked about the intended purpose of these collections and their assumed role in the later history of Kabbalistic thought. Were these volumes seen as replacements for the originals or as tools to supplement the original forms of the work? Were they intended for the elite or the vulgus?

In recent years a number of volumes have been edited which join this list of works. One such book is *Shulhan Aruch ha-Zohar* (16 volumes to date, Jerusalem 1993-1996), which “annotates” the halakhot of the *Tur* and *Shulhan Aruch* with Zoharic texts. The purpose of these volumes is clear. From the traditional standpoint, one can compare the late legal compendiums with the mystical comments of the ‘Tanaitic’ work. Regardless of intent, the

volume is a helpful tool for understanding the relationship between Halakha and Kabbalah, at least as demonstrated in these works.

Similar methods have now been applied to Moses Cordovero's works. Shmuel Yudaiqin has edited two volumes of passages from the works of Cordovero. These volumes, which focus on the study of Kabbalah, are thematically organized by chapter and offer no additional commentary (4). In a separate two-volume work entitled *Or Le-Yesharim*, Yudaiqin provides a commentary to Cordovero's Introduction to *Shi'ur Qomah* by referring the reader to passages from Cordovero's corpus. Here each passage is very briefly introduced. In a similar four-volume set entitled *Shomer ha-Pardes*, Yudaiqin provides an equally extensive commentary from Cordovero's corpus to [1] Cordovero's *Or Ne'erav* (Benei Beraq 1995); [2] Cordovero's *Or Yaqar: Commentary to Raya Mehemna 3:9* (Benei Beraq 1995); [3] *Yesodei ha-Torah ve-Iqarei ha-Dat* of R. Dov Baer Gottlieb (Benei Beraq 1996); [4] Eleazar Azikri's *Sefer Haredim* (Benei Beraq 1996). As with the above volumes, the source of each passage presented in the commentary is identified in brackets at the end of the citation.

Paraphrases and Hebrew Translations

The German pietists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries could not read Arabic. Their heavy use of Saadia Gaon's *Emunot ve-De'ot* was based on a loose Hebrew paraphrase which reflected their understanding of the text (5). A translation to (part of) the Aramaic text of the *Zohar* was prepared already in the fourteenth century by R. David ben Yehuda. This Hebrew translation can be seen to be a step toward popularization or at least an attempt to provide access to a greater number of people (6).

In the last few years a number of new editions of classic texts - some with commentaries - have been published which include Hebrew translations inserted into the body of the text in brackets and/or in a smaller font. These include *Sefer Idra Rabba* (Petah Tiqvah 1996) and *Maggid Mesharim* (Petah Tiqvah 1990), each edited by Yihiel Barlev.

In a five volume work Shalom Batzri culled from the *Zohar* and *Zohar Hadash* the narrative units and presented them with a Hebrew translation at the bottom of the page (*Ma'asiyot ha-Zohar*, 3 volumes, 1992-1993; *Ma'asiyot ha-Zohar he-Hadash*, Jerusalem 1993). Might this be compared in some way to the *Ein Ya'akov* (7) ?

More pioneering in opening up Kabbalistic texts to a wider audience is the paraphrase of Nahmanides' *Commentary to the Torah*. In this five volume set published between 1985 and 1995 (8), Pinchas Lieberman provides a running translation in modern Hebrew of the complete text. These two texts are accompanied on the page by a modern commentary which explains terms and their sources. The presentation of all these sources synoptically on the page is intended to train the reader to read Nahmanides' original text (9). The editor states that he has refrained from explaining Nahmanides' Kabbalah in his edition. He then cites Nahmanides' celebrated introduction in which he states that the written text alone [i.e. Nahmanides' *Commentary*] does not provide the key to understanding his Kabbalah (10). This apparent

contradiction is followed by the additional claim, supported by recent scholarship, that Nahmanides Kabbalistic exegesis of scripture (can at times) converge with the simple meaning of the text.(11)

Diagrams

Early texts of Jewish mysticism, including many Hekhalot works as well as magical or astrological texts, detail the hierarchy of angelic and heavenly beings. Many early Kabbalistic texts, particularly the genre of commentaries to the ten sefirot, describe the relationships between these theosophic powers. The most complex systems, however, can be found in Lurianic texts where the various worlds each contain multiple sets of ten sefirot. These texts can at times be so complicated that the reader may be compelled to draw an outline of the heavenly world described in the text.

The earliest diagrams in Jewish mystical text include drawings in European manuscripts of Hekhalot texts which depict aspects of the heavenly world in relation to the esoteric traditions of the Account of Creation and the Account of the Chariot (12). Stick drawings of elements from the world of the Merkavah can be found as well in the works of Eleazar of Worms - including one drawing of a dragon-like figure (13). Eleazar's drawing are imitated and further enhanced in the Kabbalistic reworking of his *Commentary to Ezekiel's Chariot* composed by Jacob ha-Kohen (14). Jacob ha-Kohen additionally included drawings of the letter Aleph and the angelic symbolism which is overlaid on the Menorah in Jacob Ha-Kohen's *Book of Illumination* (15). The most widespread drawings outside of the circles of the theosophic Kabbalists are the circles of letter permutations in Abraham Abulafia's *Hayye ha-Olam ha-Ba* (16). Finally, numerous diagrams of the sefirotic tree (*Ilan ha-Sefirot*) can be found with varying complexity in many Kabbalistic manuscripts. Diagrams of the sefirotic tree - in fact depicted as a tree - can be found in some of the earliest Kabbalistic manuscripts which have survived, dating to the last two decades of the thirteenth century (17). These many diagrams, including foremost the sefirotic trees have yet to be catalogued in any comprehensive way. Indeed a major desiderata of the study of Jewish mysticism is such a project, one that would reproduce all these diagrams and drawings in a single volume accompanied with a commentary which would place each diagram in its literary and historical context through internal comparisons and through its relationship to the written text which accompanies each (18).

Diagrams of later Kabbalistic literature were printed in such classic works as Gikatilla's *Sha'are Orach* (19), Moses Cordovero's *Pardes Rimmonim* (20) and Shabbetai Sheftel Horowitz's *Shefa Tal* (21), to name but a few (22). With the appearance of Lurianic Kabbalah and Sabbateanism, numerous drawings were prepared, primarily in manuscript form. The most significant diagrams to be published were those of Meir Popper in his *Sod Ilan ha-Gadol* (23). All of these diagrams have yet to be studied in any serious way. An index or basic catalog does not even exist. Hopefully a history of Jewish magical and Kabbalistic diagrams (including amulets) will be written in the foreseeable future.

Outside of the walls of the university, in the yeshivot and other learning-centers where the works of Lurianic Kabbalah are the main focus of study, new tools have been developed to grapple with the complexities of the graphic element which is embedded in the written text. In a recently published book, *Derekh le-Ez Hayyim* (24), numerous multi-color diagrams of incredible complexity outline the major patterns of the divine world as described in *Ez Hayyim*. The anonymous author, who out of modesty hides behind a numerical equivalent of his name, has invested years of learning and planning in this folio-size volume.

Major methodological questions arise when viewing these diagrams. Is the author of this volume uncovering the graphic depiction which the Lurianic Kabbalist envisioned prior to composing his work, or were these images conceived in linguistic terms alone. Did the circle of initiates who first studied these written works prepare their own diagrams (which did not survive) or did they train themselves to mentally organize the images they were reading in the text? (25) Or maybe we are outsiders who are crippled by time or distance from the world of these Kabbalistic authors and are incapable of preserving these images in their literary form? Finally, does this method of study characterize the many learning centers of Kabbalah today or is this one man's attempt to help the inferior student who requires graphic aids.

Notes

1. See my discussion of Ms. Parma 1390 in *R. Asher ben David: His Complete Works and Studies in his Kabbalistic Thought (Including The Commentaries to the Account of Creation by the Kabbalists of Provence and Gerona)*, Los Angeles 1996, p. 305 [Hebrew]; Haviva Pedaya, "Picturing and Imaging in the Kabbalistic Exegesis of Nahmanides", *Mahnayim* 6 (1994), pp. 114-123 [Hebrew].
2. See the chapter on the first printing of the *Zohar* in my edition of the *Book Bahir*, Los Angeles 1994. For further analysis of the reception history of the *Bahir* and its relationship to the *Zohar* see Boaz Huss "Sefer ha-Bahir", *Tarbiz* 65 (1996), pp. 333-340 [Hebrew].
3. Abrams, *The Book Bahir*, p. 96. Other important collections include Moses ben Jacob of Kiev, *Shushan Sodot*, Cracow 1788 (facs. reprint [Jerusalem] n.d.; retypeset Jerusalem 1995); On this work see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, Jerusalem 1974, p.70 and Jacob Reifman, "About the Author of *Shushan Sodot*", *ha-Karmel* 2 (1862), p. 207 [Hebrew]. See also the anthology of *Zohar* commentaries conain in Abraham ben Mordechai Azulai , *Sefer 'Or ha-Hama*, Przemysl 1896-1898, 3 volumes (facs. edition Benei Baraq 1977). On Anthologies of commentaries to the *Zohar* see, Boaz Huss, 'The Anthological Interpretation: The Emergence of Anthologies of *Zohar* Commentaries in the Seventeenth Century', *Prooftexts* (forthcoming). See also Nathan of Tcherin, *Derekh Hassidim*, Lemberg 1873 (facs. edition Jerusalem 1962), which is an anthology of hasidic texts.

4. *Sefer Orayta Qame de-Qadosh Baruch Huh...*, Benei Beraq 1995; *Da Elohei Avikha...*, Benei Beraq 1995.
5. R. Kiener, “The Hebrew Paraphrase of Saadiah Gaon's *Kitab al-Amanat Wa'l-I'tiqadat*”, *AJS Review* 11 (1986), pp. 1-26.
6. For other examples such as the role of al-Naqawa's *Menorat ha-Meor*, see the introduction, I. Tishby's *Wisdom of the Zohar*, first printed in Hebrew, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, Jerusalem 1949; translated into English: *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, Oxford 1989.
7. Marjorie Lehman, “A Talmudic Anthology of Aggada: Examining the *Ein Yaakov*”, Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1993.
8. *Perush ha-Ramban `al ha-Torah...*, Jerusalem 1985-95.
9. Introduction, p.13.
10. Daniel Abrams, “Orality in the Kabbalistic School of Nahmanides: Preserving and Interpreting Esoteric Traditions and Texts”, *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2 (1995), pp. 85-102.
11. E. Wolfson, “By Way of Truth: Aspects of Nahmanides' Kabbalistic Hermeneutic”, *AJS Review* 14 (1989), pp. 103-178.
12. N. Sed “Une cosmologie juive du haut moyen age la *Berayta di Ma'aseh Bereshit*”, *Revue des Etudes Juives* 123 (1964), pp. 259-305; part II: “Le texte, les manuscrits et les diagrammes”, *Ibid.*, 124 (1965), pp. 23-123; Klaus Herrmann, *Massekhet Hekhalot: Traktat von den himmlischen Palaesten, Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Tuebingen 1994.
13. *Sodei Razaya*, ed. S. Weiss, Benei Braq 1986, pp. 136, 186. Most of the drawings could not be inserted in this volume as with the edition of the other section of this compendium, *Sodei Razaya*, ed. I. Kamelhar, Bilgoraj 1936. The dragon-like figure was printed in a full folio page in Eleazar's *Commentary to Sefer Yezira*, Przemysl 1883 [facs. Brooklyn 1978], fol. 125 and see also the following pages.
14. Asi Farber-Ginat, “Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen's Commentary to Ezekiel's Chariot”, The Hebrew University, master's thesis, 1978, pp. 24, 30, 38, 62 [Hebrew]. See also the diagrams in Yitzhaq Vannah (Mahariv), *Rekeb `Elohim*, Benei Baraq 1992.
15. Abrams, “*The Book of Illumination* of R. Jacob ben Jacob HaKohen: A Synoptic Edition From Various Manuscripts”, New York University, 1993, pp. 323-325, 376, 370, 401 [Hebrew].
16. See also the relatively simple diagrams in the works of the fourteenth century Kabbalist, Joseph Hamadan: Jeremy Zwelling, “Joseph of Hamadan's *Sefer Tashak*: Critical Text Edition with Introduction [Hebrew Text]”, Ph.d. Dissertation, Brandeis University 1975, see esp. pp. 149-162, 167-184.
17. See the *Ilan ha-Hokhma* in Ms. Paris BN 763, fol. 34b.
18. See for example the discussions of Elliot Wolfson, “Negative Theology and Positive Assertion in the Early Kabbalah”, *Da'at* 32-33 (1994), p. vxiii; “Crossing Gender Boundaries”, *Circle in the Square - Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism*, Albany 1995, p. 196, n. 6.
19. Chapter 5, see for example Warsaw 1883 edition, fol. 64a.

20. *Sha'ar ha-Aziluth; Sha'ar Seder Amidatan; Sha'ar ha-Zinorot*. See also the various diagrams reproduced in Bracha Sack, *The Kabbalah of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero*, Be'er Sheva 1995, pp. 51, 115, 183 [Hebrew].
21. Hanover 1612, fols. [6]b, [7]a, [8]a, 5a, 8a, 10a, 28a, 49a, 56a, 62a.
22. See further my study "Critical and Post-Critical Textual Scholarship of Jewish Mystical Literature: Notes on the History and Development of Modern Editing Techniques", *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 1 (1996), pp. 17-71, esp. p. 52.
23. *Sod Ilan ha-Gadol*, Warsaw 1864 and 1893. The first edition was not bound, rather the folio pages were pasted together to form a scroll. The second edition (bound) was reprinted in facsimile (Jerusalem n.d.). While this *Ilan* may be the most important diagram of its type to be printed one of the more striking figures to appear in print is certainly found in Moses ben Menahem Graf's, *Vayaqel Moshe*, Dessau 1699, (facs. edition Jerusalem 1963), fol. 33b-34a. See also Jacob Spielmann, *Tal 'Orot*, Lvov 1876-1883 (Jerusalem 1976); Eliahu David Sal'atqi, *Yad 'Eliahu, Mafteah le -Qabbalat ha - 'Ari Z'al*, Jerusalem 1987.
24. *Derekh le-Ez Hayyim - Tarshim le-Havanat Sefer Ez Hayyim*, Jerusalem [1996].
25. See the discussion of M. Idel in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven and London 1988, pp. 103-111.

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