

KABBALAH IN ITALY  
1280–1510

A SURVEY

MOSHE IDEL

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## PREFACE

The following survey of Kabbalah in Italy was inspired by a series of lectures I delivered at the opening of the Avraham Goldstein-Goren Center of Jewish Studies at the Università degli Studi in Milan in the winter of 1998. It is my great pleasure to thank the late Mr. Avraham Goldstein-Goren for initiating these lectures, for caring about their publication, and for providing this lecturer with generous hospitality. The English manuscript of the lectures was translated into Italian by Professor Fabrizio Lelli some years ago. This volume incorporates revisions to the original material and the addition of some new chapters, taking into consideration salient recent scholarship.

My own survey of Jewish thought in Italy has inevitably benefited much from earlier pioneering work by many scholars, including the late Professors Isaac

Barzilay, Umberto Cassuto, Efraim Gottlieb, Adolph Jellinek, David Kaufmann, Cecil Roth, Gershom Scholem, Moses Schulvass, Joseph B. (Giuseppe) Sermoneta, Israel M. Ta-Shma, and Chaim Wirszubski; as well as Menahem Ben Sasson, Robert Bonfil, Giulio Busi, Saverio Campanini, Don Harran, Alessandro Gueta, Fabrizio Lelli, Arthur Leslie, Avraham Melammed, Mauro Perani, David Ruderman, Aviezer Ravitzky, Shlomo Simonsohn, and Hava Tirosh-Samuelson. All have contributed considerable knowledge, perspective, and insight about the vast speculative literature produced by Italian Jewry. Yet notwithstanding the great effort already invested, no detailed study of kabbalistic literature in Italy is available. This volume represents a first attempt to survey the main writings and ideas appearing in kabbalistic books and manuscripts composed in Italy and Sicily between 1280 and 1510. These temporal parameters reflect, first, Abraham Abulafia's arrival in Italy for the second time in 1279 and the beginning of his kabbalistic literary activity there, while 1510 represents the end of the literary activities of the generation of Italian and Spanish Jews who were contemporaries of the Florentine intellectuals Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola and the arrival in Italy of the Kabbalists who were refugees from Spain.

The three main Kabbalists to be analyzed below are R. Abraham Abulafia, R. Menahem Recanati, and R. Yohanan Alemanno. Each was a prolific writer who originated a vision of Kabbalah that was to a great extent new and influential, at least insofar as Italian Jewish culture was concerned. Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah was clearly novel as an articulated kabbalistic system; Recanati articulated a form of theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah previously unknown in Italy; and Yohanan Alemanno's astromagical interpretation of Kabbalah was likewise almost unknown on Italian soil. These three thinkers, who also represent three major models in Jewish Kabbalah, are seminal figures not only in the history of Kabbalah in Italy but also in the history of Kabbalah in general.

The bulk of the present survey evolved from numerous detailed articles and monographs I dedicated to these figures, as well as to additional kabbalistic writings in Italy. In the following pages I have attempted to treat these topics and authors from a more integrated perspective, comparing them to one other, and the various brands of Italian Kabbalah to those found in Spain and Byzantium.

Though the book grew from a series of publications in various languages over the past twenty-five years, I have reworked the material and integrated it in more comprehensive schemes, taking into consideration processes dealing with the development of Kabbalah as a whole. My discussions with friends and scholars over the years about topics dealt with in this volume have been extremely helpful, and I shall mention here especially Professors Robert Bonfil, Brian Copenhagen, Fabrizio Lelli, David Ruderman, and Stéphane Toussaint, and, last

but not least, the late Professors Ioan P. Culianu, Joseph B. Sermoneta, and Chaim Wirszubski.

The basic methodological approaches that informed the following discussions are drawn from a variety of methodologies, especially the historical-philological one, which puts great emphasis upon the study of manuscripts and their historical filiation, as well as on the need to read texts in their conceptual framework. This is the reason why I treated the different Kabbalists in different chapters. However, from the conceptual point of view I am closer to the Warburg school and its reverberations in the study of the Renaissance, especially the emphasis put upon magic and astrology. I hope I learned much from the writings of Daniel P. Walker, Edgar Wind, Frances A. Yates, and their followers. The parallel developments in scholarship in Italy, as represented especially by the studies of Eugenio Garin and Paola Zambelli and more recently by Franco Bacchelli and Stéphane Toussaint, were indispensable for some of the conclusions drawn below.

Many thanks are due to Ann Hawthorne's rigorous editing of the English-language manuscript; her queries were sometimes a challenge but contributed much to the clarity of the exposition.

# INTRODUCTION

## 1. A SURVEY OF KABBALAH

This book is the first comprehensive effort to survey the main stages of the development of Kabbalah in Italy, from its inception in the last decades of the thirteenth century until approximately 1510. My main focus is the works written in the Italian peninsula that both their authors and others conceived as being Kabbalah. Since an overall definition of Kabbalah—as of Italy in the Middle Ages—is filled with problems, like any attempt to define vast corpora such as philosophy, science, poetry, or magic, I prefer to use these two criteria of internal and external perception to delimit the relevant material, in itself highly diverse, covered in my analysis.<sup>1</sup>



This book is therefore not a history of Jewish culture or even of Jewish thought in Italy in this period but a much more specific enterprise. Although I will necessarily touch upon other forms of Jewish mysticism, such as the *Heikhalot* literature, that were known in the peninsula, and upon mystical aspects of Jewish philosophy that developed there, this survey focuses upon the variety of literatures that inspired Kabbalah in Italy, such as the Jewish classical traditions and medieval philosophy, magic, and astrology, and upon the affinities between kabbalistic phenomena and parallel or similar ones in Italian culture.

I deliberately use the term “survey” rather than “history.” In my opinion, one single history is not possible for such a complex phenomenon as Kabbalah; rather, it comprises a wide variety of histories. We already have histories of certain ideas and concepts that developed over centuries in accordance with changes and variations upon themes such as the righteous, *tzaddiq*, and the *Shekhinah*, the feminine description of deity;<sup>2</sup> the constellation of ideas related to the Golem;<sup>3</sup> and the avatars of the chain of being in Jewish mysticism.<sup>4</sup> There are also histories of each of the main schools or models as they developed in various centers and literatures. So, for example, a history of ecstatic Kabbalah must cover not only Italy but also Byzantium and Jerusalem, as well as Safedian Kabbalah, Sabbateanism, eighteenth-century Hasidism and its opponents, and recent developments in the printing of Abulafia’s writings and their study by a variety of audiences. There are also histories of Kabbalah in a specific city, such as Venice or Florence, which are more concerned with what was written in a particular place or is extant there though written elsewhere; in these the importance of the local culture prevails over a broader picture of literary genres or conceptual structures of this mystical lore. Biographies of individual Kabbalists and histories of specific kabbalistic manuscripts or libraries also contribute to a fuller picture of this lore. Kabbalah can also be seen as part of a history of religion as well as reflecting a mentality embedded in a specific culture and thus studied as cultural history. None of these histories should be neglected, and their findings should be integrated as much as possible.

However, after all is said, it is the content of these literatures rather than their material manifestations in manuscripts or books that remains most important. The elucidation of content requires not only historiographic disciplines but also philological skills in dealing with manuscripts, languages, and terminologies. The ascending importance of magical and astrological material, for example, demands an acquaintance with literatures that have remained outside the scope of several recent and more comprehensive scholarly understandings of Kabbalah. When their position in this larger linguistic and cultural context is understood, the Kabbalists can be seen to stand at the intersection of more than one type of intellectual history; and this is especially true in the case of Italian Kabbalah.

Let me mention the obvious: Kabbalah is a vast and complex literature, comprising commentaries on classical Jewish texts, analyses of commandments and customs, their meaning and specific ways of performance, descriptions of mystical techniques and a variety of mystical experiences. The scholar has at his disposal texts that present no comprehensive theories accepted by all or even most Kabbalists. Clearly, generalizations about this lore, as about any comprehensive literature that developed over centuries in many geographical areas, produce only precarious results.

The texts that I shall present in the following chapters attest to the great diversity of sources available to Kabbalists living in the Italian peninsula, and to the complexity of ideas that resulted. My basic assumption about these figures (as about Kabbalists elsewhere) is that creativity involves not only originality, the ability to innovate ideas, but also the capacity to study a variety of literatures, mystical or not, to bring some aspects of them together in an organized manner that was relevant not only for the Kabbalist alone, but also for others. I am not concerned with a romantic picture of innovative genius; my interest lies with the Kabbalists' impulse for drawing from traditions and revelations to find structures of knowledge that could be integrated into their own tradition.<sup>5</sup> The three major figures on whom I focus below were thinkers and mystics who also organized prior traditions, expressed in quite articulated books and even comprehensive systems, into new forms. Abraham Abulafia, the founder of ecstatic Kabbalah, conjoined Maimonidean philosophy with a linguistic technique found in Ashkenazi Hasidism. This enterprise involved bringing together the mentalist tradition of Neo-Aristotelianism with a vision in which language and its manipulation were a central religious preoccupation. R. Menahem Recanati, in contrast, imposed a vision of the divine powers, the ten *sefirot*, as divine instruments upon kabbalistic material that was already considered authoritative, to produce a different theosophy in which those *sefirot* constituted the very essence of the divine. At the same time he emphasized the impact of human rituals, namely the biblical and rabbinic precepts, upon the supernal realm. Whereas Abulafia elaborated what I call an ecstatic-mystical model, namely a way of thought and a practice that sees the attainment of mystical experience as the quintessence of religion, Recanati developed a theosophical-theurgical model, one that sought to affect processes in the divine sphere through intensive performance of the commandments. This model also has experiential aspects, but they differ radically in purpose from Abulafia's. The third figure on whom I shall focus, Yohanan Alemanno, accepted the validity of the two earlier models but transformed them into what can be described as a talismanic, Hermetic, or astromagical model by emphasizing the importance of an astromagical understanding of religion.<sup>6</sup> The fact that these three models were most fully articulated by Abulafia, a Spanish Jew by extraction, by Recanati, an Italian Jew, and by Alemanno,

the descendant of an Ashkenazi family that had migrated to Italy, without entering into polemical discussions with other Jews in their immediate vicinity, reflects both the receptivity and the freedom these Kabbalists enjoyed in the various Italian territories. They were capable of reorganizing traditions in new ways because they operated in territories in which rabbinic authority was relatively weak and in which the earlier theological traditions had ceased to be relevant. The vast majority of the traditions described in the following chapters arrived in Italy from elsewhere. Thus, it is important not only to understand these Kabbalists' organization of knowledge but also to discern where and how the different themes, texts, and even whole literatures arrived in the Italian peninsula and sometimes also the individuals who were instrumental in bringing them.

Almost inevitably, perhaps, all the themes and literatures addressed here are connected to a phenomenon of uprootedness, to a movement of ideas, books, and persons from one place to another. As the Kabbalists moved to new centers of learning and encountered new forms of knowledge there, they transformed the kabbalistic knowledge they had brought with them, reshaping knowledge in those new places. This continuous flux is a phenomenon that has not been sufficiently addressed in the scholarship on Kabbalah, and it is in any case more evident in the case of the history of Kabbalah in Italy. This geographical flux dramatically affected the content of the kabbalistic literatures.

## 2. THE GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

My assumption here, as in other studies, is that a better understanding of these literatures necessitates analyses based on distinctions among schools, their specific terminologies, and their different ways of organizing knowledge. It is impossible to impose one grand narrative upon such a project. Rather, we must follow several histories of several kabbalistic models, and trace the tensions and interactions among them.

In earlier studies I have advocated focusing upon both sociological and geographical dimensions of kabbalistic literatures that have previously been ignored. For example, discerning the different layers in Jewish society that generated the various forms of Jewish mysticism, propagated them, and changed the direction of earlier forms of mystical literature would surely promote a better understanding of the kabbalistic literatures.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, tracing the dissemination of models and forms of knowledge in a variety of geographical areas clearly requires focusing upon specific centers of creativity and specific trajectories. In addition, a lore written by persons who were in many cases itinerant scholars must take into account the implications of an itinerant life and the impact of different encounters upon the content and structure of thought of those persons.

Geographical designations are already widely used in modern scholarship to characterize the different dimensions of Jewish mysticism. Thus, the Jewish pietistic figures who were active in the late twelfth and the thirteenth centuries in southern Germany's Rhineland are called Hasidei Ashkenaz. "Ashkenaz" is a geographical as well as a cultural category describing some segments of Judaism active in certain areas. Similarly, Provençal Kabbalah is distinguished from the Catalan or Castilian one. More recently the importance of Byzantium in the early Middle Ages for later developments in medieval Judaism has begun to be recognized. "Safedian Kabbalah" is a term used widely to describe the sixteenth-century outpouring of kabbalistic creativity in the small Galilean city. Hasidism in the eighteenth century is sometimes described as eastern European, and some segments of it are even described as Polish.

"Italian Kabbalah," however, is a rare term, in some cases absent even from descriptions of Kabbalists who flourished in the Italian regions for all or most of their lives. I shall use the term both in a geographical sense, for the kabbalistic oeuvres written in the Italian territories, and in a phenomenological sense, for a certain type of literature that differs from the writings found in other centers of Kabbalah.

Several of the Kabbalists whose thought is analyzed in the following chapters came from or identified with other geographical and cultural areas: Abraham Abulafia, for example, was born in Saragossa; Reuven Tzarfati's name points in the direction of France; Yohanan Alemanno, though born in Italy, was proud of the Ashkenazi origins of his family. Many other Jews, Kabbalists or not, came to Italy from Spain after the expulsion of 1492; and a variety of nonkabbalistic thinkers active in Italy came from elsewhere: R. Jacob Anatoli from Provence, R. Yehudah ibn Matka from Toledo, R. Zerachyah ben Sha'altiel Hen (Gracian) from Barcelona, R. Qalonymos ben Qalonymos ben Meir from Arles, and R. Shemaryah Ikriti of Negroponte and, later, Elijah del Medigo from Candia, in Crete. The last two returned to their homeland and died there. Does this continuous influx of persons, texts, and traditions subvert the legitimacy of locating the developments in a certain area to a specific geography or a historicist approach? In the case of Italy, the answer, I think, must be no. Both historical and geographical trajectories are essential to an understanding of how knowledge is transmitted. Perhaps also as important are the imaginary trajectories of knowledge derived from ancient, reliable sources and its emergence in new religious ambiances.

### 3. HEIKHALOT LITERATURE AND OTHER ESOTERICA IN ITALY

The intellectual history of Jewish communities in Europe during the early Middle Ages is obscure. No significant evidence of substantial literary creativity in Europe is extant before the tenth century. The active early centers of Jewish creativity were

in the East, either in the land of Israel or in the Babylonian rabbinical academies. What information we have about centers in Europe comes mostly from the *responsa* sent from masters in Baghdad in the tenth century to Jews asking for religious guidance. This evidence indicates that between the fourth and the ninth centuries Jewish learning expanded from the East to the West, establishing the basis for many later developments in legalist studies, commentaries, poetry, and liturgy. The first reliable evidence of Jewish mysticism in the Apennine peninsula comes from testimonies written in Italy in the ninth century concerning mythologems in the so-called *Heikhalot* literature, a body of diverse short literary texts dealing with the supernal palaces and the divine chariot, as well as with magical techniques to ascend to them, or to conjure angels. This literature, written mostly in Hebrew, probably in the land of Israel, stems from the early Middle Ages, but there is no scholarly consensus about the precise period when they were written.

There are several solid indications that *Heikhalot* literature was known in Rome, or in Italy in general, relatively early. Rav Hai Gaon, a tenth-century master active in Sura in Babylonia, was asked by some persons in Kairuan, Egypt, about the veracity of some books in which divine names were found and which were used for magical purposes. They claimed that some reliable “sages from the land of Israel and from the land of Edom” had seen miracles accomplished by use of the books.<sup>8</sup> In his reply, Hai Gaon, who was skeptical about popular understanding of the operations of the divine names, subtly disparaged the authority of those witnesses, writing that formulas found among “the persons from Rome and from the land of Israel” were also found in his milieu.<sup>9</sup> He thus reduced the “sages” described in the question to just “persons.” Unfortunately, we lack any information about the identity of those Italian scholars who relied on magic. The only report that may lend support to Hai Gaon’s reference comes from a description of Rabbi Todros of Rome, a member of the Qalonymos family, hugely influential among the Hasidei Ashkenaz, who “pronounced the [divine] name over the lion and bounded it and compelled it.”<sup>10</sup> This tiny scrap of information, whether based in historical fact or in legend, at least provides an indication that Jewish notables in Rome possessed esoteric knowledge, and that magic was part and parcel of it.

It seems safe to assume that important esoteric material, similar to or identical with what Rav Hai Gaon knew in the East, existed in Rome as early as the beginning of the tenth century. We have firmer evidence from the late eleventh or early twelfth century, when R. Nathan ben Yehi’el of Rome, a major figure in the Jewish life in the city, wrote a famous dictionary of terms found in the Talmud; in an entry there he refers to a detail occurring in the most famous story in Jewish mysticism, the rabbinic legend about the four sages who entered the supernal *Pardes*.<sup>11</sup> The

meaning of this legend is debated in scholarship, but for our purpose it suffices to characterize it as testimony that late-antique Jewish mystics believed it was possible to ascend concretely to another form of external reality and experience it. R. Nathan interprets the meaning of the difficult phrase 'Avnei shaysh tahor, "the stones of pure marble," as follows:

It is explained in *Heikhalot Rabbati* and *Heikhalot Zutarti* that they did deeds and prayed prayers in a pure manner and made magical use of the crown, and they gazed at the palaces and saw how the guards of angels stand and how there was palace after palace, and within the palace, as Rabbi 'Akiva said to them: "When you arrive at the stones of pure marble do not exclaim: 'Water Water!'" The meaning is that for someone who arrives by his gazing at that place it is as if he sees many waters, although there is no water at all, but a mere image appears to him, and if he exclaims: "Water!" he is rejected, since he is telling a lie. So it is explained in *Heikhalot Rabbati*.<sup>12</sup>

R. Nathan explains the nature of the ascent not as an actual detachment of the soul or the astral body from the corporeal body in order to penetrate the supernal worlds, but as a vision of an image, a view that he introduces by the word "meaning," namely interpretation. The source for this reading of the psychanodia as an illusion is mentioned immediately afterward, when R. Nathan adduces the view of Rav Hai Gaon to the effect that the ancient mystics "do not ascend on high, but that they see and envision in the chambers of their heart, like a man who sees and envisions something clearly with his eyes, and they hear and tell and speak by means of a seeing eye, by the divine spirit."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, R. Nathan is acquainted with this earliest introspective interpretation of Rav Hai, but his verbatim quotation from the *Heikhalot Rabbati* points also to an acquaintance with the *Heikhalot* literature itself. The Roman master's acceptance of the importance of inner vision rather than of the mystical ascent on high is congruent with Rav Hai's view that the glory of God was revealed to the prophets through the "understanding of the heart"—'ovanta' de-libba'. Far from expounding a mystical ascent of the soul, the Gaon offers instead a radical reinterpretation of ancient Jewish mysticism. In the vein of more rationalist approaches, he effaces the ecstatic or shamanic aspects of *Heikhalot* experiences in favor of psychological interpretation. Though I imagine that Rav Hai's and Rabbi Nathan's recastings of an earlier religious mentality were motivated by Rav Hai's adherence to rationalist thinking,<sup>14</sup> we cannot ignore the possibility that his psychological perception bears some affinities to much earlier views of the book titled *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, namely the Account of the Chariot,<sup>15</sup> which is part of the *Heikhalot* literature. Thus we learn that seminal texts of *Heikhalot* literature were indeed present and quoted in

Rome, together with a psychological interpretation emanating from Baghdad, rather soon after this interpretation was committed to writing there.

These two testimonies are corroborated independently by a third piece of evidence, found in *Megillat 'Ahima'atz*, the Scroll of 'Ahima'atz, a famous family chronicle composed in 1054 but surveying much earlier periods. There R. Shefatyah, a mid-ninth-century figure active in Oria, is described as possessing and continuously using the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* and as also dealing with secrets. R. Shefatyah bequeathed the book to his descendants, one of whom mishandled it, and they all were severely punished.<sup>16</sup> In highlighting both the special sanctity of this book and its extraordinary power, the account seems less interested in the mystical content of the esoterica than in its magical content; such a perspective pervades the *Megillat 'Ahima'atz*, which mentions contemplation of the secret of the *Merkavah* only once.<sup>17</sup> The question is whether we may identify this book with a short cosmological treatise from the *Heikhalot* literature that bears the name *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. The content of this small book scarcely invites such veneration. Much more interesting would be a proposal that identifies *Ma'aseh Merkavah* with the *Heikhalot Rabbati*, mentioned in the passage quoted above, which deals with acquiring the purity necessary to achieve a vision of the supernal palaces. And indeed, an important mid-thirteenth-century book written in Italy, R. Tzidqiah's *Shibbolei ha-Leqet*, attributes a quotation that is taken almost verbatim from *Heikhalot Rabbati* to *Ma'aseh Merkavah*.<sup>18</sup> What is interesting from our point of view is the fact that elsewhere in the same book *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is quoted again, but this time the short statement found there is not traceable in the extant *Heikhalot* literature.<sup>19</sup> This opens the possibility that in medieval Italy there was material belonging to this literature, unknown from the extant sources.

More legendary is the account, replete with magical motifs, describing the arrival of esoteric literature from Baghdad in Lucca via the famous intermediary Aharon or Abu Aharon.<sup>20</sup> According to a tradition of R. Eleazar of Worms, this figure transmitted the secrets of prayer to the representative of the Qalonymos family, R. Moshe. In an important and detailed genealogy describing how these secrets reached the Ashkenazi territories, he writes that his Ashkenazi predecessors

received the secret of the structure [*tiqqun*]<sup>21</sup> of prayers and the other secrets rabbi from rabbi, up to Abu Aharon, the son of R. Shmuel the Prince, who came from Babylonia because of a certain deed,<sup>22</sup> and he had to wander from place to place, and they arrived in the land of Lombardy, in a town named Lucca, and there he found our Rabbi Moshe, who composed the poem "The Awe of Your Wonders," and transmitted to him all his secrets. He is our



Rabbi Moshe, the son of our Rabbi Qalonymos, the son of our Rabbi Yehudah.<sup>23</sup> And he [Moshe] was the first to leave Lombardy together with his sons, Rabbi Qalonymos and our Rabbi Yequiti'el, and his relative Yiti'el, and other important persons, who were brought by Charles [the Great] with him from Lombardy and were settled in Mainz.<sup>24</sup>

From the perspective of the history of Jewish esotericism in Italy this testimony is interesting. According to it, the transmission of esoteric knowledge was limited to the Qalonymos family: Abu Aharon arrived from Baghdad and gave his secrets to a member of an important family in Lucca, but this person left Lombardy together with his family and settled in southern Germany. Italy was therefore the place where the most important esoteric tradition of the Hasidei Ashkenaz first arrived from the East, but this event did not, at least according to the passage above, leave any impression in the Apennine peninsula. Probably sometime around 917 the core of the esoteric traditions brought from Baghdad was moved to Mainz and launched a center of Jewish esoteric speculation in Germany. I cannot pursue here the historical problems involved in this testimony, but I assume, with Joseph Dan and Avraham Grossman, that, specific dates aside, the arrival and emigration of the esoteric traditions in and from Italy are in their general contour reliable.<sup>25</sup> There is also good reason to assume that the main esoteric topic presented in the passage above, the secrets of prayers, had earlier sources.<sup>26</sup> In any case, we have explicit, nonlegendary testimony from the eleventh century about the arrival of Italian Jews in Ashkenaz, bringing material related to esotericism: Rashi, the famous R. Shlomo Yitzhaqi, testifies that he heard that a certain R. Qalonymos ben Sabbatai from Rome went to Worms and transmitted both legalist teachings and interpretations of poems that were quoted by Ashkenazi authors.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to the Ashkenazi account, which mentions only Abu Aharon's arrival in Lucca, *Megillat 'Ahima'atz* states that Abu Aharon visited several Jewish centers in Italy before returning home to Baghdad.<sup>28</sup> No mention is made of the Qalonymos family. It seems that some form of competition over a privileged relationship to this eastern figure may be discerned in these different family testimonies.<sup>29</sup>

The literature produced by the southern Italian poets contains an angelology quite similar to that of the *Heikhalot* literature; Metatron, one of the most important angels in Jewish mysticism, plays an important role, as do other angels that populate the *Heikhalot* *imaginaire*.<sup>30</sup> The presence of a *Heikhalot* worldview among many Jewish masters in Italy establishes a common denominator between them and other Jews in France and Germany.<sup>31</sup> We may assume that this mythical framework, combining maps of an anthropomorphic supernal world and a belief



in the magical powers of the divine names, lingered in various circles in medieval Italian Jewry, to be reinforced by reverberations from Germany and France. In any case, it is important to underline the view of R. 'Ahima'atz, who described his forefathers, the sons of R. 'Amittai ben Shefatyah, as—inter alia—"understanding secrets" (*mevinei sodim*), "meditating by means of Binah" (*be-Binah metzappim*), "knowing mysteries" (*yode'i razim*), and "contemplating the divine chariot" (*mistak-kelim be-merkavah*).<sup>32</sup> Clearly, esoteric knowledge was a strong factor in ensuring the prerogatives of the mid-ninth-century Jewish elite in Italy. Whether these epithets also reflected actual praxis in contemplating the divine chariot is at least a possibility. If future studies corroborate the presence of such praxis, southern Italy will serve as the bridge between the groups in Israel that practiced those mystical techniques and the Hasidei Ashkenaz, who reported on persons who ascended on high in a manner reminiscent of the *Heikhalot* literature.<sup>33</sup> Especially interesting in this context is the testimony from a major Italian figure, the thirteenth-century R. Tzidqiah ben Abraham Rofe', attributed to his father, that R. Eleazar Qallir, a major poet active in Israel in the sixth century, ascended on high when he composed one of his liturgical pieces.<sup>34</sup>

In an important recent study Ephraim Kanarfogel claims that we may describe the Italian elite in the mid-thirteenth century as an extension of the Ashkenazi elite.<sup>35</sup> In this context, special attention should be given to the fact that that R. Benjamin ben Abraham 'Anav was called a prophet.<sup>36</sup> He was the brother of R. Tzidqiah, the author of *Shibbolei ha-Leqet*, mentioned above, and was perhaps the father of a student of Abraham Abulafia's in Rome.<sup>37</sup> For a better understanding of the emergence of the first main kabbalistic school that flowered in Italy, the ecstatic one, the prophetic elements in Ashkenazi territories are very important. Indeed, Ashkenazi and French Jewish literature contains earlier references to people called prophets,<sup>38</sup> and the fact that such an attribute was also used in Italy in the Middle Ages may help to explain both Abulafia's claim to this title in Italy and his criticism of the use of divine names for magical purposes.<sup>39</sup> In any case, it should be emphasized that all three of the Kabbalists active in Italy, whose thought we shall be surveying, repeatedly referred to the *Heikhalot* literature and held it in great esteem.<sup>40</sup> Their veneration, however, does not reflect the preservation of an Italian tradition from the ninth century, but instead an acquaintance with Ashkenazi esoteric treatises and manuscripts that had saved this literature from oblivion.

No book originally written in meridional Italy dealing exclusively with themes of *Heikhalot* literature is extant or even known to have existed. Instead, Italy served as a waystation for an esoteric literature originating in the East and reaching the West. Just as in matters of rabbinic literature Bari and Otranto were viewed as sources of the Torah by a major rabbinic master in the twelfth century,<sup>41</sup> even

though voluminous and original halakhic writings from these towns are unknown, so too in matters of esoterica Italy was viewed as a major source, even though little substantial material survives to corroborate such a claim. Recently Eli Yasif has proposed seeing southern Italy as a center from which Jewish folklore radiated to other European centers.<sup>42</sup> We thus witness indications of the existence in southern Italy of a major center of learning that suddenly collapsed, and whose most important contributions were absorbed in other centers where the lost grandeur was still remembered.

#### 4. R. SABBATAI DONNOLO

The earliest major contributions of Italian Jewry are diverse, ranging from the historically oriented *Book of Josiphon* and *Megillat 'Ahima'atz* to R. Nathan ben Yehi'el's widely reproduced talmudic lexicographical *Sefer ha-'Arukh*. None of these works is concerned with speculative issues for their own sake. But the tenth century also marked the production of several philosophical works by R. Sabbatai Donnolo, including a *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*, that reflect an acquaintance with Neoplatonism.<sup>43</sup> These works affected further developments in Jewish mysticism in Italy only obliquely and in a minor way, via the Hasidei Ashkenaz, with one possible exception. As Elliot R. Wolfson pointed out, in Donnolo's *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* there is a more complex understanding of the ten sefirot as reflecting some divine quality and as part of the divine power, *ha-koah ha-gadol*.<sup>44</sup> Following the view of David Neumark, Wolfson assumes that Donnolo may have had an impact on *Sefer ha-Bahir*, a book containing one of the first formulations of kabbalistic theosophies.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, I believe that Wolfson is correct in his analysis, though we may see Donnolo not as the source of this way of thought but as one more example of the development of theosophy found in some few Jewish sources written long before him. Donnolo's treatment of the sefirot not only demonstrates the survival and transmission of second-century material, which I have already analyzed elsewhere;<sup>46</sup> it also resembles a tradition found in a Samaritan book, in which God reveals a Glory, which is something like a second God, by means of ten ranks.<sup>47</sup>

In any case, while other authors in southern Italy were concerned with the *Heikhalot* literature but never, to my best knowledge, with *Sefer Yetzirah*, Donnolo was concerned with this book but not with the *Heikhalot* literature. However, the two types of earlier literature became the basis of Hasidei Ashkenaz, and to a certain extent also of Kabbalah.

#### 5. THE ARRIVAL OF JEWISH PHILOSOPHERS IN ITALY

Neither Donnolo's writings nor the other figures mentioned above left a significant imprint on speculative thinking in Italy. *Megillat 'Ahima'atz* survived in a single

copy. This situation reflects not the irrelevance of those thinkers but a strong decline in the literary activity of Italian Jewry in the second half of the twelfth century and the early thirteenth century. This hiatus created a discontinuity in speculative thought, and when a new burst of books emerged in the thirteenth century, they drew upon more sophisticated forms of thought that were in vogue in the new centers of learning in the Mediterranean: the Neo-Aristotelian theories. In Rome, Capua, and Sicily, the centers of learning in thirteenth-century Italy, there was no return to traditional Jewish ways of thought. The arrival of several philosophers from elsewhere created a totally different intellectual climate. So, for example, the arrival of R. Jacob ben Abba Mari Anatoli from Provence in the first part of the thirteenth century introduced a strong Maimonidean approach,<sup>48</sup> and the appearance of some commentaries on the *Guide of the Perplexed* in the second part of this century became an important intellectual factor.<sup>49</sup> Most of them were antagonistic to the Heikhalot literature and to approaches characteristic of Hasidei Ashkenaz. Anatoli derided those who believed in the manipulations of the divine names as related to *Ma'aseh Merkavah*.<sup>50</sup> This tradition dealing with divine names may reflect earlier views, for it is also documented in Hasidei Ashkenaz and later in ecstatic Kabbalah.<sup>51</sup>

Much more comprehensive was the amount of philosophical knowledge brought to Italy by R. Yehudah ibn Matka from Toledo. He wrote an extensive compendium of philosophy in Arabic—apparently while in Castile—and translated it into Hebrew under the name *Midrash Hokhmah*. However, unlike Anatoli, Ibn Matka was much closer to esoteric speculations; he even referred to some speculations related to the Hebrew alphabet by the term “Kabbalah.”<sup>52</sup> R. 'Ahituv of Palermo, in the second half of the thirteenth century, was also influenced by Maimonides. Even more extreme than Anatoli in his approach to philosophy and critical of Kabbalah and magic, including Heikhalot literature, was R. Zerahyah ben Sha'altiel Hen, who arrived in Rome from Barcelona.<sup>53</sup> More moderate and closer to some mystical issues were R. Hillel of Verona, who cited one of the earliest kabbalistic books, the *Book of Bahir*, and Nahmanides.<sup>54</sup>

However, no example of an articulated mystical literature can be detected in Italy until the 1270s. Although a variety of Christian mystical authors and orders flourished in Italy at the end of the twelfth century and during most of the thirteenth, Italian Jews were scarcely aware of, and in any case not responsive to, the mystical renaissance represented by St. Francis of Assisi or St. Bonaventura. Neither can we find an explicit reference to the Joachimite spiritual movement, inspired by the Calabrian monk Joachim da Fiore, in thirteenth-century Jewish literature in Italy. The only possible exception is a translation of sermons dealing with metaphysics by Alexander the Minorite; but this was a Scholastic not a

mystical text.<sup>55</sup> We may, of course, speculate about the possibility of one influence or another coming from those religious movements, but the discrepancy between the philosophical openness and receptivity of the Jews, as we shall see below, and their total silence on the radical developments in Christian mysticism in this period renders such a possibility doubtful. In any case, I find it difficult to detect in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century kabbalistic literatures in Italy a Christian influence similar to what is plausibly documented in the case of Catalan Kabbalah.<sup>56</sup>

On the other hand, several Jewish authors in Italy demonstrated receptiveness to contemporary philosophical developments in the peninsula. In the thirteenth century R. Jacob Anatoli and R. Moshe of Salerno cooperated with Christian colleagues in their philosophical enterprise, and R. Hillel of Verona was well acquainted with Scholasticism and translated several works from Latin.<sup>57</sup> In the fourteenth century the Jewish philosophers R. Yehudah Romano, R. Immanuel of Rome, Qalonymos ben Qalonymos in Rome, and Shemaryah of Negroponte were active in translating works into Hebrew and Latin from Arabic and Latin, although most of their production centered on commentaries on philosophical books. Whereas in matters of philosophy the affinities between Jews and Christians are visible, and collaboration between them is historically well documented, there are no indications in this period of similar exchanges between mystics from the two traditions. The Jewish philosopher R. Yehudah Romano did translate a short discussion on prayer stemming from Pseudo-Dionysius's *The Divine Names*, as quoted in a book by Aegidius Romanus.<sup>58</sup> However, as I have shown elsewhere, this Neoplatonic understanding of prayer as causing the elevation of the soul, but totally rejecting the possibility of changing the will of God by praying, was not adopted by Jewish Kabbalists—with the exception of one philosophically oriented one<sup>59</sup>—but instead was used by Rabbi Leone da Modena in early seventeenth-century Venice to criticize kabbalistic theurgical understandings of prayer.<sup>60</sup> Let me emphasize: None of the writings of the medieval Italian mystics was translated into Hebrew or even quoted by Kabbalists, whereas several of the Scholastic treatises were translated, studied, and in some cases quoted by Italian Jews. The latter even translated some specimens of Dante's *Divine Comedy* into Hebrew,<sup>61</sup> and Immanuel of Rome imitated his chef-d'oeuvre.<sup>62</sup>

The arrival of new waves of philosophical speculation is certainly not a novel phenomenon in the history of European Jewry. However, in other countries this arrival created a stir or, in some cases, sharp polemics that shaped the cultural history of the Jews living there. This was certainly the case of Spain and Provence, but also of Germany and France.<sup>63</sup> A polemical literature consisting of epistles and bans, sometimes quite extreme in their formulations, is evident in those countries

in the thirteenth century; it affected Italy much less. The traditional Jewish elite remained weakened or marginal in the Italian peninsula and had nothing to say about the impact of the new speculations. The fact that Anatoli took refuge in Italy because of the resistance his sermons aroused in Provence is emblematic of the situation. Although this general openness to the ideas of newcomers occasionally led to frictions and critiques, especially in the case of R. Zerahyah Hen, receptiveness rather than antagonism characterized the Italian intellectual scene. Typical of this openness is Immanuel of Rome's enthusiastic description, in his *Mahabbarot ha-Hesheq*, of the arrival of many manuscripts from Toledo and the eagerness of the Italians to consume them.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, despite the early beginnings of Italian Jewish literature in the Middle Ages as religiously close to traditional forms of Jewish mystical and magical themes such as are found in the *Heikhalot* treatises, in the thirteenth century Jewish speculative literatures in the peninsula went in a quite different direction, reflecting the importation of new modes of thought. Whereas the traditions that emerged first in Italy had a lasting significant impact elsewhere in Europe, contributing to new elaborations, in Italy after the ninth century those views were muted. Ruptures rather than continuities characterize the history of speculative thought in the peninsula before the mid-thirteenth century, and afterward this phenomenon continued, with the abrupt arrivals and dispersals to other centers of both Jewish philosophy and Kabbalah.<sup>65</sup> The facts that the Maimonidean rationalist tradition was independent of the Italian culture and that the sources of the Ashkenazi esoterica had been lost in the peninsula explain why someone like Abulafia, who offered a synthesis between them, remained indifferent to contemporary forms of Christian mysticism. The kabbalistic traditions upon which Recanati elaborated were mostly imported directly from Catalan and Castilian circles of Kabbalists. The case of Yohanan Alemanno is more complex: as we shall see, he capitalized on previous Italian Kabbalists but also drew upon developments in some astromagical circles active in fourteenth-century Castile.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, the various forms of Italian Kabbalah were the result of massive direct importations of esoteric knowledge from Spain and Provence, although they may have had much earlier roots in the Near East. This swift move from the centers where this esoteric knowledge was committed to writing, a phenomenon I would like to call "uprooted traditions," sometimes involved a shift from esotericism to exotericism and, related to this shift, sometimes also a trend toward comparisons between Kabbalah and various philosophies. The latter trend is visible in the Quattrocento in Tuscany.

## 6. IMAGINARY TRAJECTORIES: KABBALAH AS PYTHAGOREAN PHILOSOPHY

Southern Italy in the Middle Ages was unquestionably one of the most multicultural places in Europe. Much earlier, however, it hosted another important intellectual event that had repercussions for the development of religion in Europe in general and, in a much more modest way, the development of Jewish mysticism: the emergence of the Pythagorean school. The ideas of Pythagoras and his followers never disappeared from the cultural horizon of Europe during the Middle Ages, especially because of the teaching of various forms of Middle and Neoplatonism,<sup>67</sup> and in some cases this persisting trend had an impact on Kabbalah.<sup>68</sup> During the Renaissance, however, Pythagoreanism enjoyed a dramatic resurgence as a result of some translations by Marsilio Ficino.

In one of the most widespread descriptions of Kabbalah in the Renaissance, Johann Reuchlin claims that he is restoring the ancient Pythagorean philosophy, lost in southern Italy but surviving in one way or another in Kabbalah. In dedicating his *De Arte Cabalistica* to Pope Leo X, he writes:

For Italy's part, Marsilio Ficino has published Plato, Jacob Faber of Étaples has brought out Aristotle for France. I shall complete the pattern, and for Germany I, Capnion [Reuchlin], shall bring out the reborn Pythagoras with your name at its head. His philosophy, however, I have been able to glean only from the Hebrew Kabbalah, since it derives its origin from the teachers of Kabbalah, and then was lost to our ancestors, disappearing from southern Italy into the kabbalistic writings. For this reason, it was almost all destined for destruction, and I have therefore written of the symbolic philosophy of the art of Kabbalah<sup>69</sup> so as to make Pythagorean doctrine better known to scholars.<sup>70</sup>

This is an interesting case of *prisca theologia*, a concept of concordance among various types of ancient knowledge that will concern us more in chapter 13. What is striking from our point of view is that Pythagoras is described as having drawn his philosophy from the Jews—not a new idea, to be sure, but here Kabbalah is invoked explicitly. In doing so Reuchlin resembles Giovanni Pico della Mirandola:

That divine philosophy of Pythagoras, which they call Magic, belongs to a great extent to the Mosaic tradition; since Pythagoras had managed to reach the Jews and their doctrine in Egypt, and knowledge of many of their sacred mysteries.... Zoroaster, the son of Oromasius, in practicing magic, took that to be the cult of God and the study of divinity; while engaged in this in

Persia he most successfully investigated every virtue and power of nature, in order to know those sacred and sublime secrets of the divine intellect; which subject many people called theurgy, other Cabala or magic.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, already Pico associated Kabbalah and Pythagoras. But whereas the Florentine thinker emphasizes here the performative aspect of Kabbalah, by comparing it to magic and theurgy, Reuchlin is concerned more with the speculative aspects of Kabbalah, its philosophical and symbolic cargos, although this point is also hinted at in Pico's passage. In other cases, too, Pico associates Pythagorean views with Kabbalah.<sup>72</sup>

Another comparison of an important kabbalistic topic, metempsychosis, to Pythagoreanism is found in a Jewish Kabbalist writing in the late Quattrocento, R. Elijah Hayyim ben Benjamin of Genazzano:

I have also found that similar views were held by Numenius the Pythagorean<sup>73</sup> and by Guadlando.<sup>74</sup> Numenius, out of his love of Moses' Torah, thought that Moses' soul had been reincarnated in his own body.<sup>75</sup> . . . And as regards this statement,<sup>76</sup> according to which the Kabbalists maintained that human souls are reincarnated in animal bodies, I answer that this view is to be found only in the works of later Kabbalists,<sup>77</sup> and I did not find any support for this view in our Sages' statements. However, I have found that this is the opinion of a certain ancient philosopher, i.e., Pythagoras and his sect.<sup>78</sup>

What seems to me fascinating is that a Kabbalist openly admits that a major kabbalistic view, which he accepts and defends, is not found in the classical books of rabbinic Judaism, but is sustained by an ancient and pagan thinker. R. Elijah Hayyim of Genazzano follows Recanati when he states that this view is the patrimony not of the early Kabbalists but of the later ones, although what exactly this distinction means for him is far from clear. Even more exceptional in any kabbalistic writing is the assumption, which he attributes to Numenius, that Moses' soul transmigrated and entered the body of a pagan, Plato, however intelligent he may have been.

Were the early Kabbalists mentioned by Reuchlin considered to be from southern Italy, like the Pythagorean thinkers? This is a difficult question to answer. However, we should remember that a person from southern Italy, more precisely Sicily, was more instrumental than any other figure in advancing the knowledge of Kabbalah in Florentine Christian circles: Pico's teacher, known by a rather pompous series of names, which include Flavius, Gullielmus, Ramundus, Mithridates, and Moncada. Flavius Mithridates, as he is most commonly known, was the son of



a certain Nissim Abu al-Faraj from Girgenti, a Jew of Syrian extraction, and apparently a Kabbalist himself.<sup>79</sup> He converted from Judaism in 1481, made a career as a humanist, and became a figure in the Christian ecclesiastical hierarchy. Flavius possessed an outstanding knowledge in many languages and was well acquainted with a variety of domains in Jewish thought, especially Kabbalah;<sup>80</sup> he even mentions an event in Palermo related to Abulafia's performing miracles there that may reflect an oral local tradition.<sup>81</sup>

Mithridates is known as the translator of many kabbalistic and Hasidei Ashkenaz books into Latin.<sup>82</sup> In 1485 he translated a book attributed to Pythagoras, *Aurea Dicta*, from Greek into Latin.<sup>83</sup> A few years earlier, in 1481, in a sermon delivered in Rome in the presence of the pope, he preached about the agreements among different ancient religions, using a passage from Eusebius of Caesarea's *Praeparatio Evangelica* as a starting point:

And from the Pythagorean philosopher himself, I mean Numenius, I will quote as follows from his first book, *On the Good*:<sup>84</sup> "But when one has spoken upon this point, and sealed it by the testimonies of Plato, it will be necessary to go back and connect it with the precepts of Pythagoras, and to appeal to the nations of good repute, bringing forward their rites and doctrines, and their institutions which are formed in agreement with those of Plato, all that the Brachmans, and Jews, and Magi, and Egyptians arranged."<sup>85</sup>

Although he was one of the greatest experts in matters of Kabbalah in the fifteenth century, Mithridates does not present Pythagoras here as having extracted his knowledge from Kabbalah; instead he sees the Jews as part of a more general religious agreement. However, what he did not say in 1481, before he began the translation projects that involved both Pythagoras and Kabbalah, became known among Jewish and Christian Kabbalists at the end of the 1480s, as seen above: Pythagoras was inspired by Kabbalists.

Mithridates was well acquainted with and contributed to some developments in Italian Kabbalah and Italian Jewish culture in general. He translated into Latin not only some of the most important and difficult kabbalistic books of Abraham Abulafia and Menahem Recanati and philosophical books and commentaries by R. Yehudah Romano and Gersonides, but also the Qur'an and a Pythagorean book, in which he quoted a passage from St. Bonaventura.<sup>86</sup> Through these diverse efforts he brought together mystical materials from a variety of sources and genres and presented a strongly Christianized version of Kabbalah, which immediately caught the attention of the genial and sometimes gullible Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who accepted at face value what Wirszubski called the "mock mysteries" of his teacher.<sup>87</sup> Unquestionably, Flavius contributed greatly



to the interest in kabbalistic literature in Florentine circles at the end of the Quattrocento, and to the specific ways in which it was understood there.

In this respect, for the period we are surveying, the history of Jewish esotericism in Italy came full circle, replicating its beginnings: a Jew whose father had arrived from the East studied Kabbalah in Sicily, brought his vast knowledge of it to Rome and Florence, and then to Cologne in Germany—a trajectory reminiscent of the esoteric traditions of Abu Aharon of Baghdad, who in the ninth century brought eastern esoteric traditions to Italy, whence they traveled to other centers of European Jewish learning. This time, however, the dissemination of knowledge extended well beyond elite Jewish circles and into Christian elites, via the claim that Kabbalah was an ancient philosophy that Pythagoras had learned from the Jews. This move from particularism toward universalism represents a development that has some sources in Italian Kabbalah, especially in Abraham Abulafia, and in Italian Kabbalists who decoded the esotericism that was dominant in some forms of Spanish Kabbalah, as, for example, Recanati, Reuven Tzarfati, and Alemanno did.<sup>88</sup> Reuchlin dedicated to Pope Leo X his intellectual enterprise of rescuing Pythagoras's allegedly lost philosophy by resorting to Kabbalah, a fact that evinces the shift in the status of Jewish Kabbalah in Italy, from an imported body of writings cultivated by a few Jews in the thirteenth century, to an esoteric lore that was both philosophical and magical and imagined to conceal Christian tenets.

To the major stages of this and other metamorphoses of Kabbalah in Italy, the following chapters are dedicated. I shall try, however, not to describe the medieval and Quattrocento Jewish Kabbalists in a teleological manner, as a form of *praeparatio evangelica* for its future “peak” of being absorbed into Renaissance Christian thought. Such a presentation would involve the distortions that inevitably accompany retrospective projections of later important developments upon earlier events. In my opinion, the Renaissance Christian chapter in the history of Kabbalah was no more inevitable a development than any other chapter in the history of Jewish mysticism. However, the fact remains that different schools and models of Kabbalah, from Italy and elsewhere, did converge in late Quattrocento Florence, especially in the writings of Yohanan Alemanno. These schools and models are important both in themselves and as aids to a better understanding of views expressed by Mithridates and Pico and their followers, as part of a Florentine intellectual renaissance.

The diversity that characterizes kabbalistic literature makes a monolithic definition of Kabbalah neither possible nor plausible. Every school has its own distinctive *imaginaire*, deserving serious and undogmatic exploration, and the Jewish Kabbalists between 1280 and 1510 are no exception.

# I

## KABBALAH

### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

#### 1. BETWEEN PARTICULARISM AND UNIVERSALISM

One of the most interesting features of Jewish culture is the continuous oscillation between two attitudes toward the majority cultures in which they exist: the particularist and the universalist. In their efforts to cultivate and preserve their own rituals and traditions, individual Jewish communities have at times flourished, suffered, and eventually perished in cultural ambiances very different from those of the centers where these particularist attitudes were initially articulated. Particularism is marked by adherence to Jewish rituals and the Hebrew language, universalism by the adoption of cultural attitudes and practices prevailing in the larger, non-Jewish cultures in which Jews have lived.

These two tendencies produced two corresponding approaches among historians of Judaism: nineteenth-century historians, who for the most part lived and worked in European diasporas, particularly in Germany, at a time when acculturation to the Christian Enlightenment culture was still regarded as the cultural ideal, emphasized universalist and integrative factors. In the twentieth century, especially after the Holocaust, particularism acquired a positive moral valence and universalism a negative one. Thus, for example, the leading nineteenth-century historian Heinrich Graetz regarded Kabbalah as the *bête noire* of the Jewish Middle Ages but portrayed Maimonides as the paragon of Jewish culture.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the major Israeli historian Yitzhak Baer viewed Jewish medieval philosophy as a major factor in the conversion to Christianity of Jews in Spain. This perspective reflects the strong influence of Gershom Scholem's axiology, which emphasized the importance of Kabbalah as a particularist lore.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the relatively recent positive attitude toward Kabbalah depends to a very great extent on the pivotal change in the view of the nature and role of Jewish mysticism produced by Scholem's magisterial studies. His positive and sympathetic approach to this lore opened the way to regarding mysticism as an active and integral factor in shaping Jewish history. The most powerful influence was Scholem's *chef-d'oeuvre Sabbatai Sevi*. This book deals in detail not only with a major messianic figure but also with the emergence of a massive popular messianic movement in Judaism. His hypothesis concerning the emergence of Sabbateanism reflects a particularist vision of Kabbalah, in which the wide diffusion of kabbalistic messianism via Lurianism served as the indispensable background for the emergence of the collective messianic phenomenon known as Sabbateanism, affecting the beliefs and lives of a wide variety of Jews, both common folk and learned rabbis, living in different geographical and cultural centers.<sup>3</sup>

This more particularist approach to later developments of Kabbalah differs from Scholem's portrayal of the emergence of early Kabbalah, in which Neoplatonism and Gnosticism produced a synthesis that he called Jewish Gnosticism—a lore generated by the confluence of two spiritual trends that were different from, and eventually antagonistic to, rabbinic Judaism.<sup>4</sup> Thus according to Scholem's account, Kabbalah over time became increasingly internalized and particularist.

My own view of Kabbalah assumes a different trajectory, from the particularist to the universalist. In my opinion, the sources of nascent Kabbalah are to be sought largely, though not exclusively, in the various Jewish traditions.<sup>5</sup> This lore, in all its various forms, gradually became increasingly open to the cultural ambiances that hosted the various centers of Kabbalah. Such is the case of Zoharic Kabbalah, which absorbed more Christian elements than the earlier theosophical Kabbalah;<sup>6</sup> of ecstatic Kabbalah, which was initially strongly influenced by

Neo-Aristotelianism and in its second phase absorbed Neoplatonic and Sufi elements;<sup>7</sup> and of the Kabbalah in Italy, which had strong philosophical components from the end of the fifteenth century until the first third of the seventeenth century.<sup>8</sup> Even the late-sixteenth-century Lurianic Kabbalah, based on the thought of the famous Rabbi Isaac Luria in Safed, which originally emerged from a particularist perspective, was already interpreted in strongly Renaissance philosophical terms only one generation after its inception.<sup>9</sup> In my opinion, both Sabbateanism and, later, Hasidism may also be better understood in terms of a stronger interaction with the larger non-Jewish cultures around them.<sup>10</sup> This is certainly the case of the history of Kabbalah in Italy.

## 2. KABBALAH: A MONOLITHIC OR POLYVALENT PHENOMENON?

In contrast to earlier views of Kabbalah as a somewhat monolithic phenomenon, we shall see that a wide variety of spiritual concerns preoccupied Kabbalists, both Jewish and Christian, in various centers of learning in Italy. As in the case of more comprehensive forms of thought and expression, such as philosophy and poetry, where scholarly understanding of the huge variety of individual phenomena is organized by the concept of schools, so too here, in the domain of Kabbalah, we can distinguish among schools on the basis of their particular features.<sup>11</sup>

The delineation of kabbalistic literature by schools is not new; in fact two of the earliest scholars of Kabbalah, Meier Landauer and Adolph Jellinek, undertook such efforts.<sup>12</sup> Landauer, however, who wrote in the 1840s and died before his studies were published, was aware of only some of the most important aspects of Spanish Kabbalah and did not address the dissemination of this lore in Italy and Byzantium. Jellinek, who also edited Landauer's studies, noted the importance of Byzantium as a place where an important kabbalistic book had been written, but he did not explore the development of Kabbalah in Italy.<sup>13</sup> Thanks to great advances in the study of Kabbalah during the twentieth century, launched especially by the late Gershom Scholem and his school, we are in a much better position to understand the proliferation of kabbalistic phenomena. Even so, Scholem's preliminary studies on the history of Kabbalah outside Spain did not significantly enlarge awareness of creative movements in Germany, Italy, Byzantium, North Africa, and Israel.

## 3. DEFINING KABBALAH

Before tracing the historical and conceptual developments of kabbalistic traditions in Italy, we must undertake a more difficult task: an attempt to define the meaning of the term *Kabbalah* as a spiritual rather than a historical phenomenon. This undertaking requires addressing first the more formal aspects of this lore

and then its conceptual aspects, that is, its content. The term *Kabbalah* literally means “that which has been received.” In the early occurrences of the term, the content of the received material had nothing to do with mysticism. However, besides this more general use, the term designates a long series of mystical phenomena that recur first in Judaism and later in Christianity. In a more extended form, as used by traditional Jews, *Kabbalah* is an esoteric tradition of hoary antiquity transmitted through the centuries. Believed to have originated either in the Sinaitic revelation or with such later masters as the second-century Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Shimeon bar Yohai, this type of Jewish lore was regarded as both the most sublime and eventually also the most dangerous form of study found in Judaism. A great variety of literary corpora are included under this umbrella, stemming from different centuries and consisting of various types of mystical thought.

However, the use of the term *Kabbalah* as a designation for a mystical or esoteric tradition is relatively late. One would be hard put to find it before the eleventh century, and even during the twelfth century this meaning was exceptional. The Jewish masters who used it still subscribed to its more widespread meaning—namely, as referring to the reception of any tradition, and particularly to Jewish law, *Halakhah*. For those approaching Jewish mystical literature, the inevitable question is whether the emergence of the mystical-esoteric meaning of the term *Kabbalah* and its dissemination from the beginning of the thirteenth century on reflect a substantial change in the mystical traditions cultivated by Jews. Does the absence of an esoteric meaning of this term in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages imply something about the perception of Jewish mystical forms of thought during those periods, just as the emergence of this meaning in the High Middle Ages reflects a new awareness of emerging Jewish mystical concepts? Modern scholarship on *Kabbalah* does in fact emphasize that a new phase in Jewish mysticism opened at the end of the twelfth century, which alone should be designated as *Kabbalah*, as distinct from earlier forms of Jewish mysticism. This phase was characterized by a constantly growing mystical literature, reflecting relatively consistent spiritual concerns and terminology, and a sense of continuity that often reflected a Scholastic attitude to this discipline. This consistency derived not only from the study of a specific type of literature, but also from the perceived continuity of masters and disciples. According to some accounts, *Kabbalah* was at times transmitted orally from one generation to another. This claim recurs in the writings of contemporaries of the early *Kabbalists*, the so-called *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, the pietists of the Rhineland. They, too, claimed to possess an ancient tradition concerning the secrets of the liturgical texts, and in their writings the use of the term *Kabbalah* points to an esoteric tradition.<sup>14</sup>

Thus certain early-thirteenth-century texts from Western Europe emphasize the status of Jewish mystical literatures, both in the form of Kabbalah and in that of Ashkenazi Hasidism, as a received lore, transmitted from one generation to another. For our purposes it is important to know that one of the centers in which the earlier mystical and magical traditions had arrived in Europe was Italy, either in the north, Lucca, or in the south, Bari.<sup>15</sup>

But beyond this common feature, these two bodies of literature share another trait. Both are exegetical literatures, although the texts interpreted are not always the same. The first Kabbalists, like the medieval German Hasidim, were attracted by the seminal and enigmatic *Sefer Yetzirah*, by the *Heikhalot* literature, and by various liturgical topics. While some Kabbalists were deeply concerned with the secrets of the commandments and the hidden meaning of the legendary parts of the Talmud, these topics were less prominent among Hasidei Ashkenaz.<sup>16</sup> To be sure, the exegetical nature of these mystical texts is paralleled in other forms of Jewish medieval writing, such as Jewish philosophy. However, unlike these genres, the texts constituting Kabbalah and the esoteric literature of Hasidei Ashkenaz and those of R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo of Erfurt, different from the two other corpora, often mix the exegetical mode with the traditional. As against these special blends, the earlier major mystical literary phenomena known as the *Heikhalot* literature and *Sefer Yetzirah* stand as a special category. The earlier texts are not concerned with the secrets of the canonical texts, nor are their secrets described as being received from a human teacher as part of a longer tradition. The dominant feature of the *Heikhalot* texts is personal epiphanies experienced by the great masters; long-term transmission is marginal. In contrast, comprehensive secrets and exegesis are formal traits of medieval Jewish mystical literature.

Conceptually, Kabbalah is far from a unified system even from its inception in written short fragments in the twelfth century.<sup>17</sup> The only common denominator of all the major forms of Kabbalah is the emphasis on received tradition. A deep difference exists between two main modalities in kabbalistic religiosity: theosophical-theurgical, and prophetic or ecstatic Kabbalah. Those schools developed during the thirteenth century in different places, aiming at different religious achievements. The former was concerned much more with the impact on the divinity—what I call theurgy—which was conceived not as a simple unified entity but as a complex and dynamic system—what I call theosophy. The latter was much more concerned with attaining spiritual experiences, designated as prophetic and redemptive for the Kabbalist. This seminal distinction was already proposed by Abraham Abulafia, a Kabbalist in the thirteenth century, and has been adopted and elaborated in modern scholarship. Notwithstanding the conceptual divergences between the two schools, an issue that will be discussed in considerable

detail in subsequent chapters, both claim to be Kabbalah, inasmuch as they draw their views from ancient texts and traditions.

In addition to the claim to the authority of tradition, from time to time there appears the claim, somewhat similar to the one made in Christian mysticism, that kabbalistic topics were revealed to them in the present. According to accounts written long after he died, one of the first Kabbalists, R. Abraham ben David of Posquières, was visited by the prophet Elijah, who was the source of his esoteric knowledge. However, such claims are rare during the first two centuries of the theosophical-theurgical schools of Kabbalah. An exception is the very brief testimony of Rabbi Asher ben David, a Provençal Kabbalist, that he received in a dream the solution to a quandary regarding the meaning of the divine name.<sup>18</sup>

Claims of paranormal experiences are much more widespread and explicit in ecstatic Kabbalah. Indeed, in a rich and seminal passage in his *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, or Book of Desire, the founder of this school, Abraham Abulafia, lists three complementary ways of acquiring Kabbalah:

So that you may understand my intention regarding [the meaning of] Qolot [voices] easily [be-qalut], I shall hand to you the known Qabbalat [kabbalistic traditions], some of them received by me from mouth to mouth among the sages of [our] generation;<sup>19</sup> others received from the books named *Sifrei Qabbalah*, composed by the ancient sages, the Kabbalists, blessed be their memory, concerning the wondrous topics;<sup>20</sup> and others bestowed on me by God, blessed be He, which came to me from ThY<sup>21</sup> in the form of a heavenly voice [Bat Qol], these being the higher ['Elyonot] Qabbalat.<sup>22</sup>

Written in Sicily in 1289, this passage is perhaps the first statement by a Kabbalist that some received traditions are of a higher order than others, received orally or derived from written documents. It seems to me that the three different channels may be arranged hierarchically, with the oral traditions, referred to as commonly “known,” conceived of as the lowest. Although Abulafia seems to have been well aware of the importance of the oral traditions in the circle of Nahmanides’ students, he regarded kabbalistic documents as a higher source and direct revelation as the highest. In this assessment we may assume that Abulafia’s powerful personality came to the fore in the implication that his own revelations, rather than the known mystical traditions, were higher. This perspective apparently reflects a confrontation with R. Shlomo ben Abraham ibn Adret, representative of the Catalan theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, which he regarded as inferior to his own ecstatic Kabbalah.<sup>23</sup> The superiority of the revealed tradition, which reaches the mystic in a distinct form, Bat Qol, reflects Abulafia’s vision of

his Kabbalah as conducive to the hearing of speech, *Dibbur*. Abulafia believes that his form of Kabbalah can be obtained more easily, in Hebrew *be-qalut*, a term that contains the same consonants as *Qabbalat* and *Bat Qol*.

#### 4. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF KABBALAH

Different as the traditional and revelatory aspects of Kabbalah may be, all of them convey authoritative status upon the content of the various esoteric trends conceived as Kabbalah. This legitimization was essential to allow for a greater role or more sublime conception of the content.

But important as the formal traits of Kabbalah may be in its emergence as an established discipline, complete with descriptions of the channels of its reception and transmission, its conceptual and experiential content is even more interesting. What common features underlie the conceptual structure of the various kabbalistic systems? What characterizes all of them as mystical, spiritual, or religious phenomena? What are the topics transmitted orally, studied from books, or received during a revelatory experience? Let me suggest the main concerns of the Kabbalists as mystics and thinkers:

- [a] The Kabbalists, like other Jewish mystics before them, strove to live an intensive religious life and to encourage others to do so.<sup>24</sup> Although the methods of enhancing religious awareness differed among the various kabbalistic schools—the combining of letters in ecstatic Kabbalah, the visualization of colors (mostly during prayer) in the school of R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi and R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid, various techniques of mystical intentions when performing the commandments in yet other schools—all Kabbalists sought to deroutinize ordinary religious life by challenging or actively disrupting automatized performance. By emphasizing the importance of mental concentration and intention directed to supernal entities, including visualization exercises, they attenuated routinized performance of the commandments, and ordinary forms of behavior in general.
- [b] This intensification implies a reorganization of spiritual life around a few religious ideals, which have strong psychological implications. The need of the Kabbalist to concentrate his thought, to channel his energy, to visualize colors, to master the complex theosophical maps during the performance of the rituals led to a much greater emphasis upon psychological processes than did the practices familiar in rabbinical tradition or even in the *Heikhalot* literature. In other words, intensification brought with it greater interiorization of the religious life. This



moment is especially important for a type of religiosity that advocates the importance of the performance of external deeds.

- [c] The processes of intensification and interiorization were coupled with more abstract studies, particularly regarding complex theosophical structures, but often in matters of Halakhah and occasionally in matters of philosophy as well. These studies, often preliminary to the more intensive kabbalistic practices, were intended in part to chart the main spiritual areas in which the mystics performed their inner exercises. In other words, in addition to the intensity of the spiritual and emotional faculties, the Kabbalists also saw mastery of other forms of religious knowledge and ethical virtuosity as prerequisites for their mystical life.
- [d] All these requirements could be fulfilled only by the very few. In addition to the rather esoteric nature of most forms of Kabbalah, it was also a very elitist discipline. In some kabbalistic schools, initiation rites evidently played a role. Although Kabbalah was popularized beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, influencing the way of life of many Jews outside the elite, an intensive kabbalistic life remained the prerogative of the few.

Though shared by most of the Kabbalists, the processes described above can be understood as occurring along two major lines: one focusing its concerns around normative practices, the other around exceptional ones. In the former case, the rabbinic way of life and its mystical implications stood at the center of the Kabbalist's concerns. Apparently for this reason, a more complex theosophy emerged, corresponding to the detailed system of the commandments. The elaborate correspondences between human behavior and the inner structure of the divine are a distinct feature of normative Kabbalah. The commandments became a vehicle for regulating the processes occurring on high. They were especially effective when performed with the proper intention, which included cognitive engagement: knowledge of the correspondences and the spiritual centering of one's energy on the ritual act and its influence.

On the other hand, ecstatic or prophetic Kabbalah may be considered as one of the most important examples of exceptionalist Kabbalah, a form of mystical technique intended to affect the inner human faculties. It is exceptionalist in that its major vehicle is not the Jewish *nomos*, but technical exercises unrelated to halakhic ritual as understood in the rabbinic texts. At least in the writings of the founder of this school, Abraham Abulafia, the theosophical concept of the divinity does not inform the technique—that is, no theory of ritualistic correspondences regulates the mystical activity of the Kabbalist.

These two major directions in medieval Kabbalah likewise differed in matters of theology: Maimonides was the main source of Abulafia's theology, while the theosophical Kabbalists proposed a wide variety of theosophies that posited dynamic processes within the divine world that could be influenced by performance of the commandments. Ecstatic Kabbalah involved the cultivation of a more anthropocentric ideal, such as mystical union, combined with the more individualistic attitude and errant way of life that characterized the ecstatic Kabbalists. While the theosophical Kabbalists explained the commandments as theurgical tools, the ecstasies were much more concerned with devices to change their consciousness so as to prepare it for union with the divine. Although God was conceived as the main object of the halakhic course of study, the human psyche was the object of a process of purification attained by combinations of letters, breathing exercises, mental concentration, and cultivation of states of equanimity.

## 5. THE BEGINNINGS

Kabbalah surfaced at the end of the twelfth century. The first documents to include clear-cut theosophic doctrines were written in the Languedoc region of southern France, an area in which intensive study and creation in the domain of Jewish legalist tradition were then reaching their peak; indeed, the first kabbalistic theosophies are conspicuously related to details of the Jewish liturgy. However, important as these first documents may be in the attempt to reconstruct this decisive stage in the history of Kabbalah, they constitute a marginal literary phenomenon when compared with the writings composed in other fields of Jewish speculation. Legalist writings, original philosophical treatises, and translations of philosophical writings from Arabic are far more voluminous and influential than the few quires of kabbalistic treatments that emerged from Languedoc. Moreover, sometime around 1240 Kabbalah seems to have disappeared as a meaningful phenomenon in southern France.

Although the first phase of the history of Kabbalah as a written literature in southern France was decisive for subsequent developments, it was Spain that hosted the more vital phase of medieval Kabbalah. From the first decades of the thirteenth century, kabbalistic teachings were cultivated in Catalonia, in the two towns of Gerona and Barcelona. Some of the Geronese Kabbalists were in direct contact with a major Kabbalist living in Lunel or Posquières. Although some scholars assume that this scholar, Rabbi Isaac the Blind, taught some of the Geronese Kabbalists who came to study with him in Provence, I assume that he traveled to Spain and disseminated Kabbalah there.<sup>25</sup>

We must also allow for the existence of other, independent sources of the Catalan Kabbalah. An important Geronese Kabbalist, R. Moshe ben Nahman,

known as Nahmanides (1197–1270), was a teacher of kabbalistic traditions that differed conceptually from those of his contemporaries. Much more traditional than his compatriots, Nahmanides attempted to restrict the dissemination of this lore to a small group of selected students. He established his own school, consisting of persons who were also halakhic scholars.<sup>26</sup> The rise of Nahmanides' kabbalistic school in Barcelona followed the disintegration of the Geronese school, two developments that may be seen as related.

## 6. KABBALAH IN SPAIN

However, the main creative phase of Kabbalah in Spain was still in the future. Although the freer and more creative mood of the Geronese Kabbalists was contained by Nahmanides' traditionalism, a small group of Kabbalists in Castile during the second half of the thirteenth century produced an unprecedented number of kabbalistic writings, including the seminal *Sefer ha-Zohar*. Strongly exegetical, attributing its secrets to Jewish masters of ancient times, this mystical work reflects a unique symbolic mode of expression replete with profound insights concerning the meaning of ritual and the life of the divinity. This collection of writings, representing a great variety of views, became the third canonical book in Judaism, after the Bible and the Talmud, inspiring a large number of commentators. The canonization of the *Zohar* can be seen as reflecting the same process as the silencing of the Geronese Kabbalah by Nahmanides and, as we shall see, opposition to Abulafia: an attempt to create a monolithic line of kabbalistic thought. Even though these three events occurred during different periods and in different parts of Spain, I regard them all as parts of the deep restructuring of Spanish Kabbalah, which moved from initial diversity to relative uniformity toward the end of its existence in the peninsula. Only after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, and as a result of the need of the Spanish Kabbalists to confront new challenges elsewhere, was a more creative phase reached, beginning in the 1520s.

This general outline of the development of Spanish Kabbalah should be integrated into a wider context. We can distinguish three major forms of mysticism in the Iberian peninsula during the Middle Ages. The first of these is Muslim mysticism, represented by Sufism, Ismailism, and some forms of philosophical mysticism, the last being best represented by Abu Bakr ibn Tufayl's influential book *Hayy ibn Yuqṭan*, or *The Living Son of the Enlightened*.<sup>27</sup> This phase lasted approximately from the early tenth century to the very beginning of the thirteenth, when one of the most important Muslim mystics, Ibn 'Arabi of Murcia, left Spain for the East. During this period we find some forms of Jewish mysticism represented by masters deeply influenced by Muslim sources, Sufi or philosophical. There can be no doubt that major Jewish thinkers active in the

peninsula like R. Bahya ibn Paqudah and R. Solomon ibn Gabirol were acquainted with mystical concepts and writings stemming from Arabic sources. Although we cannot deny the influence of earlier Jewish mystical sources, such as the *Heikhalot* literature and *Sefer Yetzirah*, of which there are especially significant traces in the writings of Ibn Gabirol<sup>28</sup> and Yehudah ha-Levi,<sup>29</sup> the distinctive nature of these medieval texts owes much to their Arabic sources.

The second phase of mysticism in Spain was the Jewish Kabbalah, which lasted from the beginning of the thirteenth century until the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. Though influenced by some elements stemming from the Jewish and Muslim writings of the first phase, Kabbalah is more closely related to earlier Jewish sources than to either Muslim or Christian sources. The dominant literary genres, terms, and concepts of the Kabbalists differ substantially from the world-views of their predecessors. During the flourishing of Spanish Kabbalah, Muslim mysticism had already vanished, and Christian mysticism was still inchoate. The single major exception, the thirteenth-century Catalan author Ramon Llull, who was the most important Spanish mystic of the entire Middle Ages, reflects influences of Jewish mysticism in certain issues that are crucial in his system.<sup>30</sup>

The termination of Jewish mysticism in the Iberian peninsula with Spain's expulsion of the Jews marks the beginning of the most creative phase of Christian mysticism, during the sixteenth century. Kabbalah must therefore be considered a major contribution not only to Jewish culture but also to the entire history of mysticism in that country, as well as to European esotericism in general.

Nothing similar is evident in the relations between Jewish and Christian mysticism in Italy. There, two theologically and phenomenologically divergent, and at times rival, forms of spirituality coexisted in the same geographical area. The development of Kabbalah in Italy and elsewhere reflected these different circumstances: Spanish Kabbalah evolved toward a particularist structure, whereas in Italy it became more universalist. As we shall see, Kabbalah in Italy displays far more differentiated conceptual and rhetorical structures, including major literatures exemplifying three major models: the ecstatic, the theurgical-theosophical, and the magical-Hermetic,<sup>31</sup> whereas in Spain the theosophical-theurgical model dominated most of the development of Kabbalah.

These two intellectual trajectories met and clashed when they confronted each other after Kabbalists expelled from Spain in 1492 arrived in Italy.

## 2

# ABRAHAM ABULAFIA AND ECSTATIC KABBALAH

### 1. A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF ABULAFIA

Abraham Abulafia (1240–c. 1292) is the founder of the ecstatic trend of Kabbalah.<sup>1</sup> Born in Saragossa, in Aragon, he was educated by his father, Shmuel, in Tudela until the latter's death in 1258. In 1260 he left Catalonia for the land of Israel in search of the mythical river Sambatyon. In the mid-1260s he was in Capua studying Jewish philosophy, especially the *Guide of the Perplexed* of Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides). At the end of the 1260s he arrived in Barcelona, and in 1270 he began to study Kabbalah there, perhaps as the result of a revelation.<sup>2</sup> From 1271 to 1273 he was teaching his Kabbalah and his special, mystical understanding of Maimonides' *Guide* to some Kabbalists in Castile. At the end of 1273 or early

1274 he left Spain, and for the next five years he attempted to teach his special type of mysticism in Greece: in Patros, Thebes, and Evripos. In 1279 he returned to Italy and, after a short period of detention in Trani in the same year, again spent some months in Capua, where he taught his Kabbalah to four students. In 1280 he made an unsuccessful effort to meet Pope Nicholas III while the latter was in retreat in the castle of Soriano, near Rome. When Abulafia arrived at the castle, the pope suddenly died of apoplexy, and as a result Abulafia was imprisoned for two weeks in Rome by the Minorite Franciscans. In 1282 he was in Messina, Sicily, whither he presumably traveled immediately after his release from prison.

Well before his arrival in Sicily, starting in the early 1270s, Abulafia had written several books in which he described in some detail his peculiar type of Kabbalah, consisting of a variety of techniques aimed at reaching an ecstatic experience.<sup>3</sup> He called this experience “prophecy.” By the end of the 1270s his literary and propagandistic activities had dramatically intensified. In 1280 alone he wrote two of his most important books: a large commentary on Maimonides’ *Guide* named *Sitrei Torah*, written in Capua, and an important and most influential mystical handbook, *Sefer Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*, written in Rome. Between 1279 and 1283 he also wrote several “prophetic” works, which unfortunately have been lost.<sup>4</sup> Abulafia’s own commentary on these works has, however, survived. It is mainly from these commentaries that we learn about Abulafia’s prophetic claims, as well as of some messianic aspirations stemming from his revelation in Barcelona in 1270. These aspirations prompted him to seek an audience with the pope in 1280, following another major revelation in 1279. It seems that some Jews, apparently fearing the negative consequences of such an audacious enterprise, distanced themselves from Abulafia and in some cases even persecuted him.<sup>5</sup>

An errant teacher of Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*,<sup>6</sup> a mystic, a prophet, a messiah, a preacher of a new Kabbalah to both Jews and Christians, a prolific writer—these epithets describe Abraham Abulafia at the time of his arrival in Messina, where he would remain for the rest of his life, producing more than two-thirds of his extensive writings, which would contribute substantially to both the Jewish and the Christian cultures.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. A MYSTICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE *GUIDE*

Italy hosted the composition of most of Abulafia’s oeuvre. There he also disseminated Kabbalah, either as a certain mystical interpretation of Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* or as a more advanced form of mysticism, which will be described in chapter 5. With regard to his interpretation of the *Guide*, we learn from a very important document, included in a book written in 1286 in Messina:

And I have taught it [the *Guide*] in several places: in Capua, to four [students], accidentally, but they went on erroneous ways, since they were thoughtless young men, and I left them. And at Thebes [I had] ten [students], and none of them [profited from the teaching], but they spoiled the two ways, the first [the plain] and the second [the kabbalistic]. In Evripos four [students], and there also was no one who profited, since the thoughts of men are different from one another, *a fortiori* regarding the depth of wisdom and the *Sitrei Torah*, and I did not see one of them who was worthy to receive even the notes of the truth as it is. And in Rome [I taught the *Guide*] to two elders of the city, R. Tzidqiah and R. Yeshayah, my allies, blessed be their memory, and they succeeded in a limited way, and they died, as they were very old. And in Barcelona two [students], one of them an old one, R. Qalonimus, blessed be his memory, a venerable man, and one young man, learned and intelligent and very respected, from the aristocracy of the city, whose name was R. Yehudah named Salmon, and he succeeded in a very excellent way. And at Burgos two [students], a master and [his] student. The name of the master [was] R. Moses Cinfa . . . a great man and an honorable scholar. And the name of the student is R. Shem Tov, also a kind and good young man, but his youth prevented him from learning, and he did not study it [the *Guide*] but only a few external traditions, neither he [R. Shem Tov] nor his master [R. Moses]. And in Medinat Shalom [I had] two [students], one of them R. Shemuel the Prophet, who received from me a few traditions, and the second R. Joseph Gikatilla, and he unquestionably succeeded in a wondrous way concerning what he studied under my guidance, and he added much from his strength and knowledge, and God was with him.<sup>8</sup>

This passage is unique not only in the kabbalistic literature, but also in the entire literature dealing with the dissemination of the *Guide*. No philosopher traveled so much and was continuously involved for so long in spreading the views of Maimonides. I assume that Abulafia was involved in teaching the *Guide* for at least seven years, during which he composed three commentaries on this book in a wide range of places: Catalonia, Castile, Greece, Italy, and Sicily.

Abulafia's list of the places and students he taught is not chronological. For example, he begins the list with Capua, where he stayed in late 1279 and early 1280, and only later mentions the Greek cities; likewise, his visits in Catalonia and Castile took place long before his second stays in Italy and Greece. The list also mentions by name only the students who succeeded, in one way or another, in following his teaching. Another noteworthy feature is that the successful cases are presented in the latter part of the list, with only the failures in the first half. Last

but not least, the list ends with the name of R. Joseph Gikatilla, who is presented as an accomplished disciple. Thus the list is arranged according to a hierarchical rather than a geographical principle.

Abulafia's observations also signal a difference between his students in Greece and those in Spain. He labels all his Greek students and most of his Italian ones as failures. In contrast, all his Spanish students are described as either very or somewhat successful. This conspicuous difference between East and West, with Italy occupying an intermediate status, presumably reflects cultural differences between the relatively free and rich spiritual life of Jews in Spain and Jewish life in Byzantium and Italy. In Spain, interest in Kabbalah was growing at the very time Abulafia was moving about there, whereas in Italy and Byzantium the medieval forms of Jewish mysticism were apparently unknown in the late 1270s. Abulafia's peculiar type of mysticism, combining Maimonidean metaphysics and psychology with the Ashkenazi mystical practices of combinations of letters, must have seemed bizarre, and enjoyed a poorer reception, in less developed areas. In the second half of the thirteenth century, the younger Jewish intelligentsia in Spain were already seeking a spiritual alternative to Maimonides' rationalism, whereas in Italy the more classical form of Maimonideanism continued to be taught as late as the end of the thirteenth century. Thus it is not surprising that Abulafia found fewer but better students in the West, more numerous but worse ones in the East.

As far as I can determine from my own acquaintance with medieval materials, the passage above provides a unique example of the itinerary of a wandering teacher. It covers an unusually large area and at least sixteen years of activity. Moreover, this teacher indicates that he taught a very specific work, the *Guide*, on a scale never equaled either before or afterward. But the passage reveals more than the uniqueness of Abulafia as an errant teacher and disseminator of the ideas of the *Guide*. Here we have testimony about the first attempt to propagate a very specific, kabbalistic understanding of the *Guide*. Abulafia mentions "two ways," presumably of study. One, we may assume, involves learning the plain meaning of the *Guide* by a linear reading of the text according to the order of the chapters; the second way, according to this passage, involves plumbing the depths of wisdom and *Sitrei Torah*, topics that in Abulafia's commentaries on the *Guide* refer to kabbalistic matters as he conceived them. Abulafia's testimony that some students were given the second way of reading the *Guide* appears to signal the first attempt to disseminate an esoteric reading of Kabbalah beyond Spain, the stronghold of this lore in the second part of the thirteenth century.

Abulafia's version of Kabbalah seems to have been the first form of medieval mysticism propagated in Italy, Sicily, and Greece. Inevitably, Abulafia's type of Kabbalah was influential in the later development of this lore in Italy and in the



Byzantine Empire. Abulafia's description of his students indicates that at least a large proportion of them were young persons. At this stage, there was no minimal age requirement for the study of Kabbalah.

### 3. THE KABBALAH OF THE ERRANT SCHOLARS

Abulafia spent most of his life wandering between Catalonia, Castile, Italy, Sicily, Greece, and the land of Israel. This mobility may reflect in part his own personality and inclination; but it was also at least a partial result of environmental pressures. Abulafia was both a charismatic and a disturbing figure. He left Spain in the mid-1270s, when interest there in the synthesis between Kabbalah and philosophy was declining and being replaced by a critique of philosophy. The growing emphasis upon theosophy and theurgy affected even Kabbalists such as Joseph Gikatilla, a former student of Abulafia, who changed his interest from linguistic to theosophical Kabbalah. Still later, as we have seen, Abulafia was also persecuted by Jews who feared repercussions from his messianic claims. These conflicts, potential and actual, account for Abulafia's years of wandering until he disappeared, sometime after 1291, in Sicily. This linkage between wandering and an interest in ecstatic Kabbalah was not limited to Abulafia; at least two other adherents to ecstatic Kabbalah testify to a wandering existence at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth. One of these was R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah Harar, the author of *Sefer Sha'arei Tzedeq*, who was deeply influenced by the kabbalistic theories of Abulafia. A contemporary of R. Nathan and probably also his student, R. Isaac of Acre, was also known as wandering from Acre to Catalonia, Castile, and possibly also North Africa. It seems safe to infer that in this period the highly individualistic experiences of the ecstatic Kabbalists created tensions with the Jewish establishment and made an errant existence expedient if not necessary. In contrast, the great centers of Jewish learning welcomed and supported the more socially oriented theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists.

### 4. MESSIANIC MISSION AND KABBALISTIC PROPAGANDA

Abulafia's revelations do not deal solely with idiosyncratic spiritual matters. He repeatedly describes himself as a messenger to the people of the "Isle of Power" or the "Isle of Mirror," which in Abulafia's nomenclature means Sicily, where he wrote one of his most important commentaries on his own prophetic books. Here I am less interested in the missionary aspects of Abulafia's messianic and apocalyptic revelations than in the propagandistic aspects of his activity. For him messianism and apocalypticism were not a matter of personal fate and individual achievement, but much more a message destined to be disseminated in order to awaken the awareness of the Jews. So, for example, he indicates that God has sent

him to tell “the words of the living God to the Jews, who are circumcised in their flesh but uncircumcised in their hearts.”<sup>9</sup> Abulafia claims that the poor to whom he has been sent, and for whose sake he has revealed his vision, have not paid due attention to the “form of his coming” and that they have spoken about him and his God words that should not be uttered.<sup>10</sup> Then he adds: “God has commanded him [Abulafia] to speak to the gentiles, those of uncircumcised heart and uncircumcised flesh, in His name. And he has done so, and he spoke to them, and they believed in the message of the Lord. But they did not return to God, because they relied on their sword and bow, and God has hardened their uncircumcised and impure hearts.”<sup>11</sup>

This is a very precious testimony concerning the propagandistic activities of Abulafia. Indeed, the dissemination of an eschatological-kabbalistic message to the Jews in general may be understood as part of a turning of ecstatic Kabbalah to external affairs, and thus signals a change from the politics of Kabbalists before Abulafia. More or less esoteric, this lore was not intended to be disseminated to larger audiences even by those among the Geronese Kabbalists, who had adopted a more exoteric type of writing. None of the Geronese Kabbalists mentioned discussions with Christians in general, let alone matters of Kabbalah. Clearly, none of them undertook a propagandistic task of the intensity and amplitude of Abulafia’s. He conceived of himself as a messenger to a nation<sup>12</sup> rather than only to an elite and traveled from country to country in order to propagate his kabbalistic views and thus fulfill his messianic mission. Perhaps a more concise expression of this propagandistic revelation is to be found already in a book written in 1280: “You should vivify the multitude by means of the name Yah [a divine name] and be as a lion who leaps forth in every city and open place.”<sup>13</sup>

However, much more exceptional is Abulafia’s turn to the gentiles as a result of disappointment in the Jews’ lack of receptiveness. That move led him, as we shall see in the next chapter, even to attempt to meet with the pope.

## 5. ECSTATIC KABBALAH: SPANISH OR ITALIAN?

One of the important distinctions proposed in Gershom Scholem’s *Major Trends*, but subsequently almost totally forgotten in Scholem’s school, has to do with what Scholem regarded as two major lines in Spanish Kabbalah. Scholem asserted that Abulafia’s Kabbalah “marks the culminating point in the development of two opposing schools of thought in Spanish Kabbalism, schools which I would like to call the ecstatic and the theosophical.”<sup>14</sup>

Scholem’s assumption that Abulafia represents one of the two trends in thirteenth-century Spanish Kabbalism is a modern reverberation of a view that was already expressed by some Jewish and Christian Kabbalists. However, it seems

that the modern scholar has introduced a qualification that cannot be detected in the earlier sources: Scholem regards Abulafia as the culmination or embodiment of a certain school of Spanish Kabbalah. Let us briefly consider this qualification.

Abulafia was born in Aragon and was educated, for significant segments of his life, in Catalonia. Especially important for our discussion is the fact that he started his kabbalistic studies and career in Spain. In Barcelona, in the early 1270s, he commenced his studies of the *Sefer Yetzirah* and its twelve commentaries, and it was then that he experienced what apparently was his first and most influential revelation.<sup>15</sup> However, I doubt whether all these facts are sufficient to characterize Abulafia as a representative of a Spanish brand of Kabbalah, for several reasons.

The two main sources of the specific structure of ecstatic Kabbalah are Maimonidean philosophy on the one hand and Ashkenazi mystical techniques and esotericism on the other.<sup>16</sup> There is some convincing evidence that one of the aims of these techniques was to attain a prophetic experience.<sup>17</sup> The combination between the philosophical description of prophecy in Aristotelian terms and the Ashkenazi techniques and mystical aims, which is a very complex and not always harmonious task, is the main achievement of Abulafia as a mystical thinker. However, his studies of the *Guide of the Perplexed* took place in Capua, near Rome, with the Italian thinker R. Hillel of Verona long before he engaged in studies of Kabbalah.<sup>18</sup> Maimonides' metaphysics and psychology became major spiritual factors in Abulafia's thought; Ashkenazi Hasidism contributed to ecstatic Kabbalah a vital element that was not accepted by any other theosophical-theurgical Spanish Kabbalist: applying techniques of combinations of letters as a means of attaining a paranormal experience.<sup>19</sup> Although we may assume that Abulafia studied Ashkenazi texts in Spain,<sup>20</sup> those studies were far from typical of his contemporaries' concerns there.<sup>21</sup> In proposing a synthesis between the views of the most important Jewish philosopher, who lived in Egypt, and some of the views of Hasidei Ashkenaz of northern Europe in order to create a form of Kabbalah, Abulafia performed an audacious move that had scarcely any organic connection to prevailing Spanish visions of Kabbalah. This idiosyncratic synthesis is, in my opinion, one of the most important reasons for Abulafia's failure to disseminate his Kabbalah in Spain, and perhaps also for his leaving the Iberian peninsula shortly after the beginning of his kabbalistic studies.

In this context it is perhaps significant that one of Abulafia's teachers in matters of Kabbalah was named R. Barukh Togarmi,<sup>22</sup> namely someone coming from Turkey, a fact that points to the non-Spanish origin of some of Abulafia's main sources. Likewise, he highly appreciated another commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*, by a certain R. Isaac of Bedresh, namely Béziers, apparently a Provençal master, whose combinatory techniques as preserved in Abulafia's writings are particularly close to

those of the Spanish Kabbalist.<sup>23</sup> Not only is the epithet “Spanish” doubtful, based as it is on a formal rather than a conceptual basis, but also the idea of ecstatic Kabbalah as a culmination of a Spanish school is premature. Scholem was correct in portraying the *Zohar* as such a culmination. However, in the case of Abulafia, it is difficult to see him as summarizing and perfecting elements that were characteristic of Spanish thought.<sup>24</sup> As a Kabbalist Abulafia was present in Spain for only three to four years, and so far I know of not one single Spanish Kabbalist who was substantially influenced by ecstatic Kabbalah.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, all of Abulafia’s important writings were composed outside Spain.<sup>26</sup> And finally, Abulafia’s Kabbalah was not only not accepted by the Spanish mystics; in fact it was openly and fiercely rejected by one influential figure in Spain, R. Shlomo ibn Adret, whose ban of Abulafia was so effective that it succeeded in wiping out this form of Kabbalah from Spanish soil and thus shaped to a certain degree the spiritual physiognomy of Spanish Kabbalah. In sum, not only did the components of ecstatic Kabbalah stem from trends of thought that emerged outside Spain, but this lore was divorced from the developments of Spanish Kabbalah and did not affect it. The vehemence of the assault by an eminent Kabbalist, the late fifteenth-century Rabbi Yehudah Hayyat, who was expelled from Spain, upon the dissemination of Abulafia’s writings in northern Italy attests to the hostility of the Spanish Kabbalists, who gravitated around the Zoharic literature, toward ecstatic Kabbalah.<sup>27</sup>

A comparative analysis of the phenomenological structure of ecstatic Kabbalah and Spanish theosophical Kabbalah may help us to see the basis for this hostility more clearly. The emphasis of Abulafia’s Kabbalah upon the centrality of revelation and anomian mystical techniques, its specific eschatological attitude, and its individualistic approach are drastically different from the spiritual physiognomy of Spanish Kabbalism. The sources of these characteristics are not only the idiosyncratic personality of the founder of ecstatic Kabbalah but also the esoteric material that inspired him. Abulafia referred to his Kabbalah as a prophetic Kabbalah, as against the inferior, sefirotic one.<sup>28</sup> In slightly different forms, this distinction was echoed by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Johann Reuchlin.<sup>29</sup>

However, instead of speaking about only two types of Spanish Kabbalah, we would do better to resort to the scheme of two trends in Jewish mysticism, starting before the thirteenth century. Abulafia was not only the founder of the ecstatic type of Kabbalism; as mentioned above, he was also the inheritor of mystical and magical techniques practiced by another, earlier type of Jewish mysticism, the Hasidei Ashkenaz,<sup>30</sup> which in turn was shaped by an even earlier type of Jewish ecstatic literature, the Heikhalot literature. He was influenced by another Ashkenazi figure, R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, the Prophet of Erfurt, who did not belong to the group of Hasidei Ashkenaz, but relied on magical and Heikhalot traditions. On

the other side, the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists in Spain inherited both the theosophical views of Provençal mysticism and much earlier types of theosophical and theurgical thought found mainly in rabbinic literature.<sup>31</sup> These are the reasons why I would not describe his Kabbalah as a culmination of earlier developments in Spain.

## 6. ECSTATIC KABBALAH AFTER ABULAFIA

The numerous writings of Abraham Abulafia are the cornerstones of ecstatic Kabbalah; their influence can be detected in many texts, and they were preserved in a great number of manuscripts. However, very few of them have been printed, and those editions are replete with mistakes. Several important works written under the influence of Abulafian Kabbalah perpetuated and expanded the ideas and mystical techniques elaborated in the works of the master. The most important of these works are R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah Harar's *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, written in Messina by a disciple of Abulafia sometime before 1290; some of the writings of R. Isaac of Acre, dating from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries; the kabbalistic traditions that R. Isaac collected from his master, R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah; the anonymous *Sefer ha-Tzeruf* and *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*, written in the late thirteenth century; and, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, R. Yehudah Albotini's *Sefer Sullam ha-'Aliyah*. Most of these books were written outside Spain.

Most of these works were composed either in the land of Israel or by authors who had lived there for a time.<sup>32</sup> Some of these writings reflect the penetration of Sufic concepts, absent in the writings of Abulafia. For example, the concept of equanimity [*hishtawwut*], espoused in Damascus at the end of the thirteenth century by disciples of Ibn 'Arabi, appears in one of R. Isaac of Acre's works;<sup>33</sup> and the oral melodies that are part of Abulafia's mystical technique are accompanied by instrumental music in *Sefer Sha'arei Tzedeq*, a fact that apparently reflects the Sufic practice of *Sama'*, or mystical audition, and *dikhr*, a session of recitation of divine names.<sup>34</sup>

After a long period of resistance to Abulafia's Kabbalah, the Spanish Kabbalists who arrived in the land of Israel after 1492 moved toward acceptance of its basic assumptions and toward combining it with the classical theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah regnant in Spain. Safedian Kabbalists such as R. Moshe Cordovero and R. Hayyim Vital in the sixteenth century were conspicuously influenced by Abulafia's views, which were now cited openly as a very high form of Kabbalah.<sup>35</sup> The dissemination of Cordovero's kabbalistic theories by his disciples in popular printed ethical writings helped some of Abulafia's religious ideals to reach a larger public and finally to play a formative role in the crystallization of eighteenth-century Polish Hasidism.<sup>36</sup> Clear traces of Abulafian influence are found in the

writings of one of the main followers of the Gaon of Vilnius, R. Elijah ben Shlomo, namely the nineteenth-century R. Menahem Mendel of Shklov.<sup>37</sup> More recently, Abulafia's Kabbalah has received widespread scholarly attention<sup>38</sup> and been printed and distributed even in the most orthodox Jewish circles. The main person responsible for the printing of thirteen volumes of Abulafia's and his followers' books, Amnon Gross, intends to facilitate the return of prophecy among Jews today.<sup>39</sup>

# 3

## ABRAHAM ABULAFIA'S ACTIVITY IN ITALY

### 1. ABULAFIA IN ROME

Rome played a very important role in the political and spiritual life of the Jews. The city symbolized both the evil Roman Empire, which destroyed the Jewish Second Temple, and the headquarters of the religion that later persecuted Jews more than any other—Christianity. This doubly negative heritage notwithstanding, in the medieval period Rome remained one of the main centers of power, regulating aspects of life in countries where many Jews were living. However, in the thirteenth century Rome was not only a symbol of past destruction and of present persecutions but also a center of Jewish spiritual creativity. In addition the city remained related, following some apocalyptic traditions in

Judaism, to eschatological events that were regarded as favorable for Jews and unfavorable for Christians.<sup>1</sup>

In a religious dispute that took place in Barcelona in the early 1260s, the famous Nahmanides contended, in the context of a certain rabbinic legend concerning the messiah:

For here it is not stated that he had arrived, only that he was born on the day of the destruction [of the Temple]; for was it on the day that Moses was born that he immediately went to redeem Israel? He arrived only a number of days later, under the command of the Holy One blessed be He, and [then] said to Pharaoh, "Let my people go that they may serve Me" [Exodus 7:26]. So, too, when the end-time arrives the messiah will go to the pope under the command of God and say, "Let my people go that they may serve Me," and until that time we will not say regarding him that he arrived, for he is not yet the messiah.<sup>2</sup>

Moses' mission to the Pharaoh became the prototype for the future career of the messiah. According to Nahmanides, the messiah will also have to go to the most important ruler of his time and demand that he let the Jews leave. By dint of this typological reading, another aspect of Moses' encounters with the Pharaoh may be relevant to an understanding of the messiah's mission to Rome: the performance of miracles. As scholars have pointed out, Abulafia may have been influenced by Nahmanides' passage, and thus the parallel between the messiah and Moses as performers of miracles may also have been operative in the consciousness of the ecstatic Kabbalist. This messianic mission seems to be the background of Abulafia's intense literary activity and of his arrival in the city in 1280.

In the years 1279 and 1280, the founder of ecstatic Kabbalah composed several kabbalistic writings, which constitute, as far as we know, the first kabbalistic books composed in Italy. They consist of three major literary genres:

- [a] Prophetic books, namely revelations having eschatological, often messianic, overtones, are presented as stemming from the Agent Intellect and addressed to Abulafia. The first of these, *Sefer ha-Yashar*, was written in 1279 in Patros, in Greece; but all the others, approximately seven, were written in Italy. In 1280 he composed *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, either in Capua or in Rome. In the same year he wrote in Rome *Sefer ha-Haftarah* and *Sefer ha-'Edut*. All the other prophetic books were composed in Sicily, where Abulafia himself composed a commentary on all these books. Although the prophetic books are now lost, their commentaries survived, and there we find quotations from the originals, which allow a reconstruction of their content.



[b] In 1280, before leaving for Rome, Abulafia composed in Capua a kabbalistic commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, intended for his students there. This commentary, *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, is the last and most important of three commentaries that he wrote on the *Guide* and is widely available in manuscript form.<sup>3</sup> In a commentary on the *Guide* written six years earlier, he wrote:

I am today in the city of Phonon,<sup>4</sup> and four precious stones joined my academy. . . . God bestowed on these four children [his students] knowledge and intelligence in order to understand every book and science, and this is the reason I have brought them closer as far as I could, and I invented for them the names Daniel, Hananyah, Mishael, and 'Azaryah, and I called the last Zekharyahu,<sup>5</sup> and they are children with no deficiency, good-looking and understanding every science and knowing knowledge, and having the capacity to stand in the palace of the king . . . and those four children . . . when they come to shelter under the wings of the Shekhinah, false witnesses . . . attempted to seduce them from the table of the Lord, the God of Israel, in order not to be nourished from the splendor of the Shekhinah,<sup>6</sup> at the time when other men consume grass<sup>7</sup> . . . and they came and implored and asked me to interpret the secrets of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, together with some secrets of the Torah that are in my hands, dealing with very profound matters, in order to have a proof and merit and mouth and recommender in order to extract some wisdom to which their souls were ardently striving, to know it and comprehend its essence in order to know their creator. And they implored me very much to this effect . . . and I, because of my love of them, did not want to refuse them, and I fulfilled their desire according to their wish, and I composed this commentary for them and for those similar to them.<sup>8</sup>

Thus Abulafia started rather early in his career to teach youngsters, *yeladim*, not only according to the linear method, but also according to the more advanced method of reading the *Guide*, best exemplified by the very book he wrote at their request. In fact, many years earlier, around 1273, when he himself was no more than thirty-three, he taught Gikatilla, a young man aged twenty-five, his advanced method of studying the *Guide*. In the same period he also taught the *Guide* to two other young persons in Spain, R. Shem Tov and R. Yehudah Salmon.

[c] In 1280 Abulafia composed in Rome a kabbalistic handbook, *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, another classic of Kabbalah if we are to judge from the number of extant manuscripts and quotations from it in other works.<sup>9</sup> In

Rome Abulafia taught the *Guide* to two old men, R. Tzidqiah and R. Isaiah, whom he calls his “allies”—an indication that he had some troubles there—and describes as being successful.<sup>10</sup> R. Isaiah of Trani the second was one of the most important halakhic figures in Italy of that generation. R. Tzidqiah may have been the son of R. Benjamin, belonging to the eminent ‘Anav family; a less plausible candidate is the more famous R. Tzidqiah ben Abraham, the author of *Sefer Shibbolei ha-Leqet*.<sup>11</sup> By any standards, during the two years or less of his second visit in Italy, Abulafia was busy indeed, even more so if we remember that he also taught in Capua and spent some time in Rome trying to gain an audience with Pope Nicholas III as part of a messianic enterprise. This intensive literary activity is also related to the fact that in 1280 Abulafia reached the age of forty, which was regarded as the age when a person attained wisdom.<sup>12</sup>

Thus we may safely conclude that Capua and Rome were the first cities in Italy where ecstatic Kabbalah was taught and where important kabbalistic books were composed.

## 2. ABULAFIA AND NICHOLAS III

Abulafia's overt and determined attempt to meet Pope Nicholas III had messianic implications. In August 1279, on the eve of the Jewish New Year, he pursued the pontiff, a member of the Orsini family, to the family's summer residence in the castle of Soriano da Cimini.

And during the fifth month following Nisan, the eleventh month following Tishrei, [namely] the month of 'Av, during the tenth year, he [Abulafia] arrived in Rome. He intended to go before the pope on the eve of Rosh ha-Shanah. And the pope commanded all the guards of his house, when he was in Soriano, a city one day's distance from Rome, that should Raziel<sup>13</sup> come to speak with him in the name of Judaism, that they take him immediately, and that he not see him at all but that he be taken outside the city and burned alive, and there is the wood, inside the inner gate of the city. And this matter was made known to Raziel, and he paid no attention to the words of those who said this, but practiced concentration<sup>14</sup> and saw visions and wrote them down, and thus came about this book, which he called *Sefer ha-'Edut* [Book of Testimony], being a testimony on behalf of himself and God, that he gave his life for the sake of the love of His commandments, being also a testimony on behalf of God, who rescued him from the hand of his foe. For on the day that he went before the pope two mouths were born to him, and when he entered the outer gate of the city a messenger went out to greet him

and informed him that the one who sought to destroy his soul had died the previous night; he was suddenly smitten by a plague, and on that night he was slain and died. And Raziel was saved.<sup>15</sup>

The Latin sources describing the death of Nicholas III speak unanimously about an apoplexy, which killed the pope abruptly before a confessor could be brought.<sup>16</sup> Abulafia was arrested and kept in custody for two weeks. As soon as he was liberated he left the peninsula for a decade of febrile literary and messianic activities in Sicily. When reporting the circumstances of his attempt to meet with the pope, Abulafia does not explain the cause of his sudden death. However, his account contains traces of a tension between the pope and a messiah; the pontiff warned the messiah that he would be burned, and the death of the pope is portrayed as the reason for the messiah's rescue. What did Abulafia want to achieve by this encounter? I assume that the answer is complex, and we shall deal with it in chapter 6. Here let me adduce an interesting passage from the same "prophetic book" quoted above, the *Commentary on Sefer ha-'Edut*. Abulafia introduces the brief statements revealed to him, which constituted parts of the lost original prophetic book, followed by his commentary. The supernal power, whose identity is the cosmic power known in Maimonides as the Agent Intellect, is the source of the revelation to Abulafia, and he refers to himself in the third person:

He said that he was in Rome at that time, and they told him what was to be done and what was to be said in his name, and that he should tell everyone that "God is king, and shall stir up the nations," and the retribution of those who rule instead of Him. And he [the Agent Intellect] informed him [Abulafia] that he [again Abulafia] was king, and he changed [himself] from day to day, and his degree was above that of all degrees, for in truth he was deserving such. But he returned and again made him take an oath when he was staying in Rome on the river Tiber. . . . And the meaning of his saying "Rise and lift up the head of my anointed one" refers to the life of the souls. "And on the New Year and in the Temple"—it is the power of the souls. And he says, "Anoint him as a king"—anoint him like a king with the power of all the names. "For I have anointed him as a king over Israel"—over the communities of Israel, that is, the commandments.<sup>17</sup>

It is in Rome—as Abulafia was told according to the plain sense of the revelation—that the anointment of the king will take place at the New Year, in the Temple. As we have learned from the same book, Abulafia attempted to see the pope on the eve of the Jewish New Year. The plain meaning of the attempt to become messiah and king at the New Year is that when speaking with the pope Abulafia will

fulfill a messianic mission and become the messiah. Was the “temple” no other than St. Peter’s? In any case, Abulafia interprets this plain sense of the revelation allegorically, to point to the emergence of the intellect, which is the spiritual messiah, just as the person speaking with the pope is the material messiah.<sup>18</sup> The allegorical/spiritual interpretation of his own revelation is similar to some psychologically oriented Aristotelian interpretations of the Bible in thirteenth-century Jewish philosophy, although Abulafia seems to be the only Kabbalist to have composed a text that would subsequently be interpreted by the author himself.<sup>19</sup> But what is more interesting for the present context is the consonance with the general cultural trend in Rome, and I assume in Italy in general, where openness to philosophy stemming from either Arabic or Scholastic sources was greater than what is known to have existed among Spanish contemporaries. This consonance between the intellectual aspect of the Abulafian Kabbalah and the philosophically oriented culture in Italy and Sicily is surely one of the reasons for the relative success of Abulafia in Italy, and much less in Provence, in contrast to his total marginalization in Spain.

### 3. A RETROSPECTIVE VISION

Several years later, sometime between 1286 and 1288, in his *Sefer ha-'Ot*, one of his prophetic-messianic writings, recording one of the most interesting apocalypses ever written in Hebrew, Abulafia addresses the death of the pope in a manner that is unparalleled in his other writings:

All the rulers of the small Rome,  
 Their strength has failed and diminished.  
 Its validity is from the day of the revelation  
 Of the Torah and further, and there is no  
 Ruler over His tribes.  
 Demons come to kill,  
 But goats were killed.<sup>20</sup>  
 And there were delivered to slaughter nowadays  
 Both their nobles and humble ones  
 By the young and the gentle king.  
 His enemy died in Rome [*merivo met be-Romi*]  
 In his rebellion [*be-miryo*], by the power of the Name  
 'El Hay *ve-Qayam*, because  
 The Tetragrammaton fought him  
 By Land and Sea.<sup>21</sup>

These enigmatic lines need a lengthier interpretation than is possible here. For now, let me start with the most conspicuous element: Abulafia speaks about an

enemy who died in Rome, killed by the divine name. Although the pope in fact died in Soriano, I see no better alternative to identifying the anonymous enemy than the pontiff. Why his death is translated to Rome becomes clearer when we analyze the Hebrew: *merivo met be-Romi be-miryo*. *Merivo*, "his enemy," contains the same consonants as *be-Romi*, "in Rome," and as *be-miryo*, "in his rebellion"; the use of the same four consonants in such proximity inevitably reinforces the poetic dimension of the description and may account for Abulafia's choice to name Rome as the crucial city. As for Abulafia's claim in 1288 that the pope died "by the power of the Name, 'El Hai ve-Qayam," the context implies the agency of a "gentle and young king," namely a human figure, which is probably Abulafia himself. The lines immediately following make the connection clear:

Against YHWH and against His messiah  
This will be a sign and a proof  
And a faithful testimony,  
Because we have been victorious, by the name BYT.<sup>22</sup>

I interpret the mention of the messiah as a reference to Abulafia himself, who is also the "gentle king." The death of the enemy is therefore a proof of the power of God and His messiah; apparently both used the divine name(s) in order to kill an enemy: the Tetragrammaton and the name 'EHēYeH, present in the last verse by the name BYT, which amounts in *gematria* to 21, like 'EHēYeH. Abulafia's prophetic Kabbalah gravitates around the divine names and their use in order to reach an ecstatic experience. However, divine names were conceived of as powerful linguistic units, used by prophets who had been sent by God to perform a certain mission, as we shall see in the following chapters. Therefore, from the perspective of an older Abulafia, the accidental death of the pope, with whom he wanted to discuss the meaning of the authentic Judaism, which is the knowledge of the divine names, has become the proof of his victory. The death of the pope is construed as a confrontation between the messiah and the pope, and the former used the divine name in order to kill the latter. This retrospective account is far from reflecting what in fact happened in Soriano, even in Abulafia's first report of the affair, quoted above; it may instead reflect Abulafia's increasing confidence in his messianic mission.

The occurrence of the name 'EHēYeH in connection with the killing of the pope is reminiscent of another killing performed by a redemptive figure: Moses' killing of the Egyptian. According to the biblical version, Moses killed the Egyptian who oppressed the Jews by physical force. However, according to some midrashic statements, Moses used the divine name in order to perform this act.

Let me return once more to the permutations of letters *merivo*, *be-Romi*, *be-miryo*. I find no more permutations of these consonants elsewhere in Abulafia's verse. I

suggest that here Abulafia hints at two divine names that were very important in his writings: BM and RYW are permutations of the same consonants, and they stand for namely the name of 42, MB, and the name of 72 units of three letters, which amount to 216, namely RYW. Indeed, the knowledge of precisely these two names is described as an important mystical tradition to be handed down in order to reach a divine revelation.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. ABULAFIA'S ACTIVITY IN SICILY

While in Rome and its vicinity in 1279 and 1280, Abulafia produced conspicuously influential contributions to Kabbalah, much more so than anything he had written before. After his release from two weeks' detention in prison at the hands of the Minorites, he departed for Sicily, where he spent the remaining eleven or so years of his life. There he produced another 2,000 pages of equally influential work, some of it still available only in manuscript. This corpus enlarges our understanding of Abulafia's students in Messina and Palermo, and of the reverberations of Abulafia's writings during the Renaissance.

Abulafia was already in Messina in 1282, as we learn from his commentary on *Sefer 'Ish 'Adam*, where he mentions several of his students there: R. Natronay, R. Abraham ben Shalom, R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah Harar, R. Sa'adyah ben Yitzhaq Sigilmasi, and R. Jacob ben Abraham.<sup>24</sup> According to Abulafia's account, these students—with the sole exception of the mysterious Rabbi Natronay—came to him one after another, apparently attracted by what they had heard from their acquaintances; thus we may infer that in 1282 he had already been in Messina for a substantial period. Between 1282 and 1284 it seems that two more students from Messina joined his study group and then the majority of his students left him. According to *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, his longest book, composed in Messina in 1285/1286,

Indeed, in this town that I am within now, called Senim,<sup>25</sup> which [actually is] Messina, I have found six persons, and with me I brought the seventh, from whom they [the six] have learned in my presence for a very short while. Each of them has received something from me, more or less, and all of them have left me, except the one, who is the first, and [he is also] the first reason for what each and every one of his friends has learned from my mouth. His name is Rabbi Sa'adyah ben Rabbi Yitzhaq Sigilmasi, blessed be his memory. He was followed by Rabbi Abraham ben Rabbi Shalom, and was followed by Rabbi Jacob, his son, and later was followed by Rabbi Yitzhaq his friend, and he was followed by the friend of his friend . . . and the name of the seventh was Rabbi Natronay Tzarfati, blessed be his memory.<sup>26</sup>

One more person has been added to the earlier list but during the same time one of the important original figures in Abulafia's group has died: Rabbi Natronay Tzarfati. However, when Abulafia wrote this passage only one of his seven disciples remained with the master: Rabbi Sa'adyah Sigilmasi, to whom the book is dedicated. Abulafia continues:

At the beginning of the year 5046<sup>27</sup> God has desired me, and He has brought me into His holy palace, at the very time when I have completed this book, which I have composed here in Messina, for the dear, honorable, pleasant, intelligent, and wise student, who desires to know the essence of the perfect Torah, Rabbi Sa'adyah. . . . Him I have seen as adhering to me in love; for him [I wrote this book] in order that he will have it in his hands, as a memory of what he has studied with me, for oblivion is common. Likewise, while it will be in his hands, I know that it will be of benefit also to his friends . . . an intellectual benefit to them as well as to others like them, by most of the things written in it.<sup>28</sup>

The master's unambiguous praise of Rabbi Sa'adyah is surely related to the fact that he alone was not deterred by some events that had caused his friends to leave. Abulafia continues:

I know that without [the occurrence of] those events [related] to the fantasies that I saw in my first visions, which have, God be praised, already passed, those above-mentioned students would not have separated from me. But those fantasies, which were the reasons for their departure and their distancing from me, are the very divine reasons that have caused me to stand as I am and to withstand the ordeals.<sup>29</sup>

Abulafia is clearly sensitive to the desertion of his Sicilian students. He stoically accepts their temporary disengagement but assumes that his devoted follower, Rabbi Sa'adyah, will impart to them the content of the book that he, Abulafia, has written. Nourishing this patient attitude was his understanding that a certain event may appear in a different light to a person who experiences it internally than it appears to others. I assume that Abulafia was referring to the consequences of his revelations: whereas he was encouraged by the revelations, the students were apparently frightened. This calm attitude toward the departure of his students apparently had a positive result: three years later, in the introduction to his commentary on the Bible, Abulafia again mentions R. Abraham ben Shalom and R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah, together with R. Sa'adyah Sigilmasi, as being among those who accept his leadership.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, he dedicated one of his most important books, *Sefer 'Or ha-Sekhel*, to R. Abraham and to R. Nathan the Wise.<sup>31</sup> In the

same year, 1289, Abulafia dedicated another of his books, *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, to a certain R. Jacob ben Abraham. It therefore follows that Abulafia had been able to reestablish good relations with at least three of his students. Moreover, in 1287 we learn of another student who is not mentioned up to that point, nor at any time afterward. I am referring to Rabbi Shlomo ben Moshe ha-Kohen from the Galilee. To him Abulafia dedicated his commentary on the priestly blessing, *Sefer Shomer Mitzvah*.<sup>32</sup> Thus we may conclude that after a certain crisis, apparently provoked by strange events connected to his ecstatic experiences, Abulafia was able to attract again some of his former students. It seems that all of them were living in Messina, and the fact that he dedicated almost all of the books he wrote in Sicily to these students indicates that he spent most of the period 1280–1291 in Messina.

Nonetheless, it seems that he also established some sort of relationship with some of the Jewish inhabitants of Palermo. In 1289 he mentions Rabbi 'Ahituv ben Yitzhaq and Rabbi David his brother, Rabbi Shlomo ben Rabbi David, and Rabbi Shlomo he-Hazan ben Rabbi Yakhin.<sup>33</sup> With the exception of R. Shlomo he-Hazan, all the people of Palermo are described as being physicians. According to the same testimony, these people, like his students in Messina, followed his guidance. The “physicians” of Palermo are mentioned only very late during Abulafia's stay in Sicily, probably as late as 1288, and in the same year he dedicated one book to two of his Messina students, whereas no book of Abulafia's that we know of was ever dedicated to a disciple from Palermo. This situation seems rather strange, since all those described as his Palermo students were part of the Jewish upper class, while none of his Messina students is described as playing any role in the Jewish community. This imbalance in the politics of book-dedication reflects, in my opinion, Abulafia's somewhat later acquaintance with the Palermo group. But there may also be another reason for this reticence.

Toward the end of his life, apparently in the last four years, Abulafia was involved in a bitter controversy with the greatest authority on Jewish religious law of Aragonese Jewry, Rabbi Shlomo ben Abraham ibn Adret of Barcelona. This seminal controversy, neglected in the scholarship of Kabbalah, was apparently precipitated by a fierce assault on Abulafia's messianic and prophetic claims, mounted by Ibn Adret in an epistle he sent to a number of people in Palermo.<sup>34</sup> Although there are good reasons to assume that Ibn Adret later wrote to Messina as well,<sup>35</sup> his decision to open his attack on Abulafia with a letter to Palermo may be an indication of Abulafia's weaker influence in that city. In any case, the existence of such an influence seems incontrovertible. This may be learned both from Abulafia's own testimony and from that of Ibn Adret, who indicates that Abulafia had a very dangerous impact on several communities in Sicily.<sup>36</sup> This impact is to be sought on two different levels: Abulafia was a propagandist of his peculiar type



of ecstatic Kabbalah, but also of his claim to be a prophet and messiah. It seems that it was the latter claim that provoked Ibn Adret's fiery response. If further documents should reveal more substantial evidence for Abulafia's influence as a messiah, we would have a better framework for the other messianic documents, which originated in Sicily.

Let me emphasize a particular trait of Abulafia's group of disciples in Messina, which in fact is characteristic of the Jewish culture in Sicily in general. Abulafia, who was an Aragonese Jew, apparently brought with him a French disciple—Rabbi Natronay. In Messina his most devoted follower was Rabbi Sa'adyah Sigilmasi, a North African Jew. For a while Abulafia also had a student from the Galilee,<sup>37</sup> while Rabbi Abraham ben Shalom was originally from Comti, a small island not far from Malta. This collection of individuals testifies to the variety of Abulafia's group—a veritable international school of Jewish mysticism, and perhaps the first one. Abulafia's presence in Sicily transformed the island into more than just the outstanding place for studying ecstatic Kabbalah. Abulafia sent at least two of his kabbalistic writings from Sicily to Spain: one letter to Ibn Adret's colleague in Barcelona, Rabbi Yehudah Salmon,<sup>38</sup> and *Sefer ha-'Ot*;<sup>39</sup> an epistle to a certain Rabbi Abraham, who was apparently living in Malta or in Comti;<sup>40</sup> and one of his books, *Sefer Shomer Mitzvah*, dedicated to Rabbi Shlomo ha-Kohen, who took it with him when he left Sicily.<sup>41</sup> Sicily, and more precisely Messina, thus became a center for the dissemination of a distinctive type of Kabbalah to other regions of the Mediterranean. This dissemination has much to do with the exoteric vision of Kabbalah embraced by Abulafia, who asserted explicitly that “despite the fact that I know that there are many Kabbalists who are not perfect, thinking as they are that their perfection consists in not revealing a secret issue, I shall care neither about their thought nor about their blaming me because of the disclosure, since my view on this is very different from, and even opposite to, theirs.”<sup>42</sup>

Immediately afterward Abulafia “discloses” the view that the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, the Account of the Chariot, which is one of the most important esoteric topics in Jewish mysticism, should be understood neither as a visionary experience, as in the first chapter of Ezekiel, nor as an allegory for metaphysics, as in Maimonides, but as a matter of a combination of letters of the divine names, namely as a technique of interpretation, and perhaps also as a mystical technique. The more exoteric propensity, as expressed here in such explicit terms, would remain a major characteristic of Kabbalah in Italy.

As mentioned above, R. Shlomo ibn Adret made great efforts to counteract Abulafia's influence in Sicily. In response the latter distanced himself from theological Kabbalah, including its specific formulation in Nahmanides' and thus Ibn Adret's school, namely that the ten sefirot constitute the very essence of the

divine. Abulafia contended that this was a view worse than the Christian trinitarian belief, as it assumed the existence of a more complex plurality in the divine realm.<sup>43</sup> The sharp exchange between the two Kabbalists is emblematic of the more general schism between ecstatic Kabbalah, which remained influential in Italy, Byzantium, and the land of Israel, and theosophical Kabbalah in Spain. Spanish Kabbalists were also much more inclined to an esoteric approach to Kabbalah, an approach rejected by Abulafia and his students. The fact that Abulafia dedicated most of his books to Sicilian Jews may account for the preservation of many of these books—some, like *Sefer 'Or ha-Sekhel*, in quite a number of manuscripts. Whether Abulafia was able to establish a school that continued the study of his particular kind of Kabbalah is a question that cannot be answered conclusively. What is more important is that some of his writings were available at the end of the fifteenth century, and were interesting enough to attract the attention of several authors who were instrumental in the emergence of Christian Kabbalah. It seems that the role of Sicily in the transmission of Abulafia's Kabbalah may be greater than that of a mere repository of kabbalistic manuscripts. The fact that a convert to Christianity, Paulus de Heredia, who came from Spain to Sicily, quotes Abulafia explicitly cannot be explained by his knowledge of Kabbalah while in Spain.<sup>44</sup> Because of Abulafia's stay on the island, it became a center of his Kabbalah in his lifetime and for two centuries afterward.

# 4

## ECSTATIC KABBALAH AS AN EXPERIENTIAL LORE

### 1. ON ABULAFIA'S MYSTICAL TECHNIQUES

The nature of Kabbalah is a matter of dispute among scholars. Focusing their attention on theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, a preeminently Spanish type of Kabbalah, some modern scholars have pointed out the “casuistical” nature of Kabbalah as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Part of this evaluation has to do with the marginalization of Abulafia’s Kabbalah in the scholarship after the mid-1950s, despite Gershom Scholem’s characterization of ecstatic Kabbalah as a major trend.<sup>2</sup> This marginalization is part of a larger phenomenon that can be described as a more theological approach to Kabbalah, which was conceived of more as a speculative system than as a full-fledged form of mysticism. This trend especially affected the writings of Abulafia, some of which were dedicated to describing mystical techniques.<sup>3</sup>

In ancient Jewish mysticism, the Heikhalot literature, there were already articulated forms of mystical techniques, intended to enable the mystical ascent of the soul to the supernal Chariot, the *Merkavah*. They included recitations of divine names and hymns, which apparently induced a peculiar state of consciousness. Some of these elements were still discernible among the Ashkenazi Hasidic masters of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, who were also interested in ecstatic experiences. However, elaborated descriptions of mystical paths seem to have been an innovation by Abulafia, who included some older elements found in the Ashkenazi texts he studied, with some details whose origins are still obscure. Abulafia proposed several mystical techniques, which differed from one another in several substantial details. In general we may describe his technique as including a basic element of reciting letters of the divine names in an isolated room<sup>4</sup> while in a state of mental concentration.<sup>5</sup> So, for example, we read in one of his epistles: “whoever wants to come into the Temple and enter to its inmost part has to sanctify himself by the sanctification of the high priest and to study and teach and keep and do, until he is perfect in his ethical and intellectual attributes, and then he should seclude himself<sup>6</sup> in order to receive the prophetic influx from the mouth of the Power [*Gevurah*].”<sup>7</sup> Isolation is a necessary preparation for the practice of recitation of the divine names. Recitation is to be performed in accordance with certain rules, and the mystic is required to intone the permutations of letters according to the tonality indicated by the vowels of the permuted consonants. At the same time the mystic uses a pattern of breathing reminiscent of that used by Hindu Yoga; some of Abulafia’s handbooks explain movements of the head and hands in detail. In one of these handbooks we find the following recommendations:

Direct your face toward the Name, which is mentioned, and sit as though a man is standing before you and waiting for you to speak with Him, and He is ready to answer you concerning whatever you may ask him, and you say, “Speak,” and he answers. . . . And begin then to pronounce, and recite first “the head of the head” [namely the first combination of letters], drawing out the breath and at great ease; and afterward go back as if the one standing opposite you is answering you, and you yourself answer, changing your voice, so that the answer not be similar to the question. And do not extend the answer at all, but say it easily and calmly, and in response recite one letter of the Name as it actually is.<sup>8</sup>

The recitation of the divine name is to be done in a melodious manner, as we learn already from one of the sources of Abulafia’s mystical techniques, the Ashkenazi Hasidim. R. Eleazar of Worms writes: “And the prophet was singing songs to the Holy One, blessed be He, and out of the joy of the commandment<sup>9</sup> the

speech was coming, as it is said: 'I rejoice at thy word' [Psalms 119:162]."<sup>10</sup> Singing songs to God is by no means an extraordinary concept in Judaism.<sup>11</sup> However, the song mentioned here deals with producing a kind of joy that induces the emergence of prophetic speech, perhaps reflecting a stand closer to some midrashic images, in which prophets are described as those "who were like an instrument full of speech."<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, when resorting to the same talmudic passage in Sabbath, Rabbi Eleazar describes the enhancing of the glory that is revealed to the prophets who praise God.<sup>13</sup> These views are similar to Abulafia's. Here is how he describes "prophecy," a term that is often used in his writings to characterize an ecstatic experience:

The proof that song indicates the degree of prophecy is that it is the way of song to make the heart happy by means of tunes, as it is said: "And when the minstrel played, the spirit of the Lord came upon him" [2 Kings 3:15], for prophecy does not dwell in him [unless there is] joy.<sup>14</sup> This was already hinted at in two words appearing at the end of Ecclesiastes [12:13], where it is said: "The end of the matter, all being heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Join *yare'* [fear] with *shamar* [keep], and you find *shir 'amar* [say a song]. There is a hint [of this] in "and they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them" [Numbers 6:27].<sup>15</sup>

The last part of this passage is based upon the gematria of 751, by which *yare' shamar* = *shir 'amar* = 'et shemi (my name). Abulafia equates the two verbs, which denote awe and obedience, with recitation of the song on the one hand and with the divine name on the other. Blessing stands here for the descent of prophecy, in a manner that differs from the blessing in theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah. The nexus between the song, *shirah*, and prophecy is the culmination of a much longer discussion, which portrays the Song of Songs as Solomon's last and most sublime composition, and points to the spiritual attainment of the author and to the mystical death by a kiss.<sup>16</sup> In general, Abulafia assumes that the biblical songs, such as the songs of Moses and Deborah, point to metaphysical topics and to the intellectual human faculty.<sup>17</sup> This view seems to be related to a theory found in an anonymous commentary on the Jewish liturgy, contemporary with Abulafia, to the effect that the secret of the Song of Songs is the secret of the combination of letters, a central technique in Abulafia's Kabbalah.<sup>18</sup>

It seems that the psychological processes that are characteristic of Abulafia's techniques are different from parallel processes used in other forms of mysticism that are similar in some respects to ecstatic Kabbalah. In lieu of attaining tranquilization of the mind by fixing the mental processes on a static point, Abulafia

proposed contemplation of an object that is changing all the time. In his system, the release of the consciousness from alien thoughts that may disturb the unitive or revelatory experiences is obtained by an overactivation of the mental faculty, not by its fixation.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. FEELINGS: PLEASURE AND DEATH

In Abulafia's writings and those of his followers, there are several descriptions of bodily feeling during the mystical experience. So, for example, we learn in one of his first books that "I see that unto Him [God], the quintessence of all experience arrives as there comes from Him all the wisdom of logic [and] to every intellectual soul [comes] the pleasure of vision."<sup>20</sup> Pleasure recurs in a much more elaborated manner in a book composed in Messina in 1285–86: "And you shall feel in yourself an additional spirit arousing you and passing over your entire body and causing you pleasure, and it shall seem to you as if balm has been placed upon you, from your head to your feet, one or more times, and you shall rejoice and enjoy it very much, with gladness and trembling: gladness to your soul and trembling of your body, like one who rides rapidly on a horse, who is happy and joyful, while the horse trembles beneath him."<sup>21</sup>

Abulafia conceives physical pleasure as an appropriate feeling and does not hesitate to express this feeling. He does not suggest anywhere that this image is an inappropriate one to its subject; on this point, Abulafia departs radically from Maimonides, who, following Aristotle, sees the apprehension of the divine as the highest goal of human activity; the joy that accompanies it is only a side effect of this activity.<sup>22</sup> Abandoning Maimonides in this respect, Abulafia crystallized an approach, apparently based upon personal experience, that there is an additional stage to the acquisition of intellectual perfection—namely, that of the pleasure deriving from the mystical experience.

Maimonides avoided mentioning pleasure as a symptom of a sublime experience; this reticence may be part of his more transcendental theology, which separates intellect from matter. His effort to push God beyond the range, though not beyond the scope, of human understanding in order to safeguard His utmost purity and spirituality exacted a price in the realms of both epistemology and feeling: the human intellect, connected as it is with matter, cannot experience the divine nature, though He is purely intellectual. It was only in the moment of death that the few elite, Moses and the patriarchs, were able to attain the kiss of bliss, that is, an experience of God, as we learn from the *Guide of the Perplexed*.<sup>23</sup> Transcendence has its sublime moments, for which the philosopher often pays in the form of a very modest noetic attainment of the absolute intellectual realm. Thus the divine unitive experiences were not conceived as possible in his system,

and it may well be that Maimonides was deliberately resistant to the Neoplatonic views on the cleaving of the soul to God and to the Averroistic unitive noetics.<sup>24</sup> Abulafia, however, assumes that the “death by a kiss” of the patriarchs, an experience attested in hoary antiquity, should be seen in a much more exemplary and relevant way. He asserts that “whoever’s soul is separated from him at the time of pronouncing [the divine name] will die by a kiss.”<sup>25</sup> The prerogative of the few *perfecti* in the past, according to the view of Maimonides, was turned into the immediate achievement of the extreme mystics, available in the present. The secrets of the *Guide of the Perplexed* are described as redemptive matters: “all the secrets to which he pays attention to understand them, by a [concentrated] speculation, and to understand the intention intended by them, and ‘he will be redeemed’ [Leviticus 25:31].”<sup>26</sup>

Abulafia construes the verse in Hebrew, *Ge’ulah tihieh lo*, in his own particular way: redemption will be attained by means of the thirty-six secrets, hinted at by the Hebrew letters *lo*, meaning “him,” which amount in gematria to 36. Here the nexus between secrets and redemption is explicit. A similar position can also be found in his first commentary on these secrets, *Sefer ha-Ge’ulah*, where he identifies the “life of the soul” with the “life of the next world,” referring to *hasagah*, comprehension.<sup>27</sup> This view occurs also in his second commentary on the *Guide*, titled *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*,<sup>28</sup> and it should be understood in a noneschatological framework: the next world is not the realm of existence after death, but the ecstatic experience in this world, as we learn from one of his most important books, *Hayyei ha-’Olam ha-Ba’* (The Life of the Next World). We witness here an important instance of the spiritualization of traditional eschatological terminology, interpreted in terms of imminent individual salvation, a phenomenon well known in the history of mysticism, as in Sufism for example. In this context, another observation of Abulafia’s may be relevant: he states that the number of chapters of the *Guide* is 177, a number that is equivalent to the numerical value of *Gan ‘Eden*, namely Paradise.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. THE DIALOGUE WITH THE “ANGEL”

As we have already seen above in the quotation from *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, when practicing the mystical technique the mystic is to expect someone to speak with him. Indeed, an angelic revelation in the form of a man is described several times in Abulafia’s writings. So, for example, we read in his untitled book:

“I am the angel of the God of the hosts, so and so, and it is the secret of *Gan ‘Eden* that amounts to three names, YHWH ‘Adonai ‘Elohim, whose vowels are the ‘prince of *Gan ‘Eden*’” . . . and he will tell him: “I am the tree of life, the Garden in Eden from the East.” And he will understand that God has sent to

him His angel in order to help him by instruction, and to accustom him in the strong love of the Creator, by announcing to him the truth of the essence of the tree of life that is within the Garden, and he is the “prince of Gan ‘Eden.”<sup>30</sup>

We may assume that this angel is no other than Gabriel: “The angel who advises you of the secret of God is named Gabriel, and he speaks from the first verse of the holy name mentioned by you, and he shows you the wonders of prophecy, for that is the secret of ‘In a vision I will make myself known to him, in a dream I will speak to him’ [Numbers 12:6], for ‘vision,’ which is the secret of the verse, equals Gabriel, and ‘dream,’ whose secret [namely numerical valence] is ‘Edo, is Enoch.”<sup>31</sup> Here one finds the gematria for *Gavriel* = 246 = *pasuq* (verse) = *mar’eh* (vision) = *medabber* (speaks), and these expressions allude to the cosmic Agent Intellect. Consequently, in the prophetic vision the mystic sees “the figure of a human” by means of the Agent Intellect, a revelation accompanied by speech. We infer the connection between this figure, which is the reason for the response, and the person speaking from Abulafia’s own words, who describes this situation as an answer given by man to himself. It follows that we may reasonably assume that the human form is no more than a projection of the soul or intellect of the mystic, who carries on a dialogue with it at the time of pronunciation.

Later in his *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’* Abulafia describes a detail of the technique, which has an implication for the dialogic situation: “Hold your head evenly, as if it were on the balance pans of a scale, in the manner in which you would speak with a man who was as tall as yourself, evenly, face to face.”<sup>32</sup> The ontic status of this figure may be inferred from Abulafia’s earlier comments in the same work: “We, the community of Israel, the congregation of the Lord, know in truth that God, may He be praised, is neither a body nor a power within the body, nor will He ever be corporealized. But at the time that the prophet prophesies, his abundance creates a corporeal intermediary, which is the angel.”<sup>33</sup> What is the psychological mechanism that brings about this dialogical vision? According to his book *‘Or ha-Sekhel*, “because man is composed of many powers, it is necessary that he see the influx in his intellect, and that vision is called by the name Intellectual Apprehension. And the influx will further jump to the imagination, and require that the imagination apprehend that which is in its nature to apprehend, and see in the image of corporeality imagined as spirituality combined with it; and that force will be called Man or Angel or the like.”<sup>34</sup>

In a later passage the intellect, namely the “inner speech,” is described as reflecting itself within the imagination just as the soul sees itself within the lower forms, in what seems to be an appropriation of a Neoplatonic stand: “For every inner speech is none other than a picture alone, and that is the picture which is



common to the intellect and the imagination. Therefore, when the soul sees the forms which are below it, it immediately sees itself depicted therein.”<sup>35</sup>

Some form of duality is implied here; the higher entity, namely the intellect, reveals itself within the lower, the imagination, and this seems to be another form of explaining the nature of prophecy.

#### 4. *DEVEQUT*: THE MYSTICAL IDEAL OF ECSTATIC KABBALAH

Beginning in the early thirteenth century, Kabbalah concerned itself with the ideal of cleaving to the various divine manifestations, the sefirot, as part of the mystical performance of the commandments. In the second half of the century, however, the Spanish Kabbalists became less and less interested in this ideal, emphasizing instead the paramount importance of the theurgical performance of the commandments as a mystical way to the divine. With Abulafia, the situation was fundamentally different: he considered the commandments as allegories for the spiritual processes of the mystic, rather than as techniques to attain an altered state of consciousness. Whereas the nomian, halakhic way of life was considered the main mystical avenue open to all the Jews, the ecstatic Kabbalah of Abulafia and his followers was grounded in anomian mystical techniques, whose ultimate purpose was to attain a state of union with the divine, an interpretation of the biblical imperative to cleave to God.<sup>36</sup> This imperative was reinterpreted by means of Aristotelian epistemology as pointing to the unitive state of the intellect and the intelligibles during the act of intellection. Since the intelligible of the mystic is, according to Abulafia, the cosmic active intellect, or God as an intelligizing entity, intelligizing God is tantamount to becoming identical with Him at the time of intellection. This mystical understanding of Aristotle influenced the later formulations of the states of *unio mystica* as elaborated in the Safedian and Hasidic Polish masters. So, for example, we learn from one of Abulafia's commentaries on his prophetic writings:

just as his Master<sup>37</sup> who is detached from all matter is called the Knowledge, the Knower, and the Known, all at the same time, since all three are one in Him, so shall he, the exalted man, the master of the exalted Name, be called intellect, while he is actually knowing; then he is also “the known” like his Master, and then there is no difference between them, except that his Master has His supreme rank by His own right and not derived from other creatures, while he is elevated to his rank by the mediation of the creatures.<sup>38</sup>

This is a fine example of an expression that can refer to an experience of *unio mystica*. Let me adduce now another passage on *devequt*. In the 1280s, probably under the influence of Abulafian thought, R. Joseph Gikatilla formulated a view that is important for the subsequent development of the ideal of *devequt* in Polish

Hasidism: “the letters of the Tetragrammaton, blessed be He, are all of them intellectual, not sensuous letters, and they point to an existence and to a lasting entity, and to every entity in the world, and this is the secret meaning of ‘and thou who cleave to the Lord, your God, shall be alive today’ [Deuteronomy 4:4], namely that those who cleave to the letters of the Tetragrammaton exist and last forever.”<sup>39</sup>

Abulafia also assumes that the human intellect can become one entity with the divine mind, an experience that could be designated as mystical union. In my opinion this development in Abulafia’s thought, in comparison with Maimonides’ view, can be explained both by acquaintance with Averroistic views concerning the possibility of union between the human and the cosmic intellect, which had been accepted by his teacher in matters of philosophy, R. Hillel of Verona; and by the mystical experiences Abulafia apparently underwent, which he had understood as pointing to union with God. So, for example, he argues in one of his commentaries on the *Guide of the Perplexed* that the actualization of one’s intellect will transform it into the entity that caused this process, namely the Agent Intellect, and that the two will become “one inseparable entity during the time of that act.”<sup>40</sup>

## 5. LINGUISTIC AND SALVIFIC PROPHECY

Unlike all the thirteenth-century Kabbalists in Spain, Abulafia explicitly understood the ultimate goal of his Kabbalah as an attainment of the experience of prophecy conceived as ecstasy, and consequently built a whole kabbalistic system to accomplish this. The occurrence of a technique and an experience of ecstasy to be achieved by that technique can be described as an “ecstatic model,” which involves not only a confession regarding an experience that someone has had, but also more detailed instructions about how to achieve a certain ideal. When this model stands at the center of a certain literature, and does not occur as just an interpretive stand or an isolated discussion, we may speak about ecstatic Kabbalah or an ecstatic literature. So, for example, we read that “the purpose that is intended by the ways of Kabbalah is the reception of the prophetic, divine, and intellectual influx from God, blessed be He, by means of the Agent Intellect, and the causing of the descent and the blessing by means of the [divine] name upon the individual and upon the community.”<sup>41</sup> This hypervaluation of the intellect is coupled, as we shall see below, with a simultaneous hypervaluation of speech; language is both a domain of contemplation, higher than nature, and a technique for attaining a mystical experience, which has noetic features. In other words, the overactivation of the intellect and its merging with God are achieved by an overactivation of language, utilized as a component in a mystical technique. The two extremes meet, and both are characteristic of Abulafia’s strong propensity for actualization of some of Maimonides’ earlier spiritual ideals. This view is expressed at the very

beginning of *Sitrei Torah*, where Abulafia characterizes the *Guide* as “concerned with the explanation of homologies and the interpretation of prophetic parables.” His own commentary is intended to deal with “religious wisdom, namely the interpretation of the rationale for the life of the rational soul, and the interpretation of the worship of God through love. Even if the subject of each of them [the two books] is unique in itself, everything goes to the same place.”<sup>42</sup>

In lieu of Maimonides’ hermeneutical project, which is focused on natural and metaphysical frameworks, Abulafia proposes a spiritual interpretation of the Bible, not only pointing to the true meaning of the Bible, and the proper theology, but also and more eminently issuing a pressing call for an intense spiritual life. The intensification of this spiritual life for Abulafia involves an ecstatic path conceived as inducing prophetic experiences of messianic status:

It is known that the truth of the attainment of reality is the comprehension of the divine name, and by its means he will comprehend the commandments, and they point to the Agent Intellect,<sup>43</sup> because the comprehension of the Agent Intellect is similar to a candle, which is a “river”<sup>44</sup> that goes out of ‘Eden. . . be careful with the wisdom that emerges from the combination found in the letters [available] to whoever knows how to combine them, because this is the goal of the wisdom of the man who understands the divine name . . . because the comprehension of the Agent Intellect, found within the 22 holy letters, comprises all the positive and negative commandments, and it is the candle that illumines to every man and is “the river that goes out of ‘Eden to water the Garden” [Genesis 2:10], and it shows that within the 22 letters the comprehension of the name is found, and it is, in its entirety, [emerging] out of the combinations of letters, and you will find truly that out of the combination of letters, the known, the knower, and knowledge [are one] . . . and whoever comprehends the Agent Intellect gains the life of the world to come and belongs to the secret of the angels of the living God.<sup>45</sup>

The river emerging from Eden and watering the Garden is, quite plausibly, the intellectual flow that descends from the Agent Intellect, which is separated from matter and is collected by the human intellect. This process is tantamount to the phenomenon of prophecy, which reflects, following Maimonides, the Aristotelian noetic process of representation of the intellectual by means of the imaginative capacity, and the addition of another Aristotelian view, which assumes the identity between the knower, the known, and knowledge in the moment of intellection. Thus, the Garden is envisioned as the human intellect or person, and Eden as the separated Intellect. The latter is conceived, following medieval Aristotelian

cosmology, as being available always to those who know, who in the system of Abulafia are those who use the technique of combining letters, or the divine names. This technique is conceived as inducing a transformation that changes the human into an angelic being, namely into an intellectual entity.<sup>46</sup> Here we have the explication of the function of language and divine names as means of attaining union with the Agent Intellect.

The main concern of Abulafian soteriology is less the need to attenuate the pernicious effects of the external exile, as Maimonides' reconstruction aspires to, and much more the attempt to obliterate the inner exile. In fact the two approaches should be seen not as drastically different but, at least insofar as Abulafia's views are concerned, as building upon the attainment of Maimonides: the philosopher has provided the framework, a political *Weltbild*, a philosophy of nature and a Neo-Aristotelian metaphysics punctuated by some Platonic stands, and a psychology, which serve as starting points for an intensification of the religious life, which will culminate in a mystical experience. As Abulafia explains in his *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, this intensification is strongly related to the manipulation of language: "the true essence of prophecy, its cause, is the 'word' that reaches the prophet from God by means of the 'perfect language' that subsumes the seventy languages."<sup>47</sup> The "word" plays the role of the overflow in Maimonides' definition of prophecy, the perfect language being none other than Maimonides' Agent Intellect, and this is the case also insofar as the seventy languages are concerned. It is this emphasis upon the importance of language and of linguistic imagery that is unique to Abulafia as an interpreter of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*. Some Greek forms of ontology and psychology, reverberating in the Middle Ages, have been translated into linguistic terms. The process of transformation of intellection into language, which took place according to Maimonides at the level of the intrahuman psychology, when the imagination translates abstract concepts into linguistic units, takes place in Abulafia at the very source of the intellectual realm, at least insofar as the Agent Intellect is concerned:

You should know that speech alone is not the intellect, but it is the true faculty of the soul. And in the soul there is no natural faculty that is higher than the soul, because the separate intellect emanates upon it its intellect, just as the sun emanates light upon the eye. Speech is a faculty in the soul similar to the eye in relation to the sun, which generates light upon it. And the light of the eye is the very light of the sun, and not something different from it. Likewise, the intellect of the soul is the very emanation of the Agent Intellect, not something different from it. And speech, as conceptualized<sup>48</sup> in the intellect, and the imaginative faculty and the appetitive faculty and the

sensitive, are ruled by it . . . the intellect commands speech, and speech commands the appetitive [faculty], and the appetitive the imagination, and the imagination the senses, and the senses move in order to fulfill the command of the intellect.<sup>49</sup>

Speech is introduced here as a spiritual faculty, not only as a reproduction of intellectual matters on a corporeal key. Let me turn now to the salvific aspects of the mystical experience. According to Abulafia in *Sefer ha-'Ot*: "The Holy God awakens [heqitz] the hearts of the sleepers and revives the dead by instilling a new spirit in them, so that they will be resurrected. And whoever will not awaken from his sleep and who will not be awakened by his [higher] soul, he will sleep an eternal sleep and will not come to life."<sup>50</sup> Redemption is therefore not only the arrival of the time of the end but also, and perhaps even more eminently, the arousal of the soul of man to a spiritual life. This mystical arousal is described here as conditioned by the advent of the end of time, but it affects the spirit rather than the body of man. In a rather calculated manner, Abulafia uses expressions related to the resurrection of the dead, namely the resurrection of the bodies, which is interpreted allegorically as pointing to the arousal of the soul. Let me adduce here a statement from an anonymous kabbalistic writing authored either by Abulafia or by one of his disciples, which reflects this extreme emphasis on spiritualization: "This points to the knowledge of the end [qetz] and the end [qetz] of knowledge, namely to the telos of man, because he is created in the image of God."<sup>51</sup> The end is a matter not of the corporeal existence or revival postmortem, but solely of the life of the intellect.

A similar stand is hinted at in 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz, where Abulafia states that "the end of the spirit is spirit," namely that the telos of the spirit of man is the spirit of God.<sup>52</sup> The knowledge of the end is understood as the telos of human knowledge, or of the spirit of man, which is either an imitation of God, as man was created in His image, or stems from God, as is the case of the human spirit. Again, the term *qetz* has been understood allegorically as the telos, which points to the spiritual vision of man, conceived of, implicitly, as more important than the knowledge of the end, namely apocalyptic knowledge.

Abulafia's view of prophecy as the outcome of using mystical techniques had an influence on early Hasidism. In his eclectic commentary on the Pentateuch, 'Or ha-Ganuz le-Tzaddiqim, R. Aharon ha-Kohen Perlov of Apta, an important Hasidic author, wrote at the end of the eighteenth century:

The issue of prophecy is [as follows]: it is impossible, by and large, to prophesy suddenly, without a certain preparation and holiness; but if the person who wants to prepare himself for [the state of] prophecy sanctifies and purifies himself and concentrates mentally and utterly separates himself from the

delights of this world, and serves the sages, [including] his rabbi, the prophet—and the disciples who follow the way of prophecy<sup>53</sup> are called the sons of the prophets—and when his rabbi, [who is] the prophet, understands that this disciple is already prepared for [the state of] prophecy, then his rabbi gives him the topic of the recitations of the holy names, which are keys to the supernal gate.<sup>54</sup>

The terminological and conceptual correspondences between Abulafia's thought and this text are remarkable; prophecy is an experience that can be achieved in the present time, by specific techniques taught by a master, who is described as a prophet, to his disciple. The most important element of the technique, besides the cathartic preparations, is the pronunciation of divine names. The topic of prophecy recurs in *'Or ha-Ganuz le-Tzaddiqim* several times, where the degree of prophecy is described as the divestment of corporeality.<sup>55</sup> The divine spirit too is described as a level that can be reached in the present time, as is evident in the same author's *Sefer Keter Nehora'*. The affinities between the Hasidic master and Abulafia's mystical ideals are significant, pointing to the relevance of the latter's Kabbalah late in the eighteenth century.

# 5

## ABRAHAM ABULAFIA'S HERMENEUTICS

### 1. A HERMENEUTICAL GENERATION

One of Abulafia's most original contributions to Jewish mysticism was his innovative and complex hermeneutical system. In Spain his contemporaries were greatly interested in establishing the details of exegetical techniques for decoding the Bible, and it was during this time that the fourfold scheme known as *Pardes* emerged. Whereas in the Song of Songs *pardes* means "orchard," here it was used as an acronym to refer to four senses of the Hebrew Bible: *Peshat* (plain sense), *Remez* (allegorical sense), *Derash* (homiletic sense), and *Sod* (secret sense).<sup>1</sup> This hermeneutical system, unlike Abulafia's more complex one, became widespread in Kabbalah. But different though the Spanish Kabbalists' symbolic techniques

were from Abulafia's, their originators have something in common: being much less concerned with halakhic matters than Nahmanides and most of his followers were, they belong to what I propose calling innovative Kabbalah, with an approach that was open to developments rather than concerned with preserving ancient traditions. In exploring exegetical techniques, all these kabbalistic authors active between 1270 and 1295 concerned themselves with questions related to both the infinity of the sacred text and the status of the interpreter.

Abulafia did not share the religious outlook of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists and was not concerned with a symbolic approach. He turned to a much more linguistically oriented exegesis, deconstructing the biblical text as part of an attempt to encounter the divine. He developed and articulated a sevenfold exegetical technique that combined the more classical Jewish methods of interpretation, philosophical allegory, and a variety of deconstructive devices. Since I have fully described this sevenfold scheme elsewhere, I shall briefly survey here only the more "advanced" exegetical techniques against their proper background in early Jewish mystical literature.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. INTERPRETIVE ALLEGORY AND THE "PATH OF THE NAMES"

In the writings of Abraham Abulafia and some of his followers, a famous passage from Nahmanides' introduction to his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, about the biblical text as a continuum of divine names, is quoted several times, always in positive terms. Nahmanides differentiated between this continuum of names, as a more sublime though lost path, and the path of the commandments, namely the biblical text as available today. Abulafia, however, attempted to convert this principle into a practical approach to the biblical text. So, for example, he conceived the divine name of forty-two letters as derived from the first forty-two letters of Genesis,<sup>3</sup> advancing this "fact" as part of the view that "the entire Torah consists of divine names of the Holy One, blessed be He, and this is an intelligible proof for a Kabbalist."<sup>4</sup> Although Abulafia does not explicitly mention Nahmanides' principle here, his formulation is identical with that of the Geronese Kabbalist. However, whereas Nahmanides makes no claim that the way in which he describes the division of the words of the first verse is indeed the original reading according to the "path of the names," but restricts himself to saying that it is no more than a guess, Abulafia regards the name of forty-two as already existing in magical and mystical texts as a divine name. What Nahmanides conceived of as being lost, at least in part, Abulafia claimed to have retrieved.

Although Nahmanides was acquainted with techniques involving allegorical interpretation, he was reticent about applying them;<sup>5</sup> in general his approach was different from Maimonides' naturalistic exegesis. Abulafia combined Maimonidean



allegorical exegesis with the Nahmanidean theory, namely the allegorical path with the path of the names. It is clear that he was also acquainted with exegetical elements independent of these two thinkers, such as those found in Abraham ibn Ezra's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, where some allegories are found; the anonymous book of magic *Shimmushei Torah*, written in the Middle Ages; and Hasidei Ashkenaz views, in which divine names played an important role in both thought and magical praxis.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, it is obvious from Abulafia's specific formulations that Maimonides and Nahmanides formed the cornerstones of his approach to the "secrets of the Torah."<sup>7</sup> In a passage from his *Commentary on the Pentateuch* he conjoins their approaches to produce a hierarchy:

This knowledge should be taken by the righteous from the Torah according to its plain sense, in order to perfect his righteousness; but if he wants to become a pious man, he should approach it by means of the path of the philosophical-esoteric one. However, if he desires to prophesy, he must approach it according to the "path of the names," which is the esoteric path, received from the divine intellect. . . . If you want to be righteous alone, it will suffice that you follow the paths of the Torah, on the path of its plain form. If you want to be pious alone, it will suffice that you know the secrets of the Torah in the manner of the men of inquiry, together with being righteous. However, if you want to be a prophet, it will suffice that you follow the path of the prophets, whose path was to combine the letters of the entire Torah and to approach it by the path of the holy names, from its beginning to the end, as it reached us in a true Kabbalah regarding it [the path] that "the entire Torah consists of the names of the Holy One, blessed be He," together with being perfect in the first two paths.<sup>8</sup>

I take the reading of the Torah on its plain sense as standing for Nahmanides' concept of "the path of the commandments," which according to Abulafia fits the rank of the *tzaddiq*. The last path, defined in terms copied from Nahmanides' introduction to his commentary on the Torah, is the highest one, and although Nahmanides restricted it to Moses alone, for Abulafia it applies not only to all the prophets in the past but also to those who strive to become prophets in the present. The second, philosophical path, the esoteric one, is absent in Nahmanides, but very congruent with the perception of Maimonides in the Middle Ages as an esoteric philosopher. What is important in the very last sentence is the cumulative and the integrative nature of the prophetic path: in order to become a prophet, someone must be both an accomplished righteous and a pious man, namely a philosopher. Philosophical understanding of the Torah, achieved by allegory, is not a spiritual stage to be transcended by the aspirants to prophecy, but an

approach to be maintained even when traveling the path of the prophets. As indicated in this passage, philosophical understanding of the Torah culminates in attaining metaphysical knowledge. It represents the Maimonidean moment of the purified understanding of God, which in Abulafia is a condition for union with Him or for receiving a message from Him. Between the regular religious performance of the righteous and mystical moments of prophecy, namely ecstasy, the contemplative ideal, which involves the allegorical understanding of the Bible, was given a secure place.

Abulafia's insertion of interpretive allegory between Nahmanides' conservative path of the commandments and the evasive path of the names is far from a merely mechanical achievement: as we shall see below, the allegorical approach did not always remain a separate technique, but was sometimes combined with the path of the names. However, what seems to be more important is that it illuminated Abulafia's perception of Nahmanides' paths. So, for example, Abulafia's attitude to the meaning of the commandments is significantly different from that of the Geronese master, and much closer to a Maimonidean intellectualist understanding of the role of Jewish ritual. No less interesting is the fact that philosophical esotericism thus influenced the other form of Jewish esotericism: the linguistic one.

As proposed above, for Abulafia allegorical understanding of the Torah precedes prophetic "reading" and is necessary for its attainment. How did the ecstatic Kabbalist understand the relationship between the two exegetical techniques? According to a statement in Abulafia's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, "when they [the words of a biblical verse] are taken within the philosophical approach, they become related to each other in a general manner, though not in all particulars, whereas according to the methods of Kabbalah not one letter is left without being used."<sup>9</sup> The move from allegorical to kabbalistic techniques of interpretation involves, according to Abulafia, a gain in textual understanding; allegory, dealing with broad concepts, involves understanding the relationship between the various elements in a biblical pericope in a general way, which implies that some elements of the text remain beyond the scope of the exegetical allegorical approach. According to Abulafia, only kabbalistic exegesis completely exhausts the plenitude of the text, fully taking into account all textual idiosyncrasies: "not one letter is left without being used."

A hyperliteral<sup>10</sup> approach that inspires Abulafia's kabbalistic exegesis. He regards the letters or the names not as authoritative sources for a certain type of religious behavior, like Nahmanides' "path of the commandments," nor as a magical source, as Nahmanides' understanding of the "path of the names" may have been, but rather as a source of experience. Careful examination of the text, its dissection into its constitutive letters, and their rearrangement to generate new

formulas are, at the same time, an extreme dedication to the text and an opportunity for great creative freedom. The constraint of taking everything in the text into consideration, unlike the allegorical approach, may produce paralyzing moments. Indeed, in the approach adopted in ecstatic Kabbalah, all the letters of the interpreted text must be involved in the new interpretation, but the exegete enjoys great freedom to manipulate the text, so that it is quite possible to find more than one way of construing a “kabbalistic interpretation.” In a passage found later in the same commentary, Abulafia writes:

this topic has been expressed in two pericopes, which have been conflated according to the[ir] plain sense, and commented upon according to the way of wisdom [namely philosophy], with few additions of kabbalistic words; it is necessary indeed to return to this [topic] in order to demonstrate all of this topic also according to the path of the names. However, should we approach this path according to what we have received from it, [as dealing with] the forms of the names and the combinations and gematria and notariqon [acronym], and those like them from the paths of Kabbalah, we would not be able to write all these topics that we have received by this kabbalistic path related to the knowledge of the names, even if all the heavens were parchments, and all the seas ink, and all the reeds pens, and all the beams fingers, and every moment of our days as long as the years of Methuselah. *A fortiori*, there are [kabbalistic] paths that we have not received, and we do not know anything about them.<sup>11</sup>

This rather hyperbolic passage expresses the nature of Kabbalah according to this Kabbalist; it consists of innumerable techniques of interpretation, each of them providing a certain comprehensive and detailed interpretation of the text; this is the reason why even in a kabbalistic commentary on the Torah the kabbalistic exegete is able to offer only some few of the infinite kabbalistic interpretations.<sup>12</sup> The Kabbalah based on divine names is therefore not a forgotten or a fragmentary lore, a closed corpus, but an open field, which is actually expanded by any additional effort of a Kabbalist to understand the details of a text.

All the kabbalistic exegetical techniques mentioned in this passage are intra-textual; they exploit the literal resources of the text without importing conceptualizations that would create a concatenation between the different words of the text, as allegorical exegesis does. Eccentric and radical as these forms of exegesis may be, they nevertheless rely exclusively on the potential inherent in the linguistic fabric of the text. Whereas the contents found in the allegorical approach can be exhausted, the kabbalistic ones are conceived of as inexhaustible. From this point of view Abulafia's approach is closer to the midrashic one, not only in its recurrent

use of statements found in rabbinic sources, but also in its emphasis on intratextuality. Whereas the midrashic, the allegorical, and the kabbalistic-symbolic approaches of the other Kabbalists resort to a certain form of textual narrative transposed onto another set of meanings, because they preserve, in general, the grammatical functions of the words that constitute the biblical narrative, in Abulafia's intratextual approach this effect is far from obvious. Instead there is more reliance on smaller linguistic units, phonemes, detached from external conceptualization, texts, or plots, to reconstruct the text. This innovative reconstruction makes it possible to take into account all the original letters, or their substitutes, as constituents of the fabric of the newly reconstructed text.

So, for example, when dealing with the three angels that revealed themselves to Abraham, Abulafia mentions that their acts are conspicuous from the scriptures, and that the issue of prophecy has been already clarified in Maimonides' *"Guide of the Perplexed"* and other books of wisdom [namely philosophy] in a manner sufficient for those who want to know them, if they will peruse them carefully. And the men of speculation [namely the philosophers] would apply [all] the names of the forefathers<sup>13</sup> to the human intellect, and the rest of the names would refer to the powers beneath it, some closer to it and some further away. They would refer everywhere to the Tetragrammaton and other divine names as designations of the Agent Intellect."<sup>14</sup> The allegoristic interpreters would therefore interpret the proper names, both those of the forefathers and of God, as pointing to various forms of the intellect, both human and cosmic, which is separate from matter. This extratextual interpretation is quite reductive, transforming the particulars into a general terminology derived from Greek philosophy. From this point of view, the allegorist may not be able to give an account of why the intellect, or God, is designated by one biblical term or another. Being part of a universalist approach—after all, the intellects, the human and the cosmic ones as described in philosophical sources, are transliteral and transnational entities—they transcend the peculiar designations found in the scriptural texts.

An even better understanding of the dramas connected to these intellects can be found in the Averroistic treatises on the intellect, which served as sources of inspiration for some of Abulafia's own psychological allegories. The biblical text is understood as drawing its allegorical sense not only from another series of texts, the philosophical ones, but also from texts originally written in another language, in many cases stemming from another culture, and oriented to a much more unified and simplistic axiology. However, what seems to be even more striking in the allegorical approach as described above is the absence of God: His names were allegorized as standing for the Agent Intellect, and the whole spiritual enterprise took the form of an intraintellectual affair, involving the relations

between the human and the separate intellects. In some cases it is quite difficult to distinguish between the human and the separate intellects, and sometimes even between them and God, given the assumption that the realm of the spiritual is continuous. This view, adopted by Abulafia in some discussions, offers a restricted domain of intellectual events as recurring in the variety of biblical stories.

This extreme psychologization is “remedied” by the tremendous emphasis on divine names found in the “path of the names.” Although the allegorist speaks about very important and positive psychological events, he nevertheless deals with a “lower God,” a fact that is transcended by the imposition of the kabbalistic discourse. In other words, ecstatic Kabbalah’s adoption of interpretive allegory perceived itself not as an alternative to the negative approach of the Jewish allegorists, but as a higher form of interpretation that forcefully reintroduced the divine into the spiritual enterprise designated by the Kabbalist as prophecy. In the same context Abulafia offers an example of allegorical interpretation that corroborates his argument:

the men of speculation have determined that the name “Lot” is an allegory for the material intellect and that his two daughters and wife refer to the material realm. And we are instructed that the angels are the advisors of the intellect. They are the straight paths that advise the intellect to be saved from the evil ones, which refer to the limbs [of the body], whose end is to be consumed in sulfur and heavenly fire—this is the full extent of the parable. This is in accord with what they say, that the Torah would not have deemed it important to relate such a matter, even in the event that it actually did occur, for what is the point of such a story for the man of speculation?<sup>15</sup>

The gist of the allegorical approach is to construe a parable, which represents naturalistic events, in order to retrieve the significance of the biblical story. By using an axiology based upon the psychomachia, the inner war, or the great jihad according to the Sufi texts, the allegorist exegete is able to “save” the “embarrassing” canonical text from the semimythological story, and to confer upon it an aura of philosophical significance. Allegory saves the text from its archaic, plain sense by assuming that another meaning should be imposed, which stems from a type of nomenclature alien to the original text. This extratextuality, unlike the midrashic intertextuality, decodes the canonical text by substituting for the archaic or antiquated meaning another one that often violates the original meaning. Abulafia expresses his uneasiness with the plain sense rather convincingly by presenting a typology of the attitude to language among philosophers: “It is conceivable in only one of the three ways: either it is construed in its plain sense, or it may be a parable, or it occurred to Abraham in a dream in the manner of prophecy.”<sup>16</sup>

The alternatives opened by the philosophical approach are different, but the conclusion is the same: either the plain sense is preserved, but then the philosopher has nothing to learn from such an obsolete story; or it did not happen in the historical sense, and the canonical text is to be explored for deeper meanings. This is done either by allegorical interpretation, in the manner we have already seen above, by transforming the text into a veiled philosophical discourse, which should be decoded, or by relegating the story to the realm of prophecy or prophetic dreams. In any case, the Bible on its plain sense is philosophically insignificant. Let me elaborate more on the last possibility: "And if it is a prophetic dream, or a prophecy itself, it is worthy of being written in order to instruct the prophets in the methods of prophecy, and what may be derived from them regarding divine conduct, and in any case the prophet will be able to see in it parables and enigmas."<sup>17</sup>

The last approach, paralleling the path of the names, may provide an insight into how to reach a prophetic experience, or to know God. Indeed Abulafia asserts that "the explanation of the Kabbalist is that they are all names and therefore worthy of being recorded."<sup>18</sup> He is not worried by the obsolete meaning, nor does he solve the problem by renewing the meaning through substitution. The text is "elevated" to the highest status, that of becoming a continuum of divine names. The ecstatic Kabbalist makes quite different claims from those of the allegorist. Abulafia's approach deals with the last three paths out of seven, and all three may be characterized as intratextual. As he explains in the *Commentary on the Pentateuch*,

Indeed, every Kabbalist will invoke the Name in all places it occurs, as instructed by means of any of the Divine Attribute, because this is true and right; and this is the reason why it is necessary to inquire into names and to know of each and every one of them to what Attribute it points, because the attributes change in accordance with each and every topic. And it is known that God does not possess at all attributes that will change from one to another, but that the attributes change in accordance with the nature<sup>19</sup> of the creatures that are necessarily emanated from them.<sup>20</sup>

Whereas the philosophically oriented allegorist will reduce all the plethora of divine names or proper names to describe one entity understood in its different states, namely the intellect, the ecstatic Kabbalist claims that different names correspond to the variety of creatures here below that is emanated from God. On high, there are no attributes that change—a critical hit at some forms of theological Kabbalah—but the different modes of action are projected upon the divine realm, extrapolating from the differences in the nature of the creatures. From this vantage point the variety of names is not a case of redundancy, and

should not be reduced to the status of synonyms, but respected in their singularity, in order to discover a higher complexity on high. In any case, what is crucial in this last quotation is the express need to respect the textual multiplicity of names, much more than the allegorist was capable of doing it. It is the concern with the particulars that inspires, at least in principle, the ethos of the “path of the names.” The absoluteness of the details of the text, much more than of its meaning, inspires the linguistically centered kabbalistic approach, which is to be contrasted even to kabbalistic exegesis focused on symbolic interpretations of the morphemes. This concern with intratextuality differs therefore not only from allegoristic extratextuality, but also from the midrashic and, very often, the kabbalistic-symbolist penchants for intertextuality.

### 3. ALLEGORICAL COMPOSITIONS AND DIVINE NAMES

Another important use of allegory is the allegorical composition. Unlike the few instances discussed above, and many others found in Jewish philosophy and some kabbalistic books, where the interpreted texts were not composed by authors who envisioned their writings as fraught with allegorical meanings and the interpretive allegory is, in fact, an imposed allegorization, few Jewish treatises were intended as allegories from the very beginning.

In the same years when the *Zohar* was being composed in Spain as a symbolic text, Abraham Abulafia produced in Italy and Sicily a series of what he called prophetic writings describing his revelations and interpreting them allegorically. In my opinion, the allegorical interpretations are only later and insignificant additions to a text that initially had a literary and conceptual structure and represent explications of the conceptual elements already coded within the text. Unfortunately, fuller analysis of the literary and hermeneutical aspects of Abulafia's activity in this realm remains a desideratum, since most of Abulafia's “prophetic” books have disappeared, and only his commentaries survive; the single original prophetic text extant, a poetically oriented treatise named *Sefer ha-'Ot*, is not accompanied by a commentary. Nevertheless, it is still possible to investigate the allegorical composition and the author's interpretation because some quotations from the original prophecies precede the discussions in the commentaries.

In an important passage from a lost prophetic writing titled *Sefer ha-Melitz*, the Agent Intellect, the human intellect, and the persona of the historical messiah are all described as the messiah: “the term *Mashiyah* is equivocal, [designating] three [different] matters; first and foremost the truly Agent Intellect is called the *Mashiyah* . . . and the man who will forcibly bring us out of the exile from under the rule of the nations due to his contact with the Agent Intellect—he will [also] be



called Mashiyah. And the material human hylic intellect is called Mashiyah, and is the redeemer and has influence over the soul and over all elevated spiritual powers.”<sup>21</sup> While the historical person parallels the path of the righteous and the human intellect the path of the philosophers, the Agent Intellect may stand, as it does for Maimonides and Abulafia in many cases, for the source of prophecy, and thus the path of prophecy. The development of the intellect—or the souls—in this passage is understood in soteriological terms, implying a messianic, namely redemptive, experience attained by means of the combination of letters and recitations of divine names.

Let me turn to another instance of allegorical interpretation of a fragment of a revelation found in a commentary on a prophetic book:

And his saying “and his name I have called Shadday, like My name,” [means] whose secret is Shadday like My name, and [you should] understand all the intention. Likewise his saying “He is I and I am He,” and it cannot be revealed more explicitly than this. But the secret of the “corporeal name” is the “messiah of God.” Also “Moses will rejoice,” which he has made known to us, and which is the five urges, and I called the corporeal name as well . . . now Raziel started to contemplate the essence of the messiah, and he found it and recognized it and its power, and designated it David son of David, whose secret is Yimeloh . . . the heart of the prophet.<sup>22</sup>

This nexus between the body of the messiah, his intellect, and the source of intellection is accompanied by a string of *gematria*: *ha-shem ha-gashmi* (the material or corporeal name) = *Mashiyah ha-Shem* (the anointed of the name) = *yismah Moshe* (Moshe will rejoice) = *hamishah yetzarim* (five urges) = 703. The first three phrases contain the three consonants H, Sh, M, as in either *ha-shem* or *MoSheH*. The meaning of this occurrence is quite explicit in a passage of Abulafia in his *Commentary on Sefer ha-'Edut*: “*MoSheH* knew God [*ha-Shem*] by means of the name [*shem*], and God [*ha-Shem*] also knew *MoSheH* by means of the name [*of Moses*].”<sup>23</sup>

In other words, by means of the recitation of the divine name Moshe knew God, and God knew him, or, in the terms of the quotation, by means of the name, Moses became the anointed of God. The words *ha-shem ha-gashmi* stand for the name of Moses and the names of the forefathers that have become, by means of a complex linguistic transformation, divine names.<sup>24</sup> However, the main gist of the passage is that in speaking about Moses and his transformation into the messiah, namely his cleaving to God, Abulafia includes also the forefathers' names, and by doing so he includes the name of Abraham. If we remember that we have been quoting from a prophetic book addressed to Abraham, hinted at by the angelico-theophoric name Raziel—both names amount by *gematria* to 248—there can be no doubt



that the messiah hinted at here is no other than Abraham Abulafia, who claimed to be a messiah. This is also implied in another series: *David ben David* = *Yimlokh*<sup>25</sup> = *lev ha-navi* (the heart of the prophet) = 100 means that the entity named *David ben David* will reign. Some few lines earlier in the *Commentary on Sefer ha-'Edu*t, God has mentioned the anointment of Abulafia as a king. Abulafia sees himself as David, the son of David. I assume that the second David is no other than the Agent Intellect, and the term "David, the son of David" stands for the union between the human and the separate intellects. This reading may be corroborated by a third expression, *ve-'Anokhi Hu*, namely "and I am He," which amounts to 99, a figure that for the Kabbalists is practically identical with 100.

Thus, Abulafia's discussion is not just an allegorical composition attempting to deal with the way in which someone may become a messiah, by reciting divine names; it should also be understood as revealing, on a more esoteric level, not only the atemporal "truth" about the spiritual path, understood in soteriological terms, but also the very temporal path, and perhaps an issue as important for Abulafia as the atemporal issue, namely that he himself is a messiah and a prophet. Allegory here is a compositional technique, an interpretive device, but also, and more eminently, an esoteric way of pointing to one's own extraordinary mystical attainment and his redemptive role in history. Abulafia hints at the mystical attainment in the phrase dictated to him by God: "He is I and I am He," which should be understood as pointing to a mystical union between the human and the divine.<sup>26</sup> Allegory may therefore play a more general role as telling the story of all the souls striving for spiritual redemption and extreme mystical attainments, as indeed it does in many of Abulafia's writings. However, in some of his discussions allegory also stands in a more esoteric way for his own soul.

Spiritual allegory, which is a term that seems to me more appropriate both for decoding the biblical text and for composing his narrative, may designate a special application of allegorical techniques for self-expression rather than for more general exegesis and literary composition dealing with atemporal truths. What is important in this instance of spiritual allegory, however, is that the mystical path and the mystical attainment are not expressed solely by intellectualist terminology drawn from the medieval philosophical patrimony, but also by linguistic devices, personal and divine names, that are intertwined with more classical forms of allegory.

#### 4. NATURAL/DIVINE LANGUAGE

The eccentric forms of hermeneutics adopted and developed by Abulafia are part of a larger process that I propose calling the arcanization of Judaism, which received an important impetus in the thirteenth century. Within the framework of

this arcanization, not only the words of the scriptures were conceived of as sacred and powerful but also their constituent elements, the Hebrew letters. Language became arcane, and so, too, did all its components. In the sustained contest between the view of language as conventional and the view of language as natural, the huge majority of Kabbalists, including all the ecstatic Kabbalists, adopted the view that language was natural, and even divine, sometimes because it was conceived of as being revealed. So, for example, R. Nathan Harar, who wrote the book *Sha'arei Tzedeq* toward the end of the thirteenth century in Messina, asserted:

Anyone who believes in the creation of the world, [if he also] believes that languages are conventional, [then] he must also believe that they [the linguistic conventions] are of two types: the first is divine, that is, an agreement between God and Adam; and the second is natural, that is, based on agreement between Adam, Eve, and their children. The second is derived from the first, and the first was known only to Adam and was not passed on to any of his offspring except Seth, whom he sired in his image and likeness. And so, the [esoteric] tradition [ha-Qabbalah] reached Noah. And the confusion of the tongues during the generation of the dispersion [at the tower of Babel] occurred only [with regard] to the second type of language, that is, the natural language. So eventually the [esoteric] tradition [ha-Qabbalah] reached 'Eber and, later, Abraham the Hebrew. Thus we find regarding *Sefer Yetzirah*, whose authorship is attributed to Abraham, that the Almighty revealed Himself to him. And from Abraham the [esoteric] tradition was passed on to Isaac and then to Jacob and to his sons [the tribal ancestors]. And our forefathers were in Egypt, but the Kabbalah was in the possession of the elders of the nation, and the thing remained with them until the birth of Moses, and he [Moses] was raised in the house of the king, and he learned many sorts of alien [namely philosophical and scientific] lores, and despite this fact, because of his predisposition to receive, his mind did not rest before his father, Amram, gave to him the Kabbalah that was with them from the forefathers, blessed be their memory. And when it happened that he went out in the field and secluded himself in the desert, the "Lord of All" revealed Himself to him in the bush and informed him and taught him and related to him the most wondrous things, which remained with him until the [revelatory] event at Sinai, when He introduced him to the inmost secrets of the science of the letters . . . until he become acquainted with the essence of these letters, revealed to us from his cognition, and the essence of their distant roots, and Moses, blessed be his memory, had arranged the Torah as a continuum of letters, which corresponds to the path of the [divine] names,

which reflects the structure of the letters on high; and [then] he divided the text [of the Torah] in accordance with the reading of the commandments, which reflects the essence of the structure of the lower entities.<sup>27</sup>

This passage, which though written by his student reflects Abulafia's own view quite accurately, assumes that the essence of Kabbalah is a tradition dealing with the nature of language and prophetic revelation at the same time. The knowledge connected to this ancient tradition diminished, and in the future, with the arrival of the messiah, it will reemerge.<sup>28</sup> The emphasis on both *Sefer Yetzirah* and the role of Abraham may point to an Abulafian source. Both Kabbalists regarded the linguistic material as a reality that was superior to the natural domain and as an easier way to the ecstatic experience than any other medium.<sup>29</sup> More than any of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists, these two ecstatic Kabbalists contemplated the Hebrew letters of canonical texts and combined them in order to achieve new revelations.

# 6

## ESCHATOLOGICAL THEMES AND DIVINE NAMES IN ABULAFIA'S KABBALAH

### 1. REDEMPTION AND THE DIVINE NAME

Redeemers tend to possess confidence in being already redeemed themselves. Redemption of the many is the application of their own redemption, as anticipated by the chosen one. This was the case with Abraham Abulafia. The formulator of a kabbalistic system focused on manipulations of language and divine names believed that redemption consisted in the application of the linguistic techniques on a much broader scale. The new age—historical or psychological—was to be ushered in, according to Abulafia's view of eschatology, by a change of names, both divine and human. The theme of the divine name as pivotal for the changes at the end of time is ubiquitous in Abulafia's writings. Let me adduce some examples for the importance of this theme.

There is no redemption but by means of the name of YHWH  
 And His redemption is not for those who do not request it<sup>1</sup>  
 In accordance with His Name.  
 This is why I, Zekharyahu,  
 The destroyer of the building  
 And the builder of the destruction,  
 Have written this small book  
 By the name of<sup>2</sup> 'Adonay the small<sup>3</sup>  
 In order to disclose in it the secret of YHWH the great.<sup>4</sup>

Here the composition of *Sefer ha-'Ot*, probably the most apocalyptic among Abulafia's prophetic books, is expressly envisioned as aiming to disclose the secret of the great divine name. However, until then the name 'Adonay is conceived of as dominant. The author conceives himself as the revealer of the great Tetragrammaton, apparently assumed to have been unknown beforehand. Elsewhere in the same book, the plene writing of the Tetragrammaton is sufficient for those who know how to attain a spiritual life for themselves, because it is the source of eternal life.<sup>5</sup> The name that Abulafia chooses to call himself throughout the book, Zekharyahu, is a theophoric one, meaning "the one who recites the [divine] name." However, it is not only the new or renewed knowledge of the divine name, and its preponderance over other names, that is characteristic of the messianic age, but also a change of divine attributes that will occur and symbolize this coming age. So, for example, we read in a relatively early book of Abulafia's:

It is known that these two attributes are changed always in accordance with the nature of creation, turning into each other. And the secret is that the attribute of mercy always prevails, because the numerical value of YHWH is 26 and that of the name 'Elohim is 86, namely when someone adds 86 to 26, and when someone writes 26 in its plene form, *kaf vav*, the concealed [name of] 86 under the name of 26 will be found. This means that the attribute of judgment is concealed while that of mercy is revealed. Both are, however, 26, which means that these two attributes are but one attribute.<sup>6</sup>

The Hebrew letters, spelled K[a]F and V[a]V, can be combined in another way to constitute KaV, whose numerical value is 26, namely the gematria of the Tetragrammaton, and pav, which is numerically equivalent to 86, the gematria of 'Elohim.<sup>7</sup> The passage points to the concealment of the attribute of judgment, represented here by the name 'Elohim, which is contained in the plene writing of the letters of the Tetragrammaton. Thus, the revelation of the divine name of four letters conveys the preponderance of the attribute of mercy over that of judgment.

Indeed, it seems to me that Abulafia conceives of the belief in the Tetragrammaton as characteristic of messianic times. In the *Commentary on Sefer ha-'Edut* he confesses that he has received three revelations, the first of which he calls "belief in 'Elohim"; then a revelation enigmatically described as 'Emunah 'Ahat, "one belief"; and finally "true belief," namely "belief in the special name," 'Emunah be-shem ha-meyuhad, which is conceived of as "a hidden secret" that is counted in the "secret of redemption."<sup>8</sup>

The mention of the first belief—in the name 'Elohim—and the last—in the Tetragrammaton—is clear evidence that there is a progression between the two. The importance that Abulafia attributes to beliefs is remarkably consonant with the Christian emphasis on faith in general and, much later, forms of devotion to the name of Jesus in particular.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps this consonance offered Abulafia some reason to presume that he would find a receptive ear by Pope Nicholas III. This pope was a patron of the Franciscan sect known as the Minorites, and was no doubt aware of the adoration that St. Francis felt for the name of Jesus, an adoration that in the course of time, and already during the lifetime of Abulafia, had become an important theological phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> Did Abulafia know about this new element of Italian Franciscan theology? It is difficult to answer this question. Yet this is precisely the framework within which it is possible to explain Abulafia's activity among the Christians of Sicily during the ninth decade of the thirteenth century.

This focusing upon the importance of the divine name in an eschatological context may also shed some light on a further development of kabbalistic messianism, as represented by Sabbateanism; Sabbatai Tzevi started his strange deeds with the pronunciation of the divine name.<sup>11</sup> Change of the name is, however, not only a matter of the reorientation of belief, which is indeed the gist of Abulafia's view, but also of a more ontological restructuring. In another book Abulafia asserts:

The end of the change [hilluf] of the times has arrived, and so has the end of the order of the stars, in accordance with the attributes. And the attributes and names will change, and the languages will be mixed [yevulbelu], and the nations and the beliefs will be reshaped, and the diadem of the Israelite [nation] will return to its former state, and the rank of Jews will be related to the name of the essence [of God], not to the name of [His] attribute. [Then] the revealed will become concealed, and the concealed will become revealed, and the rank of gentiles—men and women—will be lowered, and they will be vanquished, and the rank of Jews—men and women—will ascend and rise.<sup>12</sup>

Though expressed in rather apocalyptic terms, the changes announced in this passage may be much less external than internal; the main topic is a cultural-religious upheaval: the Jews will relate now to the essential divine name rather

than to the name that is an attribute. This is quite a crucial issue, as we have already seen in the quotation from *Sefer ha-'Ot* earlier in this chapter, but its significance may be even deeper when the quotation just above is compared to the earlier ones. Abulafia here uses the verb *yevulbelu*—translated here as “mixed”—to describe a deep change in the languages. In my opinion, it should be understood as pointing to the undoing of the diversity of languages launched at the tower of Babel. This is an “objective” event, as is the disappearance of other opinions, beliefs, and nations. This “conversion” should be seen as a form of retrieval of a simpler, or primordial, form of language and religion, when the messianic time arrives.<sup>13</sup> The term *hilluf*, translated here as “change,” stands for a change that took place in the past and will be obliterated in the messianic time: “the end of change.” Thus Abulafia assumes that there is a certain correspondence between the divine names, the divine attributes, the constellations of the stars, and affairs here below: languages, nations, beliefs. A change of the divine names, namely the emergence or the reemergence of the Tetragrammaton as dominant in history, means a new type of relationship between the divine attributes and, as a result, the different structuring of the celestial constellations, as well as the return of the people of Israel to their lost grandeur.<sup>14</sup> In Abulafia’s rhetoric of his vision of messianism, there is an important restorative moment.

Abulafia tells us in *Sefer ha-'Ot* that after he failed to disseminate his teachings among the Jews he turned to the Christians.<sup>15</sup> After the Christians also rejected his teachings, he wrote: “Now you of wise heart seek the Lord in your hearts, day and night. Investigate His Truth and cleave to Him and remember His Name. For His Name is engraved within the memory, and the Spirit of the Lord speaks, and within Her is recognized eternal salvation.”<sup>16</sup> These words inform us that the path that Abulafia advocated in vain to the Christians was the contemplation of the divine name. Last but not least in this context, Abulafia’s disciple R. Nathan ben Sa’adyah Harar, the author of *Sefer Sha’arei Tzedeq*, claims that

during the time of the Exile, the activity of the names was obliterated,<sup>17</sup> and prophecy was canceled from Israel, because of hindrance of the attribute of judgment. This state will go on until the coming of the person whom God has chosen, and his power will be great because of what has been transmitted to him related to their power,<sup>18</sup> and God will reveal the name to him, and transmit to him the supernal keys. Then he will stand against the attribute of judgment . . . and the attribute of mercy will guide him. The supernal [entity] will become lower, and the lower will become supernal,<sup>19</sup> and the Tetragrammaton, which has been concealed, will be revealed, and 'Adonay, which was revealed,<sup>20</sup> will [then] be concealed. Then it will happen to us

what has been written: “For they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest of them” [Jeremiah 31:33]. Then the natural, philosophical sciences will be canceled and concealed, because their supernal power was canceled, but the science of names and letters, which are by now unknown to us, will be revealed, because their [supernal] power is gradually increasing. Then “the Jews will have light and gladness” [Esther 8:16], and sadness and worry will be [the part of] the deniers, and “many of the people of the land will become Jews” [Esther 8:17], and “your sons and daughter will prophesy” [Joel 3:1].<sup>21</sup>

Changes in the effectiveness of divine names are related to redemptive events. However, just as in the case of the earlier discussions, the influence of a certain divine name or another is conceived of as concerning mainly the different forms of knowledge: either the flourishing of the inferior types of knowledge of alien extraction during the period of exile, or the return of prophecy in the case of the Tetragrammaton. In other words, although major upheavals are expected with the advent of redemption, they are of a more internal, noetic nature, rather than involving a disruption of the cosmic order. In fact redemption may be summarized as the revelation of ecstatic Kabbalah, a mystical lore based on letters and names. Moreover, according to Abulafia, the letters 'aHWY constitute the hidden divine name, which will be revealed to the messiah.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the return of prophecy is reported in a statement that also implies the revelation of an unknown divine name.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. CHANGES OF NAMES OF THE MYSTICS

In addition to the revelation of the hidden name of God, Abulafia mentions the change of the name of the mystic during the mystical experience, an event that also conveys messianic overtones. For example, we learn that during such an experience “it will appear to him as if his entire body, from head to foot, has been anointed with the oil of anointing, and he was ‘the anointed of the Lord [Mashiyah YHWH]’ and His emissary, and he will be called ‘the angel of the Lord’; his name will be similar to that of his Master, which is Shadday, who is called Metatron, the prince [namely the angel] of the divine Face.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, just as Enoch received divine names as part of his apotheosis as Metatron, the human mystic in the present will also assume new names, in many cases having a theophoric structure. In a prophetic book composed in the same years as the passage above, Abulafia writes:

And the meaning of his saying “Rise and lift up the head of my anointed one [meshiyhi]” refers to the life of the souls. “And on the New Year and in the Temple”—it is the power of the souls. And he says: “Anoint him as a king”—rejoice him like a king with the power of all the names. “For I have anointed



him as a king over Israel”<sup>25</sup>—over the communities [of] Israel, that is, the commandments. And his saying “and his name I have called Shadday, like My Name”<sup>26</sup>—whose secret is Shadday like My Name, and understand all the intention. Likewise his saying “He is I and I am He,” and it cannot be revealed more explicitly than this. But the secret of the “corporeal name” is the “Messiah of God.” Also “Moses will rejoice,” which he has made known to us, and which is the five urges, and I called the corporeal name as well. . . . now Raziel started to contemplate the essence of the messiah, and he found it and recognized it and its power and designated it David, the son of David, whose secret is Yimelokh.<sup>27</sup>

This very rich passage cannot be analyzed here in all its complex details; I shall focus only on the topics relevant to our discussion.<sup>28</sup> First and foremost, the revelation is related to Abulafia, apparently during his stay in Rome in 1280, and the temple where the messiah will be installed mentioned here may be no other than St. Peter’s. However, I take these spatial and temporal details to present only one facet of Abulafia’s messianism. As he himself puts it, after describing the details of the revelation, the mythical elements stand for spiritual events. *Rosh meshiyhi* is equal in gematria to *u-ve-rosh ha-shanah* but also to *hayyei ha-nefashot*, namely the life of the souls. This is a conspicuously spiritualistic interpretation of messianism. The messianic figure, chosen by God, is taught the secrets of the divine name, and, using this knowledge, he is able to start his messianic activity. Redemption is a consequence of the messiah’s use of the divine names, just as the instauration of the messiah is attained by means of the power of the divine names. The revelation of the divine names to a messianic figure is quite a rare topic. So far as I know, an explicit instance of such a revelation is found only in Abulafia’s writings. Thus, for example, we read in his epistle *Ve-Zot Li-Yhudah*: “When I arrived at [the knowledge of] the names by my loosening of the bonds of the seals,<sup>29</sup> ‘the Lord of All’<sup>30</sup> appeared to me and revealed to me His secret and informed me about the time of the end of the exile and about the time of the beginning of redemption. He compelled me to prophesy.”<sup>31</sup>

The nexus between the revelation of the divine name and messianism is therefore conspicuous in ecstatic Kabbalah; indeed this issue is the core of the whole system.<sup>32</sup> Revealing the divine names is, for Abulafia, tantamount to revealing the core of the Kabbalah itself, which is quintessential for knowing the secret of the time of the advent of the messianic era. Indeed, in the same epistle Abulafia uses the same statement from *Sefer Yetzirah* to characterize the form of Kabbalah that he deems the highest, namely prophetic Kabbalah, which aims at teaching how to actualize the Kabbalists’ intellects.<sup>33</sup> It is important to dwell upon the

sequence of the events related by Abulafia: his spiritual life, described here as knowing the names and loosing the bonds, brought him to a subsequent revelation of the eschatological secrets. A spiritual life is conceived here to be a condition of redemption, not vice versa.

However, the revelation of the divine name is only one aspect of the relationship between name and redemption. According to other writings of the ecstatic Kabbalist, the redemptive experience of the messiah is related to his becoming unified with God or the Agent Intellect, a state understood as a deep spiritual transformation, described also as the change of the name of the messiah to a theophoric one. God's theophany at the end of time, described in terms of changes of both names and attributes, is related to the messiah's apotheosis as part of his individual transformation. Given that the process of apotheosis is explicitly described as triggered by a technical use of the divine name, we may conceive the topic of the divine name as comprising the mode of theophany, the goal of apotheosis and the technique to reach it. Or, to express it in other terms: the revelation of the divine names, which is identical with the future reign of the attribute of mercy, is an objective event, namely a theophany, which is to be accompanied by personal redemptions and apotheoses, which consist in a transformation of individuals into spiritual beings, designated by the theophoric names, by means of reciting letters of the divine name. This median role of the knowledge of the divine name is well expressed in *'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, where Abulafia writes: "The knowledge of the names is a supreme degree over all the human degrees, shared with the divine degrees, namely that they announce the way that unifies the soul to the Agent Intellect, in an eternal union, and there is no other way close to it, that may bring the soul to this wondrous degree."<sup>34</sup>

Divine names are conceived of as modes of divine theophanies, techniques for reaching apotheotic states, and designations for those who have reached them. Earlier in the same book Abulafia writes, in a way that is not quite clear to me, about the passage of the name of man from *potentia* to *actu*, which causes the ascent of the man by two degrees.<sup>35</sup> By such an experience someone is able to both transcend and control nature. Elsewhere in the same treatise we learn that "the powers<sup>36</sup> of the Special Name<sup>37</sup> are the tools of the Messiah<sup>38</sup> to change the natures by their means, because its [the name's] powers are above Man, Lion, Ox, and Eagle. And know that *'eHeYeH* is the Special Name, and this is why it comprises all the living beasts, just as the vowels of the name are tantamount to *Ratzo va-Shov*, and I shall give you a sign that all the Chariot is beneath the hands of Man."<sup>39</sup>

The name *'eHeYeH* is an important one, and it is worth observing that it is reminiscent of Moses' mission to disclose that new name to the people of Israel. This

changing of nature is in line with some philosophical views in the Middle Ages, according to which the accomplished man, able to purify his soul and cleave to the cosmic soul, or the Agent Intellect, is capable of influencing the processes taking place in nature. Abulafia claims that at the beginning of the millennium according to the Jewish calendar, namely in 1240, when he was born, the messiah will come, and he boasts<sup>40</sup> about his knowledge of the divine name.<sup>41</sup> Elsewhere he claims: “The messiah confesses that his speech and conversation come from the special name that is with him by nature, and it generates the speech, and actualizes it after it has been in *potentia*. And the simpletons do not perceive from where their speech comes, and they are like an animal that produces a sound that is similar to speech, but does not understand the nature that is inherent in it.”<sup>42</sup>

### 3. JEWS, JUDAISM, AND DIVINE NAMES

Abulafia’s eschatological vision should be understood in a very dynamic manner: it is not identical with the more popular vision of the final redemption of the people of Israel, once and forever; rather, it has a place within an undulatory version of political history, one that sees the ascent and decline of the political organization of the Jewish nations as part of larger political and military trends.<sup>43</sup> Thus, although a restoration may include the return of the Jews to their land—a feature of the messianic age often emphasized in many writings on the subject but totally marginalized by Abulafia—his concern is with the spiritual aspects of this restoration. Abulafia embraces in some of his discussions a unique understanding of the essence of Judaism: he understands the significance of the name of YēHWDaH as a confession to the power of the divine name. In an untitled ecstatic tract he writes that in the eschatological time, “The comprehension of the Jew will be the comprehension of the Name, and this is the way [the name] Shadday was interpreted, to the effect that for us the name ’HYH [I shall be] suffices, and likewise YēHWDY [Jew], YHW DaY [the name YHW suffices], ’Ehad ’Ah ’Ehad [One the Brother One]; and by the comprehension of YHWH ’Ehad [Tetragrammaton is One], redemption [Ge’ulah] will come to us.”<sup>44</sup> The word YēHWDY, “Jew,” contains the consonants that also constitute the locution YHW DaY, which means that the three consonants that constitute the Tetragrammaton are sufficient. A comprehension of the essence of the Jew is therefore identical with comprehension of the sufficiency of the divine name. By means of gematria, the consonants of the word YēHWDY amount to 35, as do the consonants of the expression ’Ehad ’Ah ’Ehad, “One [is the] Brother [of] One.” The two occurrences of ’Ehad amount in gematria to 26, and this addition of “One” to “One” is the significance of the word ’Ah, “Brother.” But 26 is also the gematria of the consonants of the Tetragrammaton.<sup>45</sup> This comprehension is salvific, as we may learn not only from the mention of Ge’ulah, “redemption,” but

also from perusal of the larger context (not quoted here), where the phrase *Mashiyah* YHWH [Messiah of the divine name] is mentioned. In other words, for Abulafia the eschatological success of the Jews mentioned in the quotation from 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz may—though I cannot say must—be understood not only as related to a political and religious ascent of a certain nation but also as the emergence of a certain type of comprehension of the centrality of the divine name. Or, to formulate it more drastically: it would not be surprising to assume that Abulafia understood the term “Jew” as a metonym for the perfect knowledge of the divine name.

In this context let me introduce a discussion about exile in Egypt and language: “They exchanged their language for numerous foreign tongues, to the extent that one does not understand the other, [and are] almost like animals that do not understand one another and revert to incapacity for verbal communication.”<sup>46</sup> The disappearance of the use of a common language among the Jews, namely the near oblivion of Hebrew, renders them similar to animals; multiplicity of languages among the Jews, made real in the exile, also entails a reversion to a state of animality. The Jews do not possess any special superiority while in the exilic situation, and I assume, on the basis of the context of this quotation, that they are ruled by the attribute of judgment. We may assume that the reversal of this situation entails the return of the attributes of mercy, of one language, and of redemption.

In another attempt to define the nature of the Jews, Abulafia writes in his *Commentary on Sefer ha-Melitz*: “the meaning of ‘a man of Judah’ is that in this name is exemplified the lesson of Judaism [*Yahadut*]. We are informed that the aim of consolation is not arrived at merely by speculation, but rather they must make whole the integrity of Judaism, that is, confession [*hoda'ah*] of the knowledge of the truth and departure from confusion.”<sup>47</sup> The author himself explains the meaning of the term *Yahadut* here: it implies *hoda'ah*, namely confession, derived from a stipulated etymological relationship between the words *Yehudah* and *hoda'ah*. The content of the confession is knowledge of the truth.<sup>48</sup> The nature of this truth is not explained here, but we may discern its meaning from the passage that immediately precedes this sentence:

Behold, Razel intends to inform us of His Exalted Name in accordance with the hidden path, in order to bring us closer to Him, may His Name be blessed. Separate [the elements of] the words, for at times a name may consist of even only one letter, which is regarded as if it were one whole word. This tells us that each letter is a world unto itself, according to the Kabbalah.<sup>49</sup> And he was commanded to illustrate this wondrous Divine Power in order to instruct us regarding His blessed Name. Invert the [letters of the] word *Razel*, so that it becomes *Yisrael*. This tells us that *Yisrael* is *Yizrael*, just as

Avraham is Ya'aqov. This is due to the joining of their two attributes, grace and truth, as it is written: "Thou will show Truth to Ya'aqov [and] Grace to Avraham" [Micah 7:20]. And in the word *Hodu* [glorify, confess] is indicated the [Divine] Name 'HYH because of the two essence-names composed through the name YH, which are YHW and YHWH, signifying HWD, HWDW, and YWDW [they will glorify] as well as [the words] ViDWY [confession], HWDW [glorify] and HWD [glory], [and] WHDY YV 'WDH [I will glorify], YHY, YWDH. Indeed the confession of the Name is the [true] glorification. Thus HWDW [glorify] in the Name of 'HYH is the HWDaH VaD'aY [confession of certainty], and the hidden form [of the Name is] HWDaH. This is sufficient, just as He is sufficient, may His Name be exalted and raised high.<sup>50</sup>

It is clear that according to Abulafia the *hoda'ah*, confession, which is the essence of Judaism, is the *hoda'ah* in the names of God—YH 'HYH YHWH. We may therefore assume that *Yahadut* does not refer to the "Jewish people" as a whole, but rather to a specific religious experience that involves the names of God. This is also Abulafia's view in his epistle *Matzref la-Kesef*: "And the Jew who thinks that because he is Jewish and can trace his ancestry to the seed of Judah, he is of the seed of royalty, if he does not confess, in truth his similarity with the tribe of Judah is only one of name. For Judah is etymologically related to confession [*hoda'ah*]." <sup>51</sup>

Abulafia relies on the etymological allusion to Genesis 49:8: *Yehudah* as deriving from *Yodukhah*. Yet whereas there the confession is made by Judah's brothers to Judah, Abulafia alters the meaning and has it refer to God. This portrayal of Judaism is highly reminiscent of his vision of the Kabbalah, namely that its central goal was the dissemination of the knowledge of the divine name. Similarly, he was the standard-bearer of the view that the messiah would reveal the true divine name and the Kabbalah of the Names. Thus, the "Judaism" about which Abulafia intended to speak to Pope Nicholas III was a religion centered upon the name of God, and not one centered upon the halakhic structure of Judaism. This definition of Abulafia's mission would place it outside the realm of the "messianic nationalism" of Nahmanides<sup>52</sup> and another contemporary of his, Rabbi Yitzhaq ben Yedayah, and is also different from the proselytizing missionary of Judaism as proposed by some scholars.<sup>53</sup> Likewise we read in *Sefer ha-'Ot*, "You, O nation of God, Supernal Holy Ones who look to the Name [*mabitei Shemo*] and to the source of your intelligence, have seen the form of YHVH within the form of your hearts."<sup>54</sup> It seems to me that the expression "those who look to His Name" is an explanation of the name *Yisra'el*, indicated by the words "nation of God." This interpretation divides the word *Yisra'el* into *yishar*, etymologically related to the word *yashur*, "will look to," and the word 'el, "God."<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, when describing the messiah as involved in a confrontation with the pope and prevailing by means of the divine name, as described in chapter 3, we have an application of a mystical concept of the change of nature by means of the divine name. However, whereas philosophers under the influence of Avicenna would offer a totally naturalistic explanation for those changes, namely the union of the human spiritual faculty to the spiritual power that directs events in the lower world, Abulafia introduces three additional elements: the messiah, the divine name, and the will of God.

Moreover, he implicitly regards the messianic achievement as uniting the three main religious elements in Judaism: the Torah, the Chariot, and the divine name. I assume that the Chariot, *Merkavah*, has something to do with the combination of the letters of the divine names. *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is numerically equivalent with *Shem ba-shem*,<sup>56</sup> while the Torah, as mentioned above, points to vocalization of the consonants. According to another text, there is a deep affinity between the Torah and *Merkavah*. In one of his commentaries on the *Guide of the Perplexed* Abulafia advances another interesting gematria: *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is tantamount to *Galgai ha-Torah* (= 682), namely the sphere or circle of the Torah, which is to be understood as the combinatory circles that are related to permuting the letters of the Torah.<sup>57</sup> The Divine Chariot, understood as a complex of divine names, is the blueprint of the entire Torah, which Kabbalists conceived of as containing an esoteric level that emerged from reading it as a continuum of divine names. Perhaps control or the rule over the Chariot has to do with control over the circles of divine names that are related to the Torah. Thus the knowledge of the divine name comprises both Torah and *Merkavah* and is the essence of the Jew.

Last but not least: the knowledge of the divine names will be used by the messiah in a more magical manner. In the untitled treatise mentioned above, Abulafia wrote: "and then will be the true time of the Torah, when the Messiah of YHWH will control all the Chariot, so that he will change the natures by<sup>58</sup> the will of God, and to him it was said: "Time, two times and a half" [Daniel 12:7].<sup>59</sup> The focus of the discussion is overtly messianic: not only is the messiah mentioned but also the verse from Daniel dealing with the date of redemption. However, redemption is conceived to consist not only in a noetic or religious state of mind, but also in the capacity to change the natures, *le-shannot ha-teva'im*.

Let me attempt to describe the meaning of such a changing of natures. The recognition of the divine name and of the divine unity is to be complemented by an additional type of knowledge, that of the vowels between the consonants of the divine names; the vowels are conceived of as a hidden topic, hinted at by the vocalization of the consonants of the Torah. By using the letters of the divine name with

a certain vocalization, namely *Holam* and *Qamatz*, which are the vowels of *Torah*, the true *Torah* is achieved, namely a mystical experience.

In other words, Abulafia's Kabbalah consists essentially in understanding, manipulating, permuting, and experiencing encounters related to the divine names. These acts represent an intense, vibrant, and very focused type of mysticism, which assumes that an experience of plenitude, understood as salvific, is inherent in the very essence of the letters of the divine name.

# 7

## ABRAHAM ABULAFIA AND R. MENAHEM BEN BENJAMIN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY KABBALISTIC AND ASHKENAZI MANUSCRIPTS IN ITALY

### 1. ABULAFIA'S STUDIES OF COMMENTARIES ON *SEFER YETZIRAH*

We have examined Abraham Abulafia's public and literary activities in Italy, which established ecstatic Kabbalah as one of the leading schools of Jewish thought in the Apennine peninsula and in Sicily for some centuries. However, there is one more aspect of Abulafia's activity that had repercussions for the history of Kabbalah in the peninsula. In my opinion, he not only composed the first kabbalistic writings in Italy, he also brought there kabbalistic material derived from other schools flourishing in Spain. We have autobiographical testimony about this material. In his *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, Abulafia writes: "When I was thirty-one, in the city of Barcelona, God awakened me from my sleep, and I studied *Sefer*



Yetzirah together with its commentaries.”<sup>1</sup> The study of *Sefer Yetzirah* in itself is not necessarily indicative of an interest in Kabbalah; however, the mention of the commentaries, some of which were kabbalistic as we shall see below, shows that it was in Barcelona that he was introduced to this esoteric lore. We can glean the identity of those commentaries from another passage from the same book:

these are the names of the commentators to *Sefer Yetzirah*, whose commentaries I have seen and whose thoughts concerning it I have examined, according to the differences [between them], and they are twelve. The first is the *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* by R. Sa’adyah Gaon, blessed be the memory of the righteous, which he composed in Arabic, and it was translated into Hebrew, and his words combine the way of ethics according to the Torah, while a small part of them deal with the philosophical way.<sup>2</sup> The second is the commentary of R. Abraham ben Ezra, blessed be his memory, which for the most part is philosophy, and a small part of it is concise Kabbalah.<sup>3</sup> The third is [by] R. Dunash ben Tamim, which is in its entirety philosophy.<sup>4</sup> The fourth [is by] R. Sabbatai Donnolo the physician, and it combines the two topics.<sup>5</sup> The fifth, [by] the Rabbi R. Jacob of Segovia, blessed be his memory, [is] in its entirety [constituted of] [mystical] traditions [kullo Qabbalot].<sup>6</sup> The sixth [is by] the Rabbi R. Ezra, blessed be his memory, whose [kabbalistic] traditions are correct but scant.<sup>7</sup> The seventh is [by] R. Azriel, whose [kabbalistic] traditions are esoteric and numerous.<sup>8</sup> The eighth, [by] R. Yehudah he-Hasid the Ashkenazi, blessed be the memory of the righteous,<sup>9</sup> follows to a small extent the words of R. Sabbatai the physician. The ninth [is by] the Rabbi R. Eleazar the Ashkenazi, blessed be his memory, [and] his [esoteric] traditions are hidden [ne’elamot]. The tenth, [by] the Rabbi R. Moses ben Nahman, may the memory of the righteous be blessed, is in its entirety *Horayyot*,<sup>10</sup> and despite the fact that he was expert in matters of philosophy, he did not follow it [philosophy] in it [the commentary]. The eleventh [is by] the Rabbi R. Isaac of Bedresh, may the memory of the righteous be blessed, and his commentary excels all the others in disclosing the 231 gates,<sup>11</sup> because he established all the alphabets in accordance with the author of *Sefer Yetzirah*, and he extracted them to the light [Hotzia’am le’or] as a complete alphabet, as it is appropriate, forward wise.<sup>12</sup> . . . The twelfth [is by] the Rabbi R. Barukh,<sup>13</sup> my teacher and master, who also interpreted it, [and] it is in its entirety [done] in accordance with gematria, notarikon [acronym], and combinations of letters, and permutations, together with all its [Sefer Yetzirah’s] ways. I have also heard that the Rabbi R. Eleazar ha-Darshan Ashkenazi commented upon it, [in accordance with] wondrous [esoteric] traditions [Peliy’ot mequbbalot], but it did not reach me until now.<sup>14</sup>

Some of the commentaries mentioned above are well known, extant, and printed. Some others, such as those of R. Abraham ibn Ezra and R. Yehudah he-Hasid, are less known, though their existence is attested in other sources. Two are rare, and their existence is attested most explicitly in the passage above. The commentaries of R. Jacob of Segovia<sup>15</sup> and R. Isaac of Bedresh are described here for the first time, and, in the case of the latter, for the only time in the entire extant kabbalistic literature. After his studies in Barcelona, Abulafia visited some towns in Castile, where he attempted to teach his combination of linguistic Kabbalah and Maimonidean philosophy. Although he had some limited success there, as the early writings of R. Joseph Gikatilla show, he left Spain forever at the end of 1273 and, after spending some time in Greece, returned to Italy in 1279. Five years after his arrival in Capua and Rome, we have the first dated evidence of the existence of kabbalistic manuscripts in the latter city.

## 2. THREE THIRTEENTH-CENTURY KABBALISTIC MANUSCRIPTS FROM ITALY

Let me attempt to describe some of the kabbalistic material found in three kabbalistic manuscripts copied in Italy, in order to learn more about the first developments in Kabbalah there beyond what we know about Abraham Abulafia's own literary activity. I shall restrict my discussion to Rome, the most important center of this lore in the Apennine peninsula, though still modest in comparison to centers in Spain. Two of these manuscripts are connected both with Abulafia and with the history of Kabbalah in Italy beyond the development of ecstatic Kabbalah. The most important evidence of their influence lies in the fact that they were copied, in most cases in the same order, in a large number of manuscripts produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and even later. Although the nonkabbalistic aspects of these manuscripts—halakhic and philosophical for example—also provide details about the intellectual life of Jews in Rome between 1280 and 1290, we cannot cover that issue here.

The manuscripts that concern us here are Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 763, and Ms. London, British Library 756, both dating to 1284; and Ms. Parma, Catalogue de Rossi 1390, copied in 1286. The contents of the three manuscripts are rather similar, and their analysis may clarify the nature of the first kabbalistic treatises that were composed outside Italy and were circulated in Italy. Although the Parma codex was copied later, I shall analyze its contents first because it is the most comprehensive, containing material salient for my discussion that does not occur in the Paris and London manuscripts.

### Ms. Parma 2784, Catalogue de Rossi 1390

Somewhere in Italy in the first half of 1286, an important manuscript, found now in the library of Parma, was copied by several scribes, the chief copyist being

named Menahem ben Benjamin.<sup>16</sup> Most of the material in the Parma codex deals with Hasidei Ashkenaz and kabbalistic topics; there are also a few philosophical treatises. The mystical contents are as follows:

1. Fols. 36b–38b: the shorter version of *Sefer Yetzirah*<sup>17</sup>
2. Fols. 39b–43b: R. Azriel of Gerona's *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*<sup>18</sup>
3. Fols. 80a–83a: an anonymous Ashkenazi *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*<sup>19</sup>
4. Fols. 83a–88a: R. Dunash ibn Tamim's *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*<sup>20</sup>
5. Fols. 88a–91a: a *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* identified by D. Abrams as written by R. Ya'akov ha-Kohen<sup>21</sup>
6. Fols. 95a–97a: Nahmanides' *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*<sup>22</sup>

In addition to these six items, whose relation to *Sefer Yetzirah* is conspicuous, on folios 94b–95a this manuscript contains a recipe for the creation of an artificial man, known later as a Golem, which is also based on *Sefer Yetzirah*.<sup>23</sup> This text has been described by Gershom Scholem, who already perceived a similarity between this recipe and Abraham Abulafia, observing: "These instructions show an unmistakable affinity to the yoga practices that have been disseminated among the Jews chiefly by Abraham Abulafia."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, as I have attempted to show elsewhere, the unmistakable affinity may point to Abulafia as the real author of the recipe. We can determine the authorship quite reasonably by comparing the terminology of the recipe with that in the book composed by Abulafia in Rome, *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*.<sup>25</sup> This comparison is even more compelling given the fact that the Parma codex also contains a fragment from this very book (fols. 91a–b). So far as we know, this fragment is the first copy of a part of Abulafia's treatise composed in Rome in 1280. Besides the Abulafian recipe for creating a Golem, the Parma codex contains a passage dealing with the danger of creating a Golem and discussing at length the importance of *Sefer Yetzirah* (fols. 92b–93a).<sup>26</sup> This last text stems from much earlier sources and has nothing to do with Abulafia's theory; nevertheless, the fact that *Sefer Yetzirah* is at the center of the passage seems to be relevant to our discussion here.

The question I would like to address now is whether beyond the two items strongly related to Abulafia, the concern with *Sefer Yetzirah* and its commentaries reflects another affinity to the Kabbalist. Indeed a comparison of the Parma codex's commentaries on *Sefer Yetzirah* with Abulafia's list describing his curriculum in Barcelona shows that with the exception of one item, all the commentaries are identical. And even the single possible exception, the anonymous Ashkenazi commentary, might be identical with what Abulafia referred to as the commentary of R. Yehudah he-Hasid.<sup>27</sup> Given that Abulafia is the only author who ever mentioned so many commentaries on *Sefer Yetzirah* together, and that he arrived in the

same Italian city in which the manuscript was probably copied, there is good reason to see him as the person who brought this collection of commentaries with him to Italy in 1279, and supplied his manuscripts to the copyists. This suggestion is corroborated by the nature of some of the other kabbalistic treatises copied in this codex: three large portions of the remaining folios contain various writings dealing with the most important topic in Abulafia's Kabbalah: the nature of the divine name. R. Abraham ben Axelrad of Cologne's *Keter Shem Tov*, a synthesis of Ashkenazi and Geronese esotericism, opens the manuscript (fols. 1a–4a); R. Asher ben David's *Commentary on the Divine Name*, the first full-scale kabbalistic commentary on the letters of the Tetragrammaton, is found on folios 25b–34b.<sup>28</sup> Last but not least, two short compositions on the vocalization of the consonants of the divine names are found at the end of the manuscript: *Sodot ha-Niqqud* (fols. 97b–103a) and *Sod Nequddat Shem ha-Meyyuhad* (fols. 103b–105a). These treatises are anonymous, but, as Moritz Steinschneider hinted long ago, in their content they closely resemble some views of Abulafia's disciple R. Joseph Gikatilla in his earlier kabbalistic writings.<sup>29</sup> In 1286 Abulafia praised Gikatilla as a successful Kabbalist who in his early writings had added to Kabbalah from his own strength.<sup>30</sup> It may be that some of the “additions” that attracted the admiration of the master are found in the Parma manuscript. In any case, we have here quite a plausible piece of evidence that Abulafia, who left Spain around 1274, was indeed acquainted with some productions of his student. If future scholarship conclusively proves the affinity between these two short treatises and Gikatilla, we will have very strong evidence to support attributing the collection of significant parts of the codex to Abulafia himself.

In this context, also relevant may be the content of two small anonymous fragments: one dealing with the topic of the Tabernacle (fols. 109b–110a), in a manner reminiscent of the early Gikatilla and the even earlier R. Barukh Togarmi, Abulafia's master; the other dealing with two angels, Metatron and Sandalphon, and using *gematria'ot* similar to those found in the writings of Togarmi (fols. 14b–15a).<sup>31</sup> Although the Parma manuscript also contains several treatises dealing with theosophical issues that are far from Abulafia's main concerns as an ecstatic mystic, these are relatively short tracts, whose presence in the codex may reflect the copyists' use of other manuscripts, such as Ms. London 756 mentioned above, in addition to that hypothetically possessed by Abulafia; or, alternatively, we may assume that the younger Abulafia was less resistant or antagonistic to theosophical Kabbalah than he became in the second half of the 1280s in Sicily, as a result of the assault by R. Shlomo ben Abraham ibn Adret.<sup>32</sup> We may assume that the younger Abulafia had collected kabbalistic material from the Geronese school, such as R. Azriel of Gerona's *Sha'ar ha-Sho'el*, which is found in the Parma de Rossi

manuscript (fols. 8b–14b), and brought them to Italy, either because at the beginning of his career he did not oppose the theosophical positions or because he was selling them for financial reasons. Daniel Abrams has kindly drawn my attention to the fact that Ms. New York, Jewish Theological Seminary of America 8124, is a direct continuation of the Parma codex. This manuscript contains theosophical Kabbalah, as well as letters sent by Nahmanides from the land of Israel. Together the Parma and New York manuscripts contain almost all the kabbalistic, and some of the nonkabbalistic, material found in two manuscripts that were copied in Rome in 1284.

If my hypothesis is correct that Abraham Abulafia brought the kabbalistic treatises found in this manuscript to Rome, he should be recognized not only as the disseminator of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and of his own ecstatic Kabbalah, but also of some forms of Ashkenazi material and theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah. The presence in this manuscript of R. Ezra of Gerona's long fragment from his *Commentary on the Talmudic Agaddot*, and of R. Azriel of Gerona's books, as well as the presence in this and other, similar manuscripts (described below) of texts by R. Asher ben David, both Kabbalists who developed the theory of the sefirot as divine instruments, is emblematic of the further development of kabbalistic theosophy in Italy, since their instrumentalist stand was preferred by Kabbalists like Menahem Recanati and Alemanno, as we shall see below.

#### Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 763

Ms. Paris, BN 763, copied by R. Yehonathan ben Aviezer ha-Kohen of Rome, comprises sixty-four folios,<sup>33</sup> less than half the number found in the Parma codex. However, it contributes some new elements. It contains the same commentaries on *Sefer Yetzirah* (fols. 1b–12b, 22b–26a, 31b–34b) found in the Parma codex, with the exception of that of R. Azriel of Gerona. The Abulafian material is also present there (fols. 26a–28a and 31a–b), as well as the material on *Sefer Yetzirah* and the Golem (fols. 29a–b), and R. Asher ben David's *Commentary on the Divine Name* (fols. 12a–21b).<sup>34</sup> This correspondence, as well as other instances of overlapping in content,<sup>35</sup> demonstrates a possible linkage between the two codexes. This conclusion is fostered by the fact that the Paris codex was copied in Rome in 1284, two years before the Parma manuscript was compiled. Since both manuscripts are written in Italian hands, since their content overlaps to a very great extent, and since these are the only two dated manuscripts of Kabbalah in Italy from this decade, the linkage between them seems to me to be more than plausible. However, the precise nature of this linkage is not quite clear: the absence of the commentary of R. Azriel of Gerona from the earlier document seems to lessen the possibility that the later manuscript was copied from it. Since I assume that

Gerona's commentary was not added later randomly, but was part of a larger collection similar to Abulafia's list, I am strongly inclined to presuppose the existence of another codex, now lost, similar in content to that of the Paris codex but larger and closer to the content of Abulafia's list. Since the Paris codex contains an Abulafian fragment that is strongly related to a work that Abulafia composed in Rome in 1280, *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, it may be suggested that the copyist of this codex had access to a manuscript emanating from a circle of students of Abulafia's, in Rome or in Capua, and copied from it significant parts of the hypothetical manuscript. Later on, another copyist, R. Menahem ben Benjamin, had access to the same or a very similar manuscript, and copied similar though not identical parts of the original. On the basis of these facts, suggestions, and conjectures, I am strongly inclined to see in Abraham Abulafia not only the first Kabbalist who composed some of his books in Italy and Sicily, but also someone who brought with him to Italy kabbalistic and Ashkenazi material, namely the anonymous *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*—perhaps authored by R. Yehudah he-Hasid—thus widening the cultural horizons of the Jewish Italian intellectuals.

#### Ms. London, British Library 756

Like the Paris codex, the London manuscript catalogued as British Library 756 was copied by R. Yehonathan ben Aviezer ha-Kohen of Rome at an unknown date. It contains mainly theosophical Kabbalah, most of it stemming from Catalonia. The content of this manuscript and the Paris codex does not overlap, but together they supply most of the kabbalistic material copied in Ms. Parma, de Rossi 1390. For example, the British Library manuscript contains the material of Gikatilla on the secrets of the vocalizations and the divine name, R. Azriel of Gerona's *Sha'ar ha-Sho'el*, and numerous theosophical-theurgical secrets stemming from Catalan Kabbalah, which correspond to the content of Ms. New York, Jewish Theological Seminary 1824.<sup>36</sup>

### 3. MENAHEM BEN BENJAMIN, THE COPYIST OF THE PARMA CODEX, A RESIDENT OF ROME?

Rome in the 1280s was one of the most active Jewish cultural centers. Tzidqiah ben Abraham and Isaiah di Trani the second, the two greatest halakhic scholars, lived there, as did R. Zerahyah ben Sha'altiel Hen, known as Gracian, an important Jewish philosopher and translator from Arabic; Isaac ben Mordekhai, known as Maestro Gaio; the famous poet R. Immanuel ben Shelomo and his cousin, a thinker and translator named Yehudah Romano; and, of course, for a time, Abulafia. The writings of these notables convey the impression that they were working in an intense intellectual ambiance, which included many students, translations done by

invitation, and sharp controversy between Roman scholars and others on such matters as Nahmanides' Kabbalah, Abulafia's interpretation of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, the polemic between Zerahyah Gracian and R. Hillel of Verona, and exchanges of letters between the same Gracian and R. Yehudah ben Shelomo of Barcelona. It was in this fertile intellectual milieu that the Paris and London codexes were copied by "R. Yehonathan ben Eliezer ha-Kohen . . . from the community of Ferrara."<sup>37</sup> The Paris codex contains not only the kabbalistic material described above but also Nahmanides' *Sha'ar ha-Gemul*, a treatise dealing with the fate of the soul after death; and R. Zerahyah ben Sha'altiel's translation of Abu Nasr al-Farabi's treatise on the nature of the soul.<sup>38</sup> This translation from Arabic was completed in the same period in which it was copied in the Paris codex.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the kabbalistic treatises copied in the Paris and London codexes are a small contribution to a much more variegated spiritual milieu. The fact that the same treatises were copied again, in the same decade, most of them by R. Menahem ben Benjamin, in an unidentified place in Italy, shows that this kind of material had an audience that welcomed the arrival of this type of literature. This interest in Kabbalah is paralleled in the same decade by the intense literary activity of Abulafia in Sicily and by the decisive contributions of the Castilian Kabbalah. Let us turn now to the copyist of some important parts of the Parma codex.

The name Menahem is by now very well known as the name of a copyist, as a result of two studies by Michele Dukan, who was able to trace and describe in great detail various manuscripts copied in Italy at the end of the thirteenth century for a certain R. Menahem ben Benjamin.<sup>40</sup> Despite their identical name, it is possible that Menahem ben Benjamin, the copyist of many of the kabbalistic treatises of the Parma codex, was another person altogether; this issue still awaits a more detailed analysis. Menahem ben Benjamin is mentioned in the colophon of another early kabbalistic manuscript copied in Italy, again by Yehonathan ben Aviezer ha-Kohen, Ms. Munich 207; the colophon mentions the sale of "*Sefer ha-Hayyim* and *Sefer ha-Meshalim*" to R. Menahem ben Benjamin on day 30 of the month of Adar I, 5046, which corresponds to February 26, 1286.<sup>41</sup> These two works are the well-known *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, attributed to R. Abraham ibn Ezra but actually stemming from a northern European thinker at the beginning of the thirteenth century;<sup>42</sup> and *Sefer ha-Meshalim*, by the twelfth-century author R. Jacob ben Berakhiah ha-Naqdan.<sup>43</sup> What is important for our purpose here is that Menahem ben Benjamin, the buyer of the Munich codex, copied into the Parma codex the entire text of *Sefer ha-Hayyim*. Moreover, *Sefer ha-Hayyim* had already been copied by the same R. Yehonathan at the end of the Paris codex. Thus, we may describe the content of the Parma codex as including kabbalistic material similar to that found in the Paris and London codexes, as well as material found in the Munich codex; and



this combination was done by Menahem ben Benjamin. I would assume that Menahem had not seen, much less bought, the Paris codex, which already included the *Sefer ha-Hayyim*; had he possessed the Paris codex, he would presumably not also have bought the Munich one. This conjecture is corroborated by the fact that the Parma codex, which includes a commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* by R. Azriel of Gerona, is not found in the Paris codex. It well may be that R. Yehonathan had copied another manuscript, in addition to the Paris and London ones, containing the kabbalistic writings found in the Paris codex and more, and sold it to Menahem ben Benjamin.

We have another important testimony about the arrival of Spanish Kabbalah in Italy. A loose piece of parchment in Ms. Milan, Ambrosiana 52 P.12, catalogue no. 53, mentions the purchase of a manuscript on November 8, 1285, by a certain R. Menahem ben Benjamin containing the same *Sefer ha-Hayyim* and R. Eleazar of Worms's *Hokhmah ha-Nefesh*, in addition to some "secrets."<sup>44</sup> The notice of sale also mentions R. Moshe ben Nahman's *Commentary on the Pentateuch*.<sup>45</sup> Some of the kabbalistic material found in the Ambrosiana manuscript, copied in 1528, such as R. Azriel of Gerona's *Sha'ar ha-Sho'el* and R. Asher ben David's *Commentary on the Divine Name*, is also contained in the Parma codex, as is *Sefer ha-Hayyim*; they also occur in Ms. London, British Library 756. The Ambrosiana manuscript also contains, inter alia, three other kabbalistic writings, the book *Bahir*, R. Asher ben David's *Commentary on the Thirteen Divine Attributes*, and *Midrash ha-Ne'elam on the Scroll of Ruth*, which were very influential on Recanati's writings. Thus, the content of the Parma codex reflects to a very great degree a combination of almost all the content of the Paris and London codexes, copied by R. Yehonathan ben Aviezer—with the exception of Nahmanides' *Sha'ar ha-Gemul*—and important information about the sale of the Ambrosiana manuscript to Menahem ben Benjamin.

Unfortunately, the notices of sale found in the Milan Ambrosiana and the Munich codexes do not indicate the place. However, given that R. Yehonathan ben Aviezer ha-Kohen was in Rome less than two years before the sale mentioned in the Munich codex, it is possible that he was still there when he copied and sold that manuscript. He was still a resident of this city in 1294, when he copied the now lost Ms. Turin 76, which contained only philosophical treatises translated by R. Zerahyah Hen. Thus we may suppose, though this is not certain, that both Menahem and Yehonathan were residents of Rome. This conjecture is corroborated by Michele Dukan's detailed proof of the relationship between Menahem ben Benjamin and another copyist, a woman named Paula, apparently a member of his larger family, who was also a resident of Rome in the late 1280s and early 1290s.<sup>46</sup>

On the basis of all these facts and conjectures, we may extrapolate that in Rome, where Abulafia lived for a while in 1280 and taught two important halakhic figures,<sup>47</sup>



there was a sudden burst of interest in Kabbalah, reflected by the copying of the manuscripts discussed above, which fostered the emergence of ecstatic Kabbalah.

#### 4. IS R. MENAHEM BEN BENJAMIN THE COPYIST R. MENAHEM RECANATI?

The acquisition of the Munich and Ambrosiana codexes, as well as the copying of the Parma codex, by R. Menahem ben Benjamin demonstrates a distinct interest in Jewish esotericism, and raises the question whether we should not identify him with the famous Italian Kabbalist named Menahem ben Benjamin Recanati. Menahem Recanati is unquestionably one of the most important among the earlier Kabbalists, and one whose influence on the development of the Italian Kabbalah was profound. Yet although he is mentioned thousands of times in the scholarly literature on theosophical Kabbalah, his biography remains sketchy. The identification of this famous Kabbalist with some of the manuscripts copied by Menahem ben Benjamin may help both to illuminate some points in his life and to chart his intellectual development.<sup>48</sup>

The extant writings of Menahem Recanati contain no traces of the Abulafian content of the Parma manuscript, nor does he explicitly acknowledge Nahmanides' commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*, even though he quotes from it in his *Commentary on the Torah*.<sup>49</sup> By and large, Recanati was not influenced by what I call the first wave of kabbalistic literature found in the manuscripts described above.<sup>50</sup> Recanati does quote some treatises in the Parma manuscript, such as the *Prayer of Unity*, attributed to R. Nehuniah ben ha-Qaneh and stemming from the kabbalistic work *Sefer ha-Iyyun*, or *Book of Contemplation*,<sup>51</sup> and referred to in both the *Commentary on the Rationales of the Commandments* and the *Commentary on the Torah*.<sup>52</sup> However, the Parma codex is not the main source of Recanati's Kabbalah as manifested in his own writings. He apparently became acquainted with a much greater amount of kabbalistic literature stemming from Castile, from the last decades of the thirteenth century, and his encounter with the strong mythological Kabbalah, with the *Book of the Zohar* at its center, has marginalized the importance of the material found in the Parma manuscript. However, the content of this codex is important in helping us to trace the evolution of Recanati's thought, which within a short period moved from a relatively speculative focus to a more mythical one. This issue remains to be explored in detail. However, I guess that although such a transition can be proved, even while adopting the Castilian emphasis on myth Recanati remained inclined to a philosophical approach to the theosophy as he imagined it.

#### 5. SOME OF NAHMANIDES' WRITINGS IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ROME

Four of the manuscripts produced in Rome in the 1280s reproduce Nahmanides' writings: the Paris codex contains the commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* and *Sha'ar*

ha-Gemul, the London manuscript excerpts from the Commentary on the Pentateuch, the Parma and New York manuscripts three of Nahmanides' epistles, the Parma codex the commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*. The Milan Ambrosiana codex mentions Nahmanides' *Commentary on the Pentateuch*. Their presence demonstrates a growing interest in the thought of Nahmanides, a fact that is corroborated by the great influence of his *Sha'ar ha-Gemul* on R. Hillel of Verona, who was active in the same period.<sup>53</sup> In his critique of R. Hillel's views, R. Zerahyah repeatedly attacks Nahmanides' positions, which he presents as opposing those of Maimonides.<sup>54</sup> Thus Rome became one of the centers of influence of the writings of Nahmanides in the generation following his death. Nahmanides became known as the "great Rabbi," *ha-rav ha-gadol*, and Recanati refers to him in this way scores of times in his writings, as well as quoting Nahmanides hundreds of times in his *Commentary on the Torah*, in most cases in a very positive way.<sup>55</sup>

#### 6. REMARKS ON JEWISH CULTURE IN LATE-THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ROME

Clearly, Rome was a place where Catalan Jewish culture, philosophical and kabbalistic, was already well represented in the 1280s. Jewish Roman culture also benefited from contacts with Christian Scholasticism.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Italian Jewish culture had already made contributions of its own, in the forms of Abulafia's and Recanati's forms of Kabbalah and of translations in Rome of philosophical treatises from Latin and Arabic. The commencement of Kabbalah in Italy was therefore part of a cultural renaissance, manifested also in other domains such as philosophy, poetry, and Halakhah. One example involves the Neoplatonic treatise *Liber de Causis*, sometimes attributed to Aristotle, which was translated three times from Latin, by Zerahyah Hen, Hillel of Verona, and Yehudah Romano, and quoted by Abraham Abulafia in Sicily, apparently from yet another translation, whereas in Spain this book did not have a significant impact on Jewish philosophers.<sup>57</sup> Recent studies by Joseph Sermoneta and Caterina Rigo demonstrate amply that Jewish philosophical thought in the city profited immensely from direct contact with Christian texts available in Italy. Translations from Latin Scholastic literature and translations from Arabic enriched the range of philosophical thought of Italian Jews, who even preserved in Hebrew Latin texts lost in their original.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, it would be difficult to find a distinguished poet of the stature of Immanuel of Rome at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century in the entire Jewish world. In our specific context of Kabbalah in Italy, it should be mentioned that the philosopher Yehudah Romano was inclined, like his contemporary Immanuel of Rome, to some form of speculative mysticism, and even referred, perhaps for the first time, to the *sefirot* as identical with the concept of ideas.<sup>59</sup> And different though Immanuel's and Yehudah

Romano's propensities were to a "rational mysticism"—to borrow a term used by Georges Vajda and Joseph Sermoneta—like Abulafia they used Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* as a major point of departure for their mysticism.

# 7. ABULAFIA AND SOME ASHKENAZI TREATISES EXTANT IN MS. ROME, ANGELICA 46

In his enumeration of the commentaries on *Sefer Yetzirah*, Abulafia mentions that he has heard of one by a certain R. Eleazar Ashkenazi ha-Darshan, an inhabitant of Würzburg, that he has not yet seen. Such a commentary had indeed been written, and it has recently been printed.<sup>60</sup> How did a Kabbalist who had been living for some years in Messina know in 1285–86 that a contemporary Ashkenazi author had written a book that he had not yet seen? The answer lies in some form of oral communication, which reflects not only Abulafia's curiosity about commentaries on *Sefer Yetzirah* but also the way in which Jewish culture operates, and in our case Jewish culture in Italy. An important codex, preserved today in the Angelica Library in Rome, no. 46, contains material related to R. Eleazar ha-Darshan, his son R. Moshe Azriel, and some of their Ashkenazi sources.<sup>61</sup> This is a late-thirteenth-century manuscript written in an Ashkenazi hand, whose content has already attracted the attention of scholars but still demands detailed analysis. Here I can address only a few issues touching upon our subject. Ms. Rome, Angelica 46, begins (fols. 1a–18a) with an untitled treatise by R. Moshe Azriel ben Eleazar ha-Darshan of Erfurt, which combines a variety of Ashkenazi esoteric traditions with theosophical symbolism.<sup>62</sup> Immediately afterward there are three treatises dealing with esoteric issues: *Sefer ha-Navon*,<sup>63</sup> *Commentary on the Haftarah*, and a version of the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*. All three were written by an early-thirteenth-century Ashkenazi figure, R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo the Prophet, known also as Troestlin the Prophet. His Hebrew name and his *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron* are mentioned by R. Moshe Azriel ben Eleazar ha-Darshan in the Angelica manuscript.<sup>64</sup> The fact that the manuscript resides in a Roman library does not in itself mean that it was copied in the city or that it was there in the thirteenth century. However, I would like to suggest that material found in this manuscript was known in late-thirteenth-century Rome, by drawing upon some information in Abulafia's writings.

In his commentary on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, written in 1279 or 1280 in Capua and titled *Sitrei Torah*, Abulafia quotes from a *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*. The passage deals with the angel Yaho'el, but it differs from the Angelica manuscript both in details of its wording and in some important themes.<sup>65</sup> Abulafia attributes the passage to R. Eleazar of Worms. The angelic name Yaho'el appears not only in Abulafia's *Sitrei Torah* but also in his *Hayyei*

ha-'Olam ha-Ba', books written in 1279–80 in Capua and Rome, and also in his latter writings, such as *Sefer ha-'Ot* and *Sefer ha-Hesheq*; but the name of this angel never occurs in his extant earlier writings.<sup>66</sup>

As I have already pointed out elsewhere, there are similarities between themes found in the Angelica 46 codex and Abulafia's thought. So, for example, the vision of the letters of the divine name as described in *Sefer ha-Navon* is reminiscent of a passage from Abulafia's *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, a book written in Rome in 1280.<sup>67</sup> Also the connection between the recitation of divine names and the attainment of an experience of prophecy, so central in Abulafia's Kabbalah, bears a resemblance to a text by R. Moshe Azriel.<sup>68</sup> Last but not least, as I have hinted at above, Abulafia's understanding of the meaning of Judaism by an analysis of the consonants of the term *Yehudah* may stem from R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo.<sup>69</sup> Let me emphasize that I do not assume that Abulafia had seen or used the Ashkenazi material as formulated in Ms. Angelica 46. He had, in my opinion, another and presumably earlier version of R. Nehemiah's writings before his eyes, since the passage he quotes explicitly from the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron* contains some few elements that are absent from the version preserved in the Angelica codex. The major difference reflects, in my opinion, an act of censorship of Christian or Jewish-Christian motifs, which are preserved in Abulafia's version of the passage.<sup>70</sup> I assume that Abulafia knew the anonymous student of R. Moshe Azriel who was presumably responsible for the formulation of the Ashkenazi texts as they appear in Ms. Angelica,<sup>71</sup> but that the ecstatic Kabbalist had seen the material that that student brought from the Ashkenazi region before the student edited it in the form it is found in the manuscript. Other support for the assumption that the material represented in Ms. Angelica was found in the thirteenth century in Rome comes from the fact that the only early Kabbalist to be influenced by it is no other than R. Menahem Recanati.<sup>72</sup> I wonder whether the Ashkenazi figure that he testifies that he met and had some discussions with was connected to his acquaintance with our material.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, we may assume that both Abulafia and Recanati had access, in Italy, to some forms of esoteric material emanating from Ashkenaz that were not mediated by Spanish sources.<sup>74</sup>

These observations are important not only for compiling a potential inventory of the resources of Jewish esotericism in late-thirteenth-century Rome or Italy, but also for a better understanding of Abulafia's development. His first and most formative encounter with Jewish mysticism indeed took place in Barcelona in 1271, but we may assume also the importance of another, less formative, but nevertheless significant encounter with two other forms of Ashkenazi esotericism in 1279–80 in Rome: one with the works of R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, and perhaps another with a later and more synthetic type of thought articulated by the descendants of

R. Yehudah he-Hasid, his grandson R. Eleazar ben Moshe ha-Darshan, and the latter's son, perhaps R. Moshe Azriel. This encounter presumably took place during the most intense and fertile years in Abulafia's life and literary career.

Thus, in one decade, approximately 1280–1290, the Jewish culture in Rome was enriched by the arrival of a variety of Jewish esoteric material: theosophical and ecstatic Kabbalah, as well as Ashkenazi esoteric material. As we shall see below, in this decade R. Zerachyah ben Sha'altiel Hen in Rome knew of material that was close to a magical-esoteric understanding of Maimonides.<sup>75</sup>

The concomitant arrival of a significant stream of books from Spain and Ashkenaz dealing with Jewish esoterica and other topics is unquestionably a specifically Jewish development.<sup>76</sup> It fertilized not only Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah but also R. Menahem Recanati's thought, and the writings of both Kabbalists would be translated into Latin and studied in Florence at the end of the fifteenth century by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and others. However, in the thirteenth century none of those books had been translated into Latin or studied by Christian scholars or authors. Nevertheless, this phenomenon of cultural transmission and fertilization of Jewish thought in the Italian peninsula may help us to understand also another cultural event: the arrival in Italy of material from Castile translated into Latin or Castilian, and its possible impact on Dante Alighieri. Miguel Asin Palacios, and following him other scholars, have pointed to the possibility that *Liber Scalae*, or *Libro della scalla*, a book translated from Arabic into some Romance languages and describing Muhammad's ascent on high, may have influenced Dante's *Divina commedia*.<sup>77</sup> However, some scholars have suggested that themes found in the Arabic book stem from Jewish esoteric literature, more precisely from the so-called Heikhalot literature.<sup>78</sup> It is this literature that permeates also the esoteric writings of the Ashkenazi figures represented in Ms. Angelica 46.<sup>79</sup>

## 8. GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON TRANSITION AND PRESERVATION IN MEDIEVAL ITALY

We have analyzed the content of several early Italian manuscripts dealing with forms of esoterica stemming from both Ashkenazi and Sephardi sources. The arrival of a great amount of material in Italy in the thirteenth century attests to deep changes during that time in the different centers of Jewish culture. In addition to the solid historical evidence in the form of manuscripts and persons who brought them to Italy, discussed above, there was a legend in this century concerning a sage who arrived in Sicily from Morocco. In a pseudepigraphic letter attributed to R. Hai Gaon, an important halakhic figure in the tenth century, but actually fabricated sometime in the second half of the thirteenth century,<sup>80</sup> we read:

this great sage, may God save, from whom I received all this, testified about a sage from Marseilles who came to Montpellier and testified that he had seen in Sicily a great Moroccan sage, who was intelligent and deeply knowledgeable in the science of astronomy, that of the ancients and of the later, and was the great physician of the king of Sicily, and was highly regarded by the king and his ministers and great ones, like an angel of God. And he [the sage] told his disciples: "Be wary of the sect of the inquirers and the sect of those who speculate." Moreover, this [Sicilian] sage showed to the sage of Montpellier a passage from the books of the great Moroccan sage:<sup>81</sup> "Woe to whoever relies on his sharpness and inquiry, and his head goes after his feet, and leaves aside the secrets of the prophets and the sages of the children of Israel, and indulges in the science of philosophy, which is an illusion, and the science of the sorcerers and diviners, its foot is without a head and a brain. . . . Woe to whoever speculates but did not receive, [and] who received but did not speculate, because both should be learned from the mouth of the rabbi, and by eye and heart. This is the end of the passage."<sup>82</sup>

At this point it is impossible to verify a historical core for such a legend, and I am inclined to dismiss its contribution to the historical understanding of the processes that shaped the thirteenth-century developments of Jewish mysticism. However, its *imaginaire* serves as an excellent tool for a better understanding of the dynamics of the controversy between Maimonides and the camp that opposed him and whose interest in occult matters was great. In a way, this is an answer to the Great Eagle's letter to the sages of Montpellier against astrology. Sicily serves in this epistle as a stronghold of antiphilosophical approaches, one that emphasizes the ancient lore and its transmission as superior to speculation and inquiry. Just as the Andalusian Jews expelled from Spain were active in promoting Maimonides' thought in new centers, eminently Provence,<sup>83</sup> so too the pseudepigraphic epistle emphasized Morocco, where Maimonides lived for a while, the vast knowledge of the sage, and his status as a physician of the king—just as Maimonides was the physician of the sultan. In any case, Sicily stands in the epistle as a place of transmission of knowledge between North Africa and southern France, in this case not of written material but of oral traditions, a role reminiscent of Italy insofar as the Hasidei Ashkenaz traditions are concerned. Moreover, unlike the solitary figure of Maimonides in Egypt, who corresponded much but did not have a circle of disciples, the anonymous Kabbalist who forged the epistle conveyed the impression that in Sicily there was a master who led a group of disciples.

Although Italy was undoubtedly a major center for the transmission of esoteric traditions from East to West in the tenth and eleventh centuries, after the first

decades of the thirteenth century, as we shall see in chapter 12, the flux of esoteric knowledge drastically reversed direction, with esoteric material making its way to the East from Italy, which became the major consumer of the new material. Italy's new status reflected improvements in social and economic conditions for Jews, producing more stable communities than elsewhere in Europe, with the result that the existence of centers of interest in culture in Sicily, Naples, Rome, and, later, Mantua, Florence, and Venice drew many scholars and manuscripts to the Italian peninsula, and many of the manuscripts have been preserved there ever since.

It is solely in Italian codexes that material written in both Spain and Ashkenaz survived. This is the case of the small fragments by R. Barukh Togarmi mentioned above, presumably written in Barcelona, and the material by R. Eleazar ha-Darshan. These examples are part of a much larger picture, provided by Benjamin Richler: manuscripts either copied in Italy or brought there represent no less than 35 percent and perhaps even as much as 45 percent of the entire manuscript literature in Hebrew. This is a huge percentage, given that Italian Jews never amounted to a significant share of the Jewish population throughout the world; and even the lower figure would appear to be an exaggeration if the fine scholarship and cautious approach of Richler did not stand beyond these statistics.<sup>84</sup> Also surprising in this context is the small number of works written originally in Italy in relation to the large amounts of literature committed to writing in Spain and in the Ashkenazi lands. The discrepancy between the small size of Italian Jewry in the thirteenth century and the huge patrimony of manuscripts that was either created in the peninsula or brought to Italy and preserved there, especially since the thirteenth century, confirms Italy's central cultural importance for Jews in this period.

Significant percentages of these Italian manuscripts deal with Kabbalah and other forms of Jewish esoterica. Although the catalogues of the numerous Italian libraries are among the earliest and sometimes the best available in Jewish studies, exhaustive identification of the content of the manuscripts is only in its first stages, as is the work necessary to produce a more detailed picture of their content, distribution, and impact. Given the propensity to anonymity that characterizes kabbalistic literature, this situation prevents an exhaustive presentation of Italian Kabbalah. Over the years, I have attempted to read all the available manuscripts of the main Italian Kabbalists or those who were active in Italy, especially Abraham Abulafia, Menahem Recanati, and Yohanan Alemanno. However, many manuscripts composed in Italy, and even more of them copied there, still await a first perusal, a detailed analysis, an identification of their authors, and integration of their contents into a more comprehensive picture of the history of Italian Kabbalah. The following chapters represent an effort to take into consideration



the treasuries of Italian manuscripts, but the resulting picture is necessarily tentative, with many gaps and shortcomings. I shall attempt to go beyond just listing names and titles, to analyze what seem to me to be the major conceptual frameworks that informed the Italian Kabbalists and, whenever possible, to integrate their views within both Jewish and Christian cultural and historical contexts.

So far we have dealt mainly with the arrival of Kabbalah and kabbalistic material in the Italian territories. But Abulafia came from elsewhere, and the manuscripts that he brought with him represent forms of Jewish esoterica elaborated in other centers of Jewish culture, as in the case of the content of Ms. Rome, Angelica 46. The sudden irruption of new material into Italy introduced forms of Jewish esotericism that in turn developed further in the thirteenth century in other parts of Europe. Their arrival in Italy marks the region's central cultural status in this period for both Christians and Jews.



# 8

## R. MENAHEM BEN BENJAMIN RECANATI

### 1. THE THEOSOPHICAL-THEURGICAL MODEL

Abraham Abulafia, a Spanish figure who flourished in Italy, was the founder of ecstatic Kabbalah. R. Menahem ben Benjamin Recanati was the first Italian Kabbalist to adopt an important version of another type of Kabbalah, the theosophical-theurgical one. In doing so he accepted a theological view that differed dramatically from Abulafia's, one that assumed the existence of a transcendental divine layer, designated as 'Illat ha-'Illot, *Causa Causarum*, and a system of ten divine powers named sefirot. We shall have much more to say about the details of this theosophical system in the next chapter. Here, however, we should explore the consequences of the fact that the first Kabbalist who flourished in Italy after Abulafia did not follow his

mystical path and ignored his writings; he did not even engage in polemics with the ecstatic Kabbalist or his followers. Indeed, the two Kabbalists are so different in their outlook that there are very few points of contact, a fact that raises the question of the very nature of Kabbalah. Since the divergences between Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah and Recanati's theosophical-theurgical one are so substantial, it may be asked whether they should be discussed under the same rubric or if they belong to the same lore. The differences between the two Kabbalists active in Italy are important not only for the phenomenology of Kabbalah but especially for the understanding of the specific nature of this lore in Italy.

Having examined some aspects of Abulafia's mystical writings, let us consider R. Menahem Recanati's kabbalistic project. He is one of the most famous representatives of what I call the theosophical-theurgical model, one of the three major models in kabbalistic literature. Unlike the ecstatic model, represented chiefly by the writings of Abraham Abulafia and some of his followers, the theosophical-theurgical model pervades many kabbalistic writings and is the most influential model in Kabbalah.

How should Recanati's role in this prolific kabbalistic literature be understood? Is he an innovative writer, like Abulafia, or merely an author who imported to Italy a view that had already been expressed elsewhere? His importance consists, in my opinion, not only in his importation from Spain to Italy of the view that the ten sefirot are the instruments of the divine creation, but also in his having offered the most articulated and widespread formulation of this view. Whereas Abulafia's role in creating ecstatic Kabbalah is unique, Recanati is only one, though indeed a very important one, of the major theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists. As I shall show in the next chapter, he brought together two quite different kabbalistic theosophies, and his synthesis is both unique and widely influential. Here, however, let us briefly consider the way in which kabbalistic theosophy has been moved to the center of research in modern scholarship. This discussion is important in order to differentiate the way I see Recanati from the way in which he has been understood by modern scholars, as part of their larger vision of kabbalistic literature. Most modern scholars, largely following the views of Gershom Scholem, construe Kabbalah as a theosophical doctrine related to the ten sefirot.<sup>1</sup> The assumption is that a relatively homogeneous mystical phenomenon, more theoretical than practical, underlies an entire range of kabbalistic literature. Let me start with one of Scholem's more explicit definitions of Kabbalah: "the mystical interpretation of the attributes and the unity of God, in the so-called doctrine of the Sefiroth, constituted a problem common to all Kabbalists, while the solutions given to it by and in the various schools differ from one another."<sup>2</sup> Despite this scholarly attempt to propose the existence of a common core question for all the kabbalistic schools,

which responded to it in various ways, it would be much more cautious to see the theosophical aspect as an important one addressed by many, though not all, Kabbalists. However, Scholem's entire oeuvre takes the position that theosophy is not only a central issue shared by all the Kabbalists, but also the single most important feature of Kabbalah. The result is an assumption that all Kabbalah focuses on attaining knowledge of the divine attributes, rather than on the experiential involvement in processes connected with them, by means of theurgic, and sometimes mystical-theurgic, performance of the commandments.

Here is another of Scholem's descriptions of Jewish mysticism, which is representative of his vision of Kabbalah. Just before the quotation above, after indicating that Jewish mysticism is shaped by the positive content and values recognized by Judaism, Scholem characterizes the Jewish mystics as follows:

Their ideas proceed from the concepts and values peculiar to Judaism, that is to say, above all from the belief in the Unity of God and the meaning of His revelation as laid down in the Torah, the sacred law. Jewish mysticism in its various forms represents an attempt to interpret the religious values of Judaism in terms of mystical values. It concentrates upon the idea of the living God who manifests himself in the act of Creation, Revelation and Redemption. Pushed to its extreme, the mystical meditation on this idea gives birth to the conception of a sphere, a whole realm of divinity, which underlies the world of our sense-data and which is present and active in all that exists.<sup>3</sup>

There is much to be praised in this statement; however, it embraces the dominant modern theoretical approach to Kabbalah, which conceives of this mystical lore more in theological than in experiential terms. So, for example, a reverberation of this view is found in R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, who claims that "the discursive and even dialectical elements are so prominent in kabbalistic literature that we may almost speak of an intellectualistic hypertrophy. It often looks as if the sole difference between Talmudic and Kabbalistic literature resides in the different subject-matter."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Isaiah Tishby, another of Scholem's main disciples, describes one of the key concepts of Kabbalah, the doctrine of the sefirot, as follows: "it can be established without a doubt that there is some reflection here of a definite gnostic tendency, and that it did in fact emerge and develop from a historico-literary contact with the remnants of Gnosis, which were preserved over a period of many generations in certain Jewish circles, until they found their way to early kabbalists, who were deeply affected by them both spiritually and intellectually."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as we learn from this quotation, confidence in Scholem's theory was so great that the Gnostic thesis was considered to be a proven fact, which "deeply affected" Kabbalah.

The kabbalistic views on evil, another topic that may indeed be important but has certainly been overemphasized in modern scholarship, is also judged to have been influenced by Gnostic sources. The fascination of some scholars of Kabbalah with the problem of evil and its role in Jewish mysticism warrants a separate analysis; it may betray the fascination with evil that is characteristic of the Gnostics.<sup>6</sup> Scholem assumed that the kabbalistic view of the origin of evil had a Zoroastrian source, and that it reached the medieval Kabbalists through the mediation of Gnostic sources.<sup>7</sup> Tishby formulates this view in what is the main study on the kabbalistic doctrine of evil: "The theory that evil and the dark, 'left-sided' forces were put forth as a separate emanation is an ancient one, and it certainly stems from Iranian dualistic systems, and from there it came to the Gnostic movement. . . . It is clear that such a doctrine had necessarily changed its extreme dualistic nature when it penetrated into Jewish circles."<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere the same scholar mentions that "the gnostic character of the main trends of the medieval Jewish mysticism, known as Kabbalah, is now a well-known and well-established fact. . . . These systems exhibit gnostic traits in the whole field of theology: in their doctrines of God, creation, evil, man, salvation, and redemption. They amount, in fact, to a gnostic transformation of Judaism."<sup>9</sup>

No hesitation seems to haunt scholars in their assessment of an issue that "deeply affects" the very nature of the main form of Kabbalah. Indeed, if the theory above is correct, Recanati is to be conceived of as one of the greatest "Gnostics," given his concerns with theosophy and sometimes with evil. Nevertheless, it seems that a better understanding of Recanati's thought, one that is more complex and variegated, may open the way for a better understanding of the main concerns of other theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists, too, and help us to restate the entire problem of Gnosticism as a significant component of Kabbalah. What seems to me problematic in the scholarly theories described above involves more than the inadequate evidence for a transmission of ancient Gnostic mythologems into medieval Kabbalah; rather it involves the dissociation of the theosophical speculations of scholars from their crucial context, that of theurgy.<sup>10</sup> Modern scholars, like the ancient Gnostics, have been much more concerned with abstract knowledge, marginalizing the ritual involved in attaining the mystical experience.

Theosophy is a realm of discourse that modern scholars appear to believe they can discuss in isolation, as if the Kabbalists were theologians whose main concern was to map the upper world as an enterprise in itself. It is my contention that theosophy and theurgy were inextricably intertwined, and in the next chapter I shall attempt to demonstrate from Recanati's writings that this is so. By doing so I wish to reinforce an interpretation of the first steps of the Kabbalah as better understood on the basis of an internal development in rabbinic Judaism, whose emphasis on

ritual is well known. Thus the way in which I seek to present Recanati differs from the modern scholarly understanding of Kabbalah both historically—I do not see any significant role for Gnosticism—and phenomenologically, for I contend that we should not separate theosophy from theurgy. Likewise, I shall attempt to show that there are strong mystical aspects to the discussions of theosophical issues. However, before exploring the conceptual innovations of this Kabbalist, let us survey his literary legacy.

## 2. THE WRITINGS OF R. MENAHEM RECANATI

In a generation of very prolific Kabbalists, Recanati was exceptional. Between 1270 and 1295 kabbalistic literature flowered in an unprecedented manner, and most of the Kabbalists produced quite voluminous and numerous writings. This productivity is obvious in both Spain and Italy. The names of Joseph Gikatilla, Moshe de Leon, Abraham Abulafia, Joseph of Hamadan, and last, but not least, those producing the Zoharic literature are ample evidence of a new phase in kabbalistic literature that may be described as that of the innovative Kabbalah. Freedom to innovate and extensive writings are intertwined and are often marked also by originality. In the generation immediately following the innovative Kabbalah the impulse for voluminous writings continued, though only rarely marked by originality; most Kabbalists capitalized on the insights of the previous generation, combining them to create mosaics that were more complex but less coherent and innovative. The writings of the innovative Kabbalists are characterized by the absence of names of earlier Kabbalists or quotations from their writings. This independence from authority was quite astonishing in a literature that claimed to be an ancient tradition. In the generation of the mosaic Kabbalists—namely, those combining the ideas of several kabbalistic schools—the situation changed dramatically: the lengthy productions of R. Yitzhaq of Acre, Joseph Angelet, and R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid are replete with quotations from a variety of kabbalistic schools. They are more concerned with absorbing and digesting, arranging and rearranging the pertinent sources in larger literary creations, more with translating, imitating, or even plagiarizing than with enlarging the horizons of kabbalistic thought.

Between 1295 and 1330, although much was written, there was little conceptual progress. Among the mosaic Kabbalists, the most syncretistic was R. Yitzhaq of Acre, who traveled much in order to study Kabbalah from a variety of schools. His writings provide evidence of the spectrum of kabbalistic knowledge available at the beginning of the fourteenth century. He combines the Catalan and Castilian forms of Kabbalah with the ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia and with Sufic views.<sup>11</sup> His voluminous *Me'irat 'Einayyim* demonstrates the existence of a more general tendency to compile compendia aimed at exposing the hidden dimensions of the Bible.

Other mosaic Kabbalists were less knowledgeable and less syncretistic. Angelet, though a student of R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon, a Catalan Kabbalist, was deeply immersed in Castilian Kabbalah. R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid was more original, although most of his writing consists of lengthy passages copied verbatim from a variety of kabbalistic sources. Recanati was a contemporary of these Kabbalists, and it seems reasonable that there were some relations among them. R. Yitzhaq of Acre provided him with a major source for his theosophy, as we shall see in the next chapter; and R. Joseph Angelet is the first Kabbalist to have quoted Recanati by name.<sup>12</sup> What is common to all four mosaic Kabbalists is their acquaintance with the *Zohar*: R. Yitzhaq wrote the most detailed and seminal document dealing with the emergence of this book,<sup>13</sup> R. David was the first to translate it,<sup>14</sup> R. Joseph Angelet was the first to imitate its Aramaic language,<sup>15</sup> and Recanati was both the first Kabbalist to quote extensively and repeatedly from this book and, together with R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid, the first of its interpreters. By his extensive use of this book Recanati inscribes himself in the list of the Spanish Kabbalists, his contemporaries and admirers of the *Zohar*. However, while it is not surprising that the newly circulated book had a wide influence in Spain, the surfacing of numerous and sometimes long passages from the *Zohar* in the same generation in Italy poses a historical problem, which becomes even more evident when combined with the deep influence of the later kabbalistic writings of three Castilians: R. Moshe ben Shem Tov de Leon, R. Joseph of Hamadan, and R. Joseph Gikatilla. How is it possible to explain the massive use of a vast literature composed only few years before Recanati himself began his own kabbalistic writings? I have no definitive answer to this quandary, and in principle I see only two possible solutions: that a massive importation of kabbalistic literature took place in Italy at the very end of the thirteenth century, or the alternative, for which there is no historical documentation either, namely that Recanati visited Spain for a while, perhaps the region of Soria or Saragossa, and acquired there kabbalistic writings that served him in composing his own writings immediately afterward somewhere in Italy.

In any case, what is clear is that Recanati made massive use of the more mythical Kabbalah that reached him shortly before he started his own kabbalistic literary activity, absorbing its contents, mastering its details, and employing the new texts extensively in his own writings. He apparently was aware of the late date of some of his sources, since he introduces the Castilian books that were composed shortly before with the identifier "the last [most recent] Kabbalists."<sup>16</sup> His use of the new wave of texts is neither servile nor simply eclectic, but usually deliberate, imposing a rather coherent view upon most of the sources quoted in a certain context. In any case, the spectrum of the Spanish kabbalistic writings available to Recanati is very impressive, and the richness of his library is stunning.

Like the other mosaic Kabbalists, Recanati quotes lengthy passages quite precisely, a fact that facilitates definitive identifications of his sources, though he is less generous than R. Yitzhaq of Acre and R. Joseph Angelet in pointing out the names or the titles of their sources.

What are Recanati's original kabbalistic writings, in addition to the treatises that he copied, as suggested in the previous chapter? Undoubtedly the most voluminous and influential book is his *Commentary on the Torah*, perhaps the first full-fledged interpretation of almost the entire Pentateuch based on dominant concepts belonging to the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah. Abraham Abulafia's commentary on the Torah, *Sefer ha-Maftehot*, composed in 1289, uses the allegorical and numerical techniques described in chapter 5 above, and remained in very few manuscripts. The book had no substantial impact on the further development of Kabbalah. R. Moshe ben Nahman's commentary deals chiefly with nonesoteric topics, and R. Bahya ben Asher's voluminous commentary uses Kabbalah as part of a more comprehensive explanation of the biblical text, which also includes numerous midrashic and allegorical expositions. The *Zohar*, the most influential commentary on the Pentateuch, is substantially different from Recanati's in its strong midrashic orientation. R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid's *Sefer Mar'ot ha-Tzove'ot* is mainly a compilation of long passages copied faithfully from other sources or translated from Aramaic. Thus it is mosaic on the macrocosmic level, copying one kabbalistic source for the interpretation of a certain biblical passage, whereas Recanati adduces a variety of concepts and sources in order to interpret one verse kabbalistically.<sup>17</sup> *Sefer Mar'ot ha-Tzove'ot* remained at the margin of Kabbalah, although it was more influential than Abulafia's commentary on the Pentateuch. Thus Recanati was the first Kabbalist who embraced a theosophical-theurgical worldview in order to adopt an exoteric approach to the Torah and whose work was influential on a large scale. Recanati's commentary is dense and concise, condensing the most important Catalan and Castilian discussions of the kabbalistic secrets of the Bible, including many Zoharic citations. Its huge success is attested by its survival in a great number of manuscripts and by its early dissemination in printed form. It was one of the first kabbalistic books ever published—and republished—in its Hebrew original<sup>18</sup> and was translated into Latin more than once,<sup>19</sup> exercising a very significant influence on two major Christian Kabbalists, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola<sup>20</sup> and Guillaume Postel.<sup>21</sup>

The second most influential work by this Italian Kabbalist is his *Commentary on the Rationales of the Commandments*. In this case, too, the large number of manuscripts in which it is extant and the early printings attest to an enthusiastic reception, especially in Italy and in the Byzantine Empire.<sup>22</sup> This is a much smaller treatise, reflecting an earlier stage of Recanati's knowledge of Kabbalah, and much of it was absorbed into the *Commentary on the Torah*.

The third kabbalistic book, *The Commentary on Prayer*, is an even shorter treatise, whose impact was much smaller.<sup>23</sup> It seems that Recanati never finished writing the commentaries on the Torah and prayer. He composed two short poems based on kabbalistic concepts and compiled a manuscript later referred to as his *Siddur*, prayer book, where he copied short magical treatises, as well as a collection—*Liqqutim*, or *Collectanea*—containing magical material.<sup>24</sup> There is good reason to assume that early in his career Recanati composed a commentary on the *Zohar*, which does not survive, and perhaps it, too, was integrated within the *Commentary on the Torah*.<sup>25</sup> Recanati is also known for his nonkabbalistic collection of *Pesaqim*, legal decisions that were very influential and were printed several times.<sup>26</sup>

All the literary genres used by Recanati in his main kabbalistic writings are traditional—commentaries on classical matters in Judaism—and in this respect he resembles other Kabbalists. Thus, Recanati can be described as an exemplary nomian Kabbalist, whereas Abulafia was preeminently an anomian Kabbalist. Recanati's writings and sources reflect a situation in kabbalistic literature that warrants discussion in some detail. Whereas in Spain Abulafia's writings were banned and the Kabbalists there rejected or at least neglected ecstatic Kabbalah, gravitating instead to the mythical Kabbalah best represented by the *Zohar*, in Italy both ecstatic Kabbalah and the mythical version were well represented. At least at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth, Italy appears to have been home to a much more variegated kabbalistic literature than any other country. The two trends also remained influential in Italy beyond this period, and later a third trend, the magical one, was incorporated into Kabbalah there. This picture helps to counteract modern scholarship's overemphasis on the centrality of Spanish Kabbalah and to encourage a less monolithic understanding of Kabbalah from a phenomenological, historical, and geographical point of view. Studies of other major centers, such as Byzantium, have revealed Italian influence. A pluralistic vision of the history of Kabbalah, which entails deemphasizing the centrality of Spain in the history of Kabbalah, will help to distinguish more precisely the specific contributions of Kabbalah in Italy.

### 3. RECANATI'S MYSTICAL PATH

According to a legend preserved in Recanati's family, at the beginning of his career Recanati could not understand matters of the Torah, and only after many attempts did he receive a revelation that opened his heart to the study of Kabbalah.<sup>27</sup> This legend may contain some core of truth; it may reflect a tradition connected to revelatory experiences connected to this Kabbalist. Indeed, several references to extraordinary experiences can be detected in his *Commentary on the Torah*.<sup>28</sup> These references, however, may have nothing to do with kabbalistic ideals, and even less



with the use of mystical techniques designed to reach a certain type of mystical experience.

However, this was not the case when Recanati discussed topics such as joy, *devequt*, and prophecy. Some of these issues had already attracted the attention of the Geronese Kabbalists in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, although late in this century their importance was reduced in Spanish theosophical Kabbalah. Let me start with a view that seems to be characteristic of Recanati. When discussing a certain passage from the *Zohar*, he wrote: "When I had seen this [interpretation]<sup>29</sup> I enjoyed it very much, which seemed to me as if I had received it from Sinai."<sup>30</sup> This personal confession becomes clearer when we compare it with a second passage dealing with joy and kabbalistic secrets: "when something that was previously unknown is revealed to someone there is no greater joy in the world like it . . . because joy is one part from the parts of the holy spirit, and when new things are revealed out of joy the soul is separated from its place."<sup>31</sup> The study of the Kabbalah in a creative manner has a strong experiential aspect. Thus, it is not the precise content of the study that matters but the spiritual aptitude of the Kabbalist to innovate, a capacity that will open him to revelatory experiences. These and other, similar statements<sup>32</sup> demonstrate that there is no automatic connection between theosophy and casuistry, as modern scholars have assumed. Scholem insists that theosophical speculations "occupy a large and conspicuous area in kabbalistic teaching. Sometimes their connections with the mystical plane become rather tenuous and are superseded by an interpretative and homiletic vein with occasionally even results in a kind of kabbalistic *pilpul* (casuistry)."<sup>33</sup>

Crucial in this context is Recanati's recommendation that someone not study Kabbalah except while he is in a state of joy.<sup>34</sup> Elsewhere he elaborates upon the talmudic dictum that the ancestor died by means of the Kiss of God; originally pointing toward a blessed death, one without pain, in the kabbalistic-Neoplatonizing interpretation this dictum was seen as referring to an ecstatic experience, reminiscent of the one described above when dealing with the revelation of secrets: "Know that, just as the ripe fruit falls from the tree, it no longer needing its connection [to the tree], so is the link between the soul and the body. When the soul has attained whatever she is able to attain, she cleaves [*daveqah*] to the supernal soul, and will remove its raiment of dust and sever [itself] from its place [namely the body] and will cleave to the Shekhinah; and this is [the meaning of] death by a kiss."<sup>35</sup>

Recanati or his hypothetical source is heavily influenced by the fruit metaphor occurring in R. Abraham ibn Ezra's commentary on Psalm 1, where the verb *daveq* also occurs. Thus, the ultimate experience of cleaving to the supernal soul enables her to attain the final union, namely, the cleaving to the divine presence; the preceding

experiences are implicitly regarded as lower and intermediate states, culminating in this beatific union. Here Neoplatonism seems to be appearing in kabbalistic garb; in both ontological schemes, the supernal soul is only an intermediary entity, which must be transcended in the final return of the soul to her origin. The union with the Universal Soul is a preparatory stage on the natural journey of the worthy soul toward her source; until then, the experience of union may be regarded as a series of intermittent acts, which enable the person to remain alive and active in this world. Qua Kabbalist, Recanati viewed the ultimate source of the human soul in the intradivine structure; her originating in the Universal Soul would be, in his eyes, tantamount to accepting a Greek philosophical orientation.<sup>36</sup>

Elsewhere in his *Commentary on the Torah*,<sup>37</sup> while capitalizing on texts found in the Geronese Kabbalists,<sup>38</sup> Recanati introduces a nexus, apparently unknown to the earlier Catalan Kabbalists, between the cleaving of the individual soul to the supernal soul and death by a kiss. Apparently this association appears for the first time in Recanati.<sup>39</sup> This more mystical understanding of the ideal of cleaving is reminiscent of Abulafia's nexus between the two experiences, although the ecstatic Kabbalist operated within an Aristotelian rather than a Neoplatonic system.<sup>40</sup>

Let me now introduce a quotation from the Geronese Kabbalists Azriel and Ezra, which Recanati construes in a new way: "When the pious and the men of deeds [engaged in a state of mental] concentration, and were involved in supernal mysteries, they imagined, by the power of their thought, that these things were engraved before them,<sup>41</sup> and when they linked their soul to the Supernal Soul, these things increased and expanded and revealed themselves . . . as when he cleaved his soul to the Supernal Soul, these awesome things were engraved in his heart."<sup>42</sup> According to Recanati's mythical interpretation as formulated here, the Kabbalist should imagine the sefirot as if they were imprinted before his eyes; then his soul should adhere on high, and then draw down the divine blessing.<sup>43</sup> This approach represents what I call the mystical-magical model, one that combines the ascent of the soul on high, an experience of union with the supernal sources, and stimulation of the descent of the divine influx.<sup>44</sup>

To what extent, we may ask, can an encounter with a literary text incite someone's imagination and activity in order to encourage application of the recommendations of that text to practical mystical life? Is a passage written in Gerona, "the crown of Aragon," capable of inspiring a mystical life in Italy? This question is much more serious if we assume that Recanati learned everything related to Kabbalah solely from written documents. Are those short early kabbalistic passages sufficient to inspire a more experiential understanding and practice of Kabbalah? Or are the quotations no more than a reflection of Recanati's ability to extract the more interesting passages from the manuscripts he was able to acquire? Unfortunately, the little we

know about his life and studies does not permit a definitive answer. However, if he was in fact in Aragon for a while, it might have been there that he came into contact with a group of Kabbalists who could introduce him to a more practical approach to these texts. I would opt, however, for the first alternative. Texts describing experiences in the past, even when the author of the text did not necessarily undergo an experience, may incite experiences later on in other persons.

Most of the quotations above are taken from Recanati's highly influential *Commentary on the Torah*, which served as the source for several later Kabbalists active in Italy: R. Reuven Tzarfati, R. Moshe ben Yoav, and R. Yehudah Hayyat.<sup>45</sup> Recanati is also one of the sources upon which Pico della Mirandola drew for his concept of the ecstatic "death by a kiss," which reverberated throughout Renaissance literature as *morte di bacio*. Medieval Neoplatonism contributed to the kabbalistic concept of *devequt*, which was consonant with the Renaissance Neoplatonic approach; so it is little wonder that the Florentine Neoplatonists were so fond of kabbalistic doctrines, which fitted their unique form of philosophical thought.<sup>46</sup>

The discussions of *devequt* as preserved and understood by Recanati found their way to other Kabbalists in Italy, while their traces in later Spanish Kabbalah, where they were first formulated, are very feeble. For example, another interesting passage on *devequt* quoted by Recanati is found in R. Ezra's *Commentary on the Talmudic 'Aggadot*, which exists in two manuscripts extant in Rome.<sup>47</sup> Even Spanish Kabbalists such as R. Yehudah Hayyat copied Recanati's formulations of the Geronese passages on *devequt*, since they lacked direct access to the thirteenth-century Geronese treatises that inspired him. Does this state of affairs indicate a greater propensity among the Italian Kabbalists toward mystical experiences of union than among the Spanish ones? The fact that both the Aristotelian interpretation of *devequt*, as exemplified in Abulafia's writings, and the Neoplatonic one, as exemplified in Recanati, flowered in Italy much more than in Spain or elsewhere, and even influenced Pico and, via him, other Christian thinkers, may be emblematic of the predisposition of Jewish Kabbalists in Italy to forms of mysticism less influential in Spain, where a more homogeneous vision of Kabbalah is discernible.

# 9

## MENAHEM RECANATI AS A THEOSOPHICAL-THEURGICAL KABBALIST

### 1. RECANATI'S THEOSOPHY AND ITS SOURCES

The theosophical-theurgical model was the dominant form of Kabbalah in Spain from the time of its emergence under the impact of Provençal traditions brought there by R. Yitzhaq Sagi Nahor during the early thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> However, I have no doubt, as we shall see below, that the actual sources of theurgy and theosophy are much earlier, occurring not only in Provençal and Ashkenazi sources but in rabbinic ones as well. Nevertheless, we should not necessarily assume that theurgy and theosophy always occur together in these earlier sources. In some cases it is possible to find theosophical discussions without theurgical implication, as in one of R. Solomon ibn Gabirol's poems or in Ashkenazi Hasidism.<sup>2</sup> However, a

theosophical concept of the sefirot appears as early as the tenth century in the widely influential *Commentary on Sefer Yezirah* by R. Sabbatai Donnolo, an Italian Jew.<sup>3</sup> As E. R. Wolfson has pointed out, Donnolo may be one of the first medieval Jewish writers to conceive of the sefirot as part of the divine realm.<sup>4</sup> However, Donnolo's short passage is a far cry from the more elaborate discussions of this issue by Provençal and Spanish Kabbalists, who were his direct sources. Recanati was acquainted with several of the theosophies circulating in Spain, but we may assume that he adopted and combined two of them, which served as the main sources for his own theosophical system. One is that of R. Azriel of Gerona, and the second is that of the latter's younger and more famous compatriot, Nahmanides.

R. Azriel, who belonged to R. Yitzhaq Sagi Nahor's school in Gerona, offered the most articulate synthesis between a Neoplatonic theory of emanation and mythical elements found in earlier theosophical traditions, such as Sagi Nahor and *Sefer ha-Bahir*. In his theosophical system, the Infinite, the 'Ein Sof, slowly emerges as a technical term referring to the distant transcendental deity, while the ten emanations, the sefirot, are described as instruments of divine activities here below: creation, providence, or revelation.<sup>5</sup> According to an image used by one of his disciples, the Infinite is the captain while the ten sefirot are the ship. Although R. Azriel is anxious to emphasize the connection between the transcendental deity and the emanated one, the main ontological distinction drawn is not between the created world and the last of the ten sefirot, but between the first sefirot and the Infinite. In his analysis Azriel demonstrates awareness of the similarity between kabbalistic and philosophical theories. In his *Commentary on Talmudic 'Aggadot*, written sometime in the 1240s, R. Azriel asserts: "The words of the wisdom of the Torah and the words of the masters of investigation [ba'alei ha-mehqar; philosophers] mentioned above are identical [sheneihem ke-'ahat], their way is one, and there is no difference between them, save for the terms alone, since the investigators did not know how to designate each and every part by its proper name."<sup>6</sup> Only the Kabbalists, continues R. Azriel, who received traditions from the prophets, know how to designate each entity appropriately. Although the Kabbalists possess a higher religious knowledge, the philosophers are not to be discarded as totally inadequate. This statement refers to Aristotle and Plato, whom he has quoted immediately before.<sup>7</sup> As other scholars have already shown, these quotations are in fact entirely Neoplatonic, including a misattribution to Aristotle.<sup>8</sup>

R. Azriel of Gerona also refers to the various sefirotic levels, using a distinctive Plotinian scheme: he posits a hierarchy in which a Hidden World ('Olam ha-Ne'elam) is the highest; this scheme is parallel to the divine will as adumbrated by R. Jacob ben Sheshet, quoted above, and in other discussions by Azriel.<sup>9</sup> Next in importance are the Intellectual World ['Olam ha-Muskal]; the Sensory World ['Olam ha-Murgash], which is parallel to the world of the soul in the Plotinian scheme; and

the Natural World ['Olam ha-Mutbba'].<sup>10</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that the source that influenced R. Azriel's view of the spiritual worlds preserved, in one way or another, the Greek forms of *cosmos noetos* (the intellectual world) and *cosmos aisthetos* (the world of the senses), found in the Neoplatonic literature and reflected in Azriel's use of the term 'Olam. In general, it seems that Scholem was inclined to overemphasize the role of the Gnostic *aion* (supernal world) as the origin of the kabbalistic *pleroma* (supernal fullness)<sup>11</sup> and to minimize the influence of Neoplatonic sources on early Kabbalah when dealing with this specific topic.

Recanati was acquainted with R. Azriel's theosophical views via at least two types of sources: first, the writings of R. Azriel himself, namely his *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* and his widely available *Sha'ar ha-Sho'el*.<sup>12</sup> However, what is more important is the fact that a commentary on parts of the *Sha'ar ha-Sho'el*, extant in anonymous manuscripts, elaborated upon R. Azriel's theosophy. This anonymous text, which I suggest was written by R. Yitzhaq of Acre, was copied by R. Menahem Recanati and became a major source for some of his most important discussions on the nature of the sefirot.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Recanati inherited, directly and indirectly, a brand of theosophy that envisions the Infinite as *Causa Causarum*. Recanati often uses the term 'Illat ha-'Illot (Cause of the Causes) and only rarely 'Ein Sof (Infinite), and he refers to the sefirot as instruments. This is, as I have attempted to show above, a much more philosophically oriented theology, which creates a distance between the sublime divine realm and the lower, and dynamic, system of powers that serve Him. Recanati accepted this view relatively early in his career, as we learn from a lengthy exposition on the nature of the sefirot at the end of what I consider to be his first extant original book, the *Commentary on the Rationales of the Commandments*. By locating this discussion at the end of the treatise, Recanati accords it greater importance.

At that time Recanati was already well acquainted with significant portions of *Sefer ha-Zohar*, whose theosophy assumes that the sefirot are the essence of God, and that the supreme deity is inextricably related to the ten sefirot.<sup>14</sup> However, notwithstanding his recurrent quotations from the *Zohar* and the reverence in which he clearly held it as an ancient source, Recanati remained largely unaffected by its theosophy. One of the reasons may be that the profoundly midrashic and associative style of this book resists systematic treatment. Another reason may be that its strongly mythical *imaginaire* alienated Recanati. In his later writings, Recanati demonstrated his acquaintance with a somewhat more articulated though still rather esoteric treatment of another "essentialist" theosophy, that of R. Moshe ben Nahman (Nahmanides), as it had been committed to writing by a student of one of his own students, R. Shem Tov ben Abraham ibn Gaon. Shem Tov's commentary on the secrets alluded to by Nahmanides in his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, titled *Keter Shem Tov*, is quoted scores of times in Recanati's *Commentary on the Torah*.<sup>15</sup>

Given the esoteric nature of the discourse that characterizes Nahmanides' book, as well as the entire school of Nahmanides, Recanati felt no obligation to subscribe to a vague theosophy, despite the great respect he had for Nahmanides. He nevertheless adopted from this school a concept that is quite characteristic of it and, to the best of my knowledge, unknown earlier. Recanati is very fond of the view that the last, or lowest, sefirah, Malkhut, is part of the emanative process but is not included within the divine unity. This divine power was conceived of as integrating within itself all the attributes of the nine higher sefirot, albeit not constituting a divine manifestation that is part of the divine essence. In my opinion, Nahmanides and his school attempted to create a dividing line between the divine and the creatures, and the last sefirah served as a transient entity that, though emanated, is not fully divine but possesses the characteristics of a created entity, and is thus linked to the lower worlds.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the theosophy of R. Azriel was concerned more with explicating the process of the emergence of the plurality from the unity, while Nahmanides' school was more inclined to draw the dividing line between a complex divine realm and the created world. R. Azriel and the school of Gerona close to him subscribed to a Neoplatonic theory of emanation as producing a nondivine supernal realm.<sup>17</sup> Nahmanides' school embraced a theory of emanation as an inner process within the divine realm, apparently one found in ancient Jewish writings, which assumes that the emanated does not distance itself from the supreme emanator.

Recanati combined the transcendental vision of R. Azriel with the Nahmanidean theory that the last sefirah was an intermediary between the divine and the created. This synthesis is, to my best knowledge, new with Recanati, despite the fact that other Kabbalists, such as R. Yitzhak of Acre, were acquainted with both theosophies. However, Recanati did much more than combine the traits of these two theosophies. In adopting the concept of sefirot as instruments, he reinterpreted most of the kabbalistic sources on the theosophy of essence as if they contended with the theory of sefirot as instruments. In other words, Recanati adopted a theory formulated by two secondary figures in the history of Kabbalah and imposed it on bodies of literature that he regarded as far more authoritative: Nahmanides and *Sefer ha-Zohar*. Though himself belonging to what I would describe as the first elite, namely those authors who also created in the domain of Halakhah, Recanati preferred the views of the secondary elite, as represented by R. Azriel of Gerona and R. Yitzhak of Acre, to that of the representative par excellence of the first elite, Nahmanides, and the most ancient and venerated of the kabbalistic books, the *Zohar*.

What was the reason for such an imposition? I wonder if a definitive answer is available. However, we may propose several lines of argumentation, which may somehow clarify Recanati's politics. Recanati believed that R. Azriel of Gerona's *Commentary on Sefer Yezirah* had been written by Nahmanides. This mistake may be

responsible for the attribution to the latter Kabbalist of a theosophy to which he did not subscribe, one that differentiates between 'Ein Sof and the ten sefirot.<sup>18</sup> The history of Kabbalah abounds with such mistakes; however, in this case its impact was more dramatic. The mistake may reflect the fact that at least the first wave of kabbalistic material arriving in Italy was not received directly from anyone belonging to the schools in which the books had originated; there was no initiation and study in a group, but instead the treatises were circulated in a rather random manner. Unlike Spain during the first three centuries of the arrival and development of Kabbalah there, Italy did not create distinct schools of theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah. Another possible reason may be that this sort of theosophy had been sharply criticized by Abraham Abulafia shortly before Recanati composed his books.<sup>19</sup> Although Abulafia indeed did not have an impact on Recanati, I assume that news of the fiery controversy between Ibn Adret and Abulafia did not escape Recanati's attention.

The emergence of Recanati's adoption of the "instrumental" theosophy requires a more oblique explanation, though perhaps one more important for understanding his thought in general. Though critical of philosophers, Recanati is fond of Maimonides' denial of positive attributes with regard to the nature of the *Causa Causarum*. However, while agreeing with Maimonides' rejection of the positive attributes on the level of the transcendental deity, he is eager to allow an important role for this type of attribute when it is understood as referring to the ten sefirot, which in his view do not constitute the divine essence. Recanati therefore operates in a rather complex manner: while remaining faithful to Maimonides' denial of positive attributes, he is also faithful to kabbalistic interpretations of the emanated divinity.

Recanati explicitly rejects a philosophical interpretation of the term *sefirot* as designating the effects of the supreme realm in accordance with the preparation of the lower recipients, *lefi ha-meqabblim*. This view, found already in the twelfth-century thinker R. Abraham ibn Ezra, occurs among some few Kabbalists, who were anxious not to introduce plurality into a concept of divinity that assumes that the sefirot are the essence of God. This is the case, for example, of the anonymous author of the famous *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*. I assume that Recanati's rejection of such a position has to do with his concern to build up a theosophical system open to interaction of the divine realm with human religious deeds, or what was described above as theurgy. Too philosophical a stand would solve a theological problem but would create a much greater religious one, namely a static deity who is unaffected by the performance of the commandments.

## 2. LATE-ANTIQUE AND MEDIEVAL THEURGY

If the analysis above is correct, we must conclude that the nature of theosophy must be understood as substantially dependent on the importance of theurgy. A



more profound understanding of any theology cannot, therefore, be separated from the broader structure of a certain religious system—in the case of Judaism, a religion focusing on performance of the commandments. Theologies have no independent existence, but are correlated with a variety of understandings of the commandments. The affinity between the two realms, the theosophical and the ritualistic-performative, is much older than its first formulation in twelfth-century Kabbalah. However, in Recanati's generation it is well represented by both the Catalan and Castilian forms of Kabbalah.

This link is obvious in an ancient Gnostic author, Monoimos the Arab, who was acquainted with Jewish motifs and traditions. His notion of a decad of powers *qua* "perfect son" is conceived of as symbolically hinted at by certain biblical themes: the Ten Commandments and the ten plagues. Accordingly, this Gnostic presented his view as a symbolic interpretation of biblical themes, an approach quite reminiscent of the symbolic exegesis of the Bible. The decad represented by Moses' rod is explicitly connected to the creation of the world and to the ten plagues: "With that one tittle, the law constitutes the series of the ten commandments, which expresses allegorically the divine mysteries of [those] precepts. For, he says, all knowledge of the universe is contained in what relates to the succession of the ten plagues and the series of the Ten Commandments."<sup>20</sup> The correspondence among the Ten Commandments, the ten plagues, the decad related to the rod, and the creation of the world is echoed in a similar correspondence in Jewish sources among the ten creative words (*ma'amarot*), the Ten Commandments, and the ten plagues.<sup>21</sup> I contend that the decad connected with the Creation is parallel to the ten *ma'amarot*. Moreover, the ten plagues symbolize the Creation—and thus presumably the *ma'amarot*; and the son of the perfect man, *qua* "tittle of iota"—namely, the decad—"is an image of that perfect invisible man." I would conjecture that the son reflects the nature of the father,<sup>22</sup> just as the ten plagues symbolically reflect the "symbols of creation." It therefore seems that there were two decads in Monoimos—the ten plagues and the commandments—and that the symbols of creation and "divine mysteries" respectively reflect the decad of the son and of the perfect man.

This theory is corroborated by the existence of two decads, each described by an anthropomorphic term, in a Coptic Gnostic text. In a fragmentary description of the creation of man, the anonymous author states: "He made the twenty digits after the likeness of the two Decads: the Decad that is hidden and the manifested Decad."<sup>23</sup> According to the modern editor of this text, the hidden decad is known as the "First Man," while the "Anthropos" probably resembles the manifested decad.<sup>24</sup> This double decad can be meaningfully compared to the ones from the texts of Monoimos. As in his case, the anonymous author of the Coptic treatise

was acquainted with Jewish material.<sup>25</sup> Both Gnostic authors also share another, perhaps less significant feature: the absence of anti-Jewish views, otherwise widespread in Gnostic literature.

Let us turn from the late-antique affinity between theosophy and theurgy to a late-thirteenth-century one. While interpreting a talmudic dictum R. Shlomo ibn Adret, Nahmanides' most important disciple and a contemporary of Recanati, complains that understanding the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* (the Account of the Chariot) in the vein of Greek philosophy is dangerous, since it weakens the performance of the commandments. His assumption is that the deed should be the starting point, and that from it someone should understand the intelligibilia (*muskkalot*) hinted at within the deed:<sup>26</sup> "and this is the meaning of the *Merkavah*, because the matters alluded to by the commandments are the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. And Abbaye and Ravva [two rabbinic authorities] were preoccupied [solely] by the interpretation of the commandments . . . how precisely they should be performed . . . but not with explaining and disclosing the rationales hinted at within them . . . whereas R. Yohanan ben Zakkai has performed the commandments in fact, and he has concentrated his attention on contemplating their complexion."<sup>27</sup>

The performance of the commandments is necessary in order to disclose the depth of their content: the *Merkavah*. The rationales can be apprehended only through the experience of the performance of the commandment itself as the starting point. This is an explicit rejection of the intellectualist approach, inspired by Greek philosophy, which emphasized the abstract intent of the commandment rather than its performance. On his side, Recanati writes: "The commandments are [all] one thing, and they depend from the supernal *Merkavah*, each and every one of them according to their proper activity, and each and every commandment hangs upon one part of the *Merkavah*."<sup>28</sup>

According to other statements in the same context, the commandments depend directly upon *Causa Causarum*.<sup>29</sup> The contention that human religious deeds have an impact on the divine realm and its processes is old, and persistent in many forms of religion. Judaism, a performative religion par excellence, contains strong impulses of theurgy. This term, which combines the Greek words *theos*, "God," and *ergon*, "activity," conveys the notion that human actions have repercussions on the divine realm. The term was used in late antiquity and now in modern scholarship as referring to human purifications intended to elevate the soul to ascent on high, or to magic in general. I advocate retaining the meaning of "theurgy" as a concept that deals with action upon God, in order to distinguish it from magic, understood as directed to achieve material aims. Such a perspective is found already in rabbinic sources—although modern scholars have been inclined to regard it as dubious or marginal<sup>30</sup>—and it became a crucial issue in

the mainstream of Kabbalah during the thirteenth century. Although Jewish philosophers—such as Maimonides—and even some few Kabbalists—such as Abraham Abulafia and R. Yitzhaq ibn Latif—rejected the vision of the commandments as influencing the divine realm, the vast majority of Kabbalists subscribed to this view without apparent reservation; Recanati was one of them and contributed much to the dissemination of this linkage. As I shall try to demonstrate below, this intense interest in commandments was crucial to his entire kabbalistic project, and without our awareness of this fact, his presentation as a theologian does not do justice to his way of thought, and I assume also of his way of life. I would say that, in contrast to modern scholars' concern with theosophy, myth, and symbol, Recanati would place the emphasis on rituals and their impact. He would invert Mircea Eliade's statement, which is symptomatic of modern scholarship on Kabbalah: "Symbol and myth will give a clear view of the modalities [of the sacred] that a rite can never do more than suggest."<sup>31</sup> He would be much closer to Mary Douglas's interest in "the kind of use to which people put their symbols in everyday life, as regulators or as channels of power. That is, we would attend to their ideas about ritual efficacy, and less to the structure of their theoretical orientations."<sup>32</sup>

I have mapped in detail elsewhere the main stages of theurgical thought in Judaism, and recently three other studies have contributed substantial perspectives upon this subject.<sup>33</sup> A vigorous flourishing of interest in theurgy during the most creative phase of Kabbalah in Spain, in the years 1270–1295, is attested by an upsurge of lengthy commentaries on the rationales of the commandments. The voluminous writings of R. Moshe de Leon, Joseph Gikatilla, R. Joseph of Hamadan, and parts of the Zoharic literature, as well as the anonymous Kabbalist who wrote *Sefer ha-Yihud*, a major source of Recanati's thought, reflect this unprecedented interest.<sup>34</sup> Recanati promoted several forms of theurgy that he found in kabbalistic sources written in the 1280s and 1290s, but he also capitalized on more extreme forms reflecting the most recent developments in this domain. Early in his career Recanati wrote an influential treatise that belongs to the literary genre of commentaries on the commandments, his *Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot*. His explanations there are rather simple and based mostly on Geronese views. More important are the numerous discussions on the commandments found in his later and more influential *Commentary on the Torah*, which presents a richer range of theurgical perspectives, the result of Recanati's acquaintance with more recent kabbalistic books. Given that his third kabbalistic book was concerned with another commandment, prayer, it seems reasonable to conclude that understanding the rationales of the commandments was his major speculative concern. Let me summarize the main principles of Recanati's concept of theurgy.

## Ontologization of the Commandments

Following some views in rabbinic sources, which were emphasized and to some degree systematized by early Kabbalists, a commandment performed in the mundane world is conceived of as ascending on high and waiting there for the performer in order to serve him, in one way or another, after his death. So, for example, an important rabbinic figure interpreting Psalm 112:1–3 asserted that “R. Shmuel ben Nahmani said in the name of R. Yonathan: Whoever performs a commandment in this world, it will receive him [*meqaddemet ’oto*] in the World to Come, as it is said: ‘[then shall thy light break forth like the morning . . .] and thy righteousness shall go before thee [the glory of the Lord shall be thy rearguard].’”<sup>35</sup> Capitalizing on this passage, R. Ezra of Gerona and, following him, R. Azriel offered a more complex approach that incorporated the mythical picture in the Talmud within a more elaborated worldview.<sup>36</sup> Recanati quotes R. Ezra’s view twice, once briefly in the introduction to his *Commentary on the Rationales of the Commandments* and more extensively in his *Commentary on the Torah*. Here is Recanati’s fuller formulation of this passage:

The performance of a commandment [*mitzwah*] is the light of life.<sup>37</sup> One who acts below maintains and sustains [*meqayyem u-ma’amid*] its power [*kohah*] on high, “and he who walks in the ways of light, it [the commandment] does not depart from it.” This is why when the soul is detached from his body, that light is like a magnet to that soul, as it is written: “[He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor,] his righteousness endures for ever” [Psalms 112:9], because that [divine] manifestation draws her, as it is written: “his horn shall be exalted with honor” [Psalms 112:9], namely the splendor of the soul, “for the skin of Moses’ face shone” [Exodus 34:35], and it ascends and stands in a supernal and intimate place, within the glory of the blessed Holy One.<sup>38</sup>

This passage describes a theurgical activity not in the sense that the divine system is changed by the performance of this commandment, namely that one divine power is united with another, but in the sense that its ascent on high affects the supernal world, by a certain augmentation of energy there.

## Sympathetic Structures

A well-known view found in a rabbinic text indicates that the number of the commandments is identical with that of all the human limbs, namely 613. Kabbalists exploited this rather rare view in order to discover precise correspondences between each of the commandments and the human limb to which it was related. Building upon the view that in their specific structures the ten sefirot reflect the

human body, a threefold correspondence was established among the human and the divine limbs and the commandments. This correspondence was understood as being active, namely as implying an effect of the human performance of the commandments by limbs, on the corresponding divine powers. In late-thirteenth-century kabbalistic texts written in Castile by R. Joseph of Hamadan, the view that by performance of the pertinent commandment the human limb strengthens the divine one, in effect sustaining the supernal limb, was epitomized by the widespread syntagm 'Ever mahaziq (or mehazzeq 'ever), that is, "a [human] limb supports [or strengthens] a [divine] limb." This effect is the result of human and divine isomorphism. According to Recanati, "since man was made in the supernal archetype, when you shall cause the ascent and mounting of each and every commandment, then the commandment will arrive unto God, blessed be He."<sup>39</sup>

Thus, performance of the commandment below induces the influx to dwell upon the corresponding "commandment" above; in this way, human activity is ontologized by the concept of the sefirot as commandments.<sup>40</sup> We witness here a parallel to the formula "a limb supports a limb." The corollary of this position is that by refraining from performing the commandments or by transgressing, someone negatively affects the supernal system, weakening power within the sefirot. Recanati describes the earlier concept that the sefirot "return to their origin in the 'Depths of Nothingness'" because of human sins as follows: it is "as if [we] weaken the supernal power, in opposition to what it is written: 'and now, I pray thee, let the power of my Lord be great.'"<sup>41</sup> Unlike the imperative to enhance the divine power by performing the commandments, the sins are weakening it.

In the quotation above Recanati draws upon a view—quoted without mentioning the source—in an anonymous Castilian treatise titled *Sefer ha-Yihud*, one of the most influential sources on Recanati's thought. According to this treatise, not only will the divine influx retreat from the sefirotic pleroma, but even parts of that very structure will be contracted to their sources, the depths of nothingness, because of human transgression, which thereby weakens the divine system.<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere Recanati deals with the multiplication or diminution of the channels of mercy or judgment as a function of human deeds.<sup>43</sup> Commenting upon *Sefer ha-Yihud*'s view, Recanati describes human religious activity as being like "making God": ". . . as if he made Me. As is written: 'It is a time to make God' [Psalm 119:126]: as if to say that whoever transgresses below is as if he transgresses above; and of this it is said: 'he diminishes the image [of God].'"<sup>44</sup> The diminished image presumably refers to the sefirotic pleroma. Here again the Kabbalist interprets a much earlier view, expressed more simply in rabbinic sources.<sup>45</sup>

According to another passage, in Recanati's *Commentary on the Rationales of the Commandments*, "whoever performs one commandment causes that power to

descend upon the same commandment above, out of the ‘Annihilation of Thought,’ and he is considered as if he literally maintained one part of the Holy One, blessed be He.”<sup>46</sup> And in his *Commentary on the Torah*, Recanati again follows earlier views: “Each commandment is a branch and limb of the Supernal Form, so that by the completion of the entire Torah the Supernal Man is completed, as each and every sefirah of the ten sefirot . . . makes, by being linked [together], one form.”<sup>47</sup> In a rather hyperbolic manner, Recanati claims that “it is incumbent upon man to contemplate the commandments of the Torah, [to see] how many worlds he maintains by their performance and how many worlds he destroys by their neglect.”<sup>48</sup> This is one of the most extreme formulations of the extreme impact of human ritualistic activity, which had a great influence on later kabbalistic views of the commandments.

### Ascent of the Divine Power

According to Recanati, the performance of the commandments has two theurgical aspects: man can open the supernal source and cause the descent of influx upon the “commandment,” and a lower sefirah can ascend toward a higher sefirah. In his *Commentary on the Torah*, the divine Glory, namely the last sefirah, ascends toward the Tetragrammaton, presumably the sixth sefirah, Tiferet.<sup>49</sup> Even more important seems to be another discussion, in the context of the meaning of the recitation of the piece recited at the end of the prayers, titled ‘*Alenu le-shabeah*, in which Recanati presents “the supernal Glory” as longing to ascend to the supernal light.<sup>50</sup> On the same page Recanati quotes both R. Eleazar of Worms and R. Yehudah he-Hasid twice. The Ashkenazi presentation of the Glory is an issue of great importance, as it provides possible evidence that the concept of the dynamism of the Glory preceded the kabbalistic exploration of the dynamics of the sefirot, which itself served as one of the starting points for the intradivine kabbalistic processes.<sup>51</sup> Here we have a special form of the theory of union between the female and male sefirotic manifestations by the performance of the Jewish ritual. Recanati thus combined Ashkenazi views—and he was acquainted personally with an Ashkenazi Hasid<sup>52</sup>—with the kabbalistic views of mystical intention during the performance of the commandments. It seems that the last two decades of the thirteenth century in both Spain and Italy witnessed syntheses between Ashkenazi esotericism and forms of Kabbalah that developed in Catalonia and Castile.<sup>53</sup>

# IO

## MENAHM RECANATI'S HERMENEUTICS

### 1. THE EXEGETICAL IMPERATIVE

The generation of Jewish scholars before Recanati contributed greatly to kabbalistic hermeneutics, as was mentioned in chapter 5. Both the ecstatic Kabbalists, such as Abulafia and Yitzhaq of Acre, and the theosophical-theurgical ones, such as the Castilian Kabbalists, formulated systematic techniques of exegesis. However, Recanati, who was acquainted with many of these treatments, does not quote them at all. Though composing a book that invited, in principle, some elaborations on exegesis, in his main work, the *Commentary on the Torah*, the Italian Kabbalist does not indulge in theoretical speculations, describing precisely how secrets were extracted from the scriptures. In this respect his approach is reminiscent of

Nahmanides' or R. Shlomo ibn Adret's reticence in formulating exegetical systems. These three authors belong to what I propose to call the first elite, a layer of authors who refrained from organizing exegetical methods into a more systematic structure.

This reticence notwithstanding, Recanati did not refrain from offering his own kabbalistic interpretations of the Pentateuch and of the various commandments. In fact he invited everyone to do so, and his encouragement is both explicit and quite extraordinary in its formulation:

It is incumbent upon us to elevate all these good things, degree after degree, step after step, until these things arrive at God, blessed be He, who is perfect without any blemish . . . since every place in the Torah where you are able to elevate that deed or that commandment to a thing that is higher than it, does elevate it, and then it will be good to you, despite the fact that you did not receive that rationale from a kabbalistic sage, or even if you did not see it in one of the books of the sages. All this [may be done] lest you should say that this thing is not according to its plain sense but hints at a higher thing. . . . You should also not say that the rationale that you thought of by yourself is the principal reason why the Torah, namely that commandment, was revealed. But you should say that if that commandment had not been promulgated, it would be worthwhile to be revealed because of this rationale.<sup>1</sup>

Recanati's imperative is to elevate—the Hebrew verb is *le-ha'alot*—namely to find a nexus between a commandment and a supernal entity to which to relate it. This exegetical elevation should not consist in a denial of the plain sense of the commandment; rather, the kabbalistic explanation is to be understood as a link between an action and a supernal entity. Thus, the Italian Kabbalist strives to maintain the paramount importance of performance of the commandment even after discovering the kabbalistic sense. Discovering the sublime secrets of Kabbalah should therefore not preclude the performance of the commandments by Kabbalists in the mundane world. However, the emphasis is on the necessity to discover rationales, which are theosophical, and thus transform the performance into a theurgical act.

The method of discovery is very important. Recanati is aware of the existence of oral traditions, which were kept as esoteric teachings, as well as of the kabbalistic literature dealing with the rationales of the commandments. However, Recanati does insist that if someone does not receive rationales in the two ways, oral and written, someone should find out a rationale by himself, by using his own reason. By offering this third source for rationales of the commandments, Recanati inserts his Kabbalah into the innovative trend of Kabbalah, which was ready to allow, and



even encourage, the independent spiritual exegetical literature. He is perhaps the first of the Kabbalists who belongs to the first elite and nevertheless allows such a free exegetical activity.

I assume that this freedom is part of the existential situation of this Kabbalist. Assuming that he acquired most if not all of his kabbalistic knowledge from written documents, and lacking any name of a kabbalistic master who introduced Recanati to Kabbalah, we witness here the beginning of a new process in the history of Kabbalah. It may be that Recanati was the first Kabbalist to be born and educated, for at least most of his life, outside a center of kabbalistic learning.<sup>2</sup> Recanati does not emerge from a certain kabbalistic school, nor does he subscribe to any of them in a definitive manner, and this noncommittal attitude opened the way to a greater receptiveness to exegetical innovations. Apparently Nahmanides' interdiction on innovating kabbalistic secrets by using reason—a policy adopted by most of his followers—was less relevant in Italy. Thus Recanati, a figure belonging to a first elite, inscribes himself in a line of intellectual activity characteristic of the secondary elite, just as he does when he imposes R. Azriel's instrumental theosophy—stemming from a figure in the secondary elite—upon Nahmanides' essentialist one, deriving from the first elite.

## 2. ON SYMBOLS IN RECANATI'S KABBALAH

The main tool for the elevation of scriptural discussions related to the higher entities is the symbolic interpretation of the sacred texts. Recanati's recommendation should be understood in this specific context, as promoting a textual exegesis but not a symbolic interpretation of reality or history. By being so specifically text-oriented, the Italian Kabbalist can help us better understand the gist of the kabbalistic symbolic project, which deals predominantly with adding new theosophic meanings to the plain sense of the canonical texts.

Let me survey first what I would designate as the pansymbolic perception of modern scholars, which assumes that the Kabbalists perceived not only sacred scriptures but also reality as possessing symbolic valences. So, for example, we read in an essay by Isaiah Tishby dedicated to kabbalistic symbolism: "the Kabbalistic symbols are not only means for understanding reality, or ways of expression, but the entire reality is conceived of as a texture of symbols for divinity, and the vision of the existents without understanding the significance that is hidden within them, is a flawed vision."<sup>3</sup> A less grandiose attempt to explain the sources of the kabbalistic symbols is found in one of Scholem's essays, where he characterizes the kabbalistic symbols as "symbols of a very special kind, in which the spiritual experience of the mystics was almost inextricably intertwined with the historical experience of the Jewish people. It is this interweaving of two realms,

which in most other religious mysticisms have remained separate, that gave Kabbalah its specific imprint.”<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere Scholem reinforces this historically oriented explanation of symbolism: “The more sordid and cruel the fragment of historical reality allowed to the Jew amid the storms of exile, the deeper and more precise the symbolic hope which burst through it and transfigured it.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite numerous attempts to tie kabbalistic symbolism to nonscriptural matters, there is little evidence to support the too-comprehensive visions attributed to Kabbalists. They were apparently not concerned with nature or history, and did not transform them into symbols. Had they done so, we could learn something from their symbolism about their experiences and historical setting. However, the poor information we have about the lives of the Kabbalists—and Recanati is a perfect example—leaves us unable to extrapolate from the symbols to the historical events, the places, or the persons contemporary with the Kabbalah. As I have argued elsewhere, not all the kabbalistic literature is symbolic, and even in the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, symbols are of different sorts, and we would do better to analyze individual Kabbalists’ use of symbols before generalizing prematurely about the nature of kabbalistic symbolism. Such an approach has been applied already in the cases of *Sefer Ma’arekhet ha-’Elohut* and of R. Joseph Gikatilla.<sup>6</sup>

Let us now examine Recanati’s writings to see whether they indeed corroborate scholars’ impressions about a pansymbolist approach. Like many other theosophical-theurgic Kabbalists, Recanati adopted a modest approach, restricting himself to the interpretation of biblical and rabbinic issues, commandments and stories. His fear that the plain sense of the sacred scriptures would become problematic for an intellectual may be related to the allegorical exegesis of the Jewish philosophers, which reveals a reluctance to create embarrassment for more conservative Jews concerned with maintaining the traditional halakhic approach. I assume that this is also the case with Recanati, and it seems that at least in one major case he should be understood as reacting to a philosophical interpretation to what I propose to call a primary symbol in Judaism. Such a tension between the old and new elements is more evident when the absorption of new elements is a very massive one, or when some of these novel elements reflect a religious or intellectual sensibility that conflicts substantially with some of the core symbols of the adopting structure. The more central the symbol that is interpreted in a new manner, the greater the potential conflict. If a symbol interpreted in a new way is a primary one,<sup>7</sup> it can easily involve a confrontation between its traditional concept and the novel one. The secondary symbols are less liable to provoke strong resentments among more traditionalist figures when these symbols are transposed into different keys.

As we saw in chapter 9, Recanati, like other Kabbalists, created a very strong linkage between the commandments and the Divine Chariot, the *Merkavah*. In my

opinion, the divine chariot should be seen as a primary symbol, since it had a deep influence on many issues in Jewish mysticism, and (as we shall see below) it organizes the structure of one of the central issues in Judaism, the commandments.<sup>8</sup> Let us look at how Recanati portrays the philosophical understanding of the divine chariot:

[The philosophers] . . . have no part or heritage whatsoever in the secrets of the Torah and the secrets of our sages, and it would be better to refrain from [dealing with] the commandments and the homilies [of the sages] rather than speaking about them, distorting their [authentic] meaning, and proposing a rationale for them with which even children are acquainted. Look at the third part of the *Guide*, and you will know their [the philosophers'] issues. And if that wisdom is a wisdom, know indeed and explicitly that it [philosophy] is not the wisdom of our Torah, since they did not believe [in anything] except in matters that they derived by logical demonstration, and they interpreted all the *Sitrei Torah* according to the Greek wisdom, and the *Merkavah* "came up and went out of Egypt" [1 Kings 10:29].<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, in another book Recanati asserts that philosophers reject issues connected to the words of prayer and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*.<sup>10</sup> Immediately afterward he attacks Maimonides himself.<sup>11</sup> Jewish philosophers in general, and Maimonides in particular, distorted the traditional esoteric issues by interpreting them according to Greek philosophy. They presented the secrets of the Jews as if they stemmed from alien sources, referred to as "Egypt." In the same place Recanati also mentions the *Merkavah* in a context that clearly deals with the meaning of the commandments. As we have seen above, Recanati explicitly connects the rationales of the commandments with the *Merkavah*; we therefore have in his approach a clear criticism of the Maimonidean view of the commandments based upon Recanati's rejection of the philosophical conception of the *Merkavah* as stemming from external sources. Is it sheer coincidence that the vast body of kabbalistic literature dealing with *Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot* flourished in the hundred years following Maimonides' attempt to propose rationales, which Kabbalists conceived as being innovations? However, my proposal should not be understood too simplistically; the symbolic mode was much more than a reaction to Maimonides' and other philosophers' allegorical exegesis. As we saw in the quotations from *Monoimos the Arab* in the previous chapter, the Ten Commandments and the ten plagues were understood as "symbols of creation" on the one hand and as divine mysteries on the other, in an approach in which theosophy and theurgy were deeply intertwined.

To counteract this interpretation, Kabbalists in the thirteenth century, and Recanati after them, portrayed the divine chariot as the preeminent symbol of the

divine potencies, the sefirot.<sup>12</sup> This explanation of the origin of symbolism as strongly dependent on the status of the rituals seems to me one of the main ways to conceptualize the emergence of the theosophic-theurgic Kabbalah, although it is difficult to adduce decisive proofs for this explanation.<sup>13</sup> However, in the case of Recanati it seems that there is indeed a nexus between a philosophical interpretation described explicitly as alien, and the kabbalistic symbolic approach to the *Merkavah*. In other words, the symbolic hermeneutics of these Kabbalists should be better understood as an attempt to counteract the allegorical monosemic code, historically stemming from an alien source, which was conceived of as subverting the plain sense of the sacred texts. As we saw in the passage above, for Recanati the battle was between the philosophers' interpretation of the secrets of the Torah, understood as identical with, or at least similar to, Aristotelian philosophy, and the kabbalistic appropriation of these secrets in symbolic terms.

If this explanation is correct, the crystallization of the symbolic mode in Kabbalah is part of a comprehensive conflict between Aristotelian noetics when applied to scripture, and a growing theosophical system stemming from both earlier Jewish sources and Neoplatonic ontology, which invited a more Neoplatonic noetics and a more nebulous and polysemic approach to the canonical texts. Indeed, scholars have described the *Zohar*, the most important kabbalistic corpus using symbols in a creative way, as a reaction to Maimonides.<sup>14</sup> This general observation is also pertinent to the symbolic hermeneutics of Kabbalah. To understand better the scriptural nature of the symbolic code, we should introduce Umberto Eco's semiotics.<sup>15</sup> The use of the concept of code is particularly pertinent in the kabbalistic systems, where the sefirot are conceived of not as essentially divine powers but as instruments of divine activities. The quandary involved in knowing the divine system understood as consisting of sefirot as instruments and symbolized by scriptural terms is much smaller than it may be in the essential systems; in my opinion, even in these systems the Kabbalist was acquainted with the *signifié*, the sefirotic system and its details, before he started the exegetical enterprise. I am inclined to see Scholem's vision of the symbol as expressing an inexpressible entity or process, and its more recent exaggerations as the result of the impact of an apophatic approach, namely a negative theology that is characteristic of Western Christian mystical thought.<sup>16</sup>

Let us look at the kataphatic, or positive theological, approach found in Recanati's discussion of elevation. In the introduction to his *Commentary on the Rationales of the Commandments*, he writes: "The commandments of the Torah are divided into many categories,<sup>17</sup> and all of them depend on one power, which is *Causa Causarum*, blessed be He and His Name. And each and every commandment has a great principle [*Iqar Gadol*] and hidden rationale, which is not understood from any of the other commandments except via this [specific] commandment,

which discloses the secret.”<sup>18</sup> The epistemology that informs this statement assumes that the commandments are the specific venue for understanding the corresponding sefirotic powers or aspects. Thus, we may assume that the cultivation of the Jewish ritual was both a *modus vivendi* and a *modus cognescendi*. The commandments therefore function as symbols that allow the practitioners to intuit the structure of the supernal world. These direct statements are reminiscent of the correspondences between plagues and the decadic *anthropos* mentioned above in chapter 9, in the name of the Gnostic Monoimos the Arab. There, too, the creative powers are related to human activities, the Ten Commandments. In the cases of both the ancient Gnostic and Recanati, as we shall see immediately below, the supernal world contains all the information that concerns what is going on here below. So, for example, Recanati writes, in the context of the quotations adduced above in our discussions of the *Merkavah* and commandments: “The sages of Kabbalah said that the secret of the seven days of creation hint at what is past, is present, and will be in the future.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the symbolic structure is not only a matter of understanding the symbolic valence of the sacred scripture, which is indeed the most important function of the symbolic mode, but also an experiential mystical dimension of the Kabbalist as a performer. Let me address now a much more literary treatment of the symbolic mode. In his *Commentary on the Torah* Recanati writes: “From all these matters you may know that all the stories of the Torah have their principle on high. And because they are on high, they are, in any case, generating fruits upon the world below, in their likeness, like the light that emerges from the sun. This is the reason why you may find in the Torah issues that may seem, on their plain sense, superfluous. But when you elevate these matters [to a position] opposite the face of the supernal candlestick, they will illumine, as it is written: ‘Take the veil from my eyes that I may see the marvels that spring from thy law’ [Psalms 119:18].”<sup>20</sup>

The principle of elevation is mentioned here in a discussion of the nonritualistic aspects of the Bible, just as Recanati deals with the commandments in the quotations analyzed earlier. Thus the two major subject matters of the Bible, stories and ritual, are conceived of as intimately related to the supernal world, which is the principle that informs the meaning of the lower world. From the epistemological point of view, Recanati does not seem to be much concerned with the matters of the ineffability of the divine and the indescribability of the hidden, in contrast to modern scholars. In fact, the lower is conceived of as a type of copy, through which the knowledgeable Kabbalist is able to find out its original on high. Such a strong relationship is portrayed in two seminal statements on the relationship between the higher and the lower and between the human body and the sefirotic realm. In his *Commentary on the Torah* Recanati asserts: “All the supernal things are generating

their paradigm here below.”<sup>21</sup> More conspicuous is the view expressed earlier in the same treatise:

Man comprises all the supernal [entities]. His hands hint at the arms of the world; the tongue and the circumcision correspond to the two preponderant [Powers], and also the spinal cord [corresponds] to the first preponderant [Power]. The legs correspond to the branches. The heart corresponds to the Great Sea or its [female] companion. And these signs are made in the likeness of the supernal [entities]. . . . And this is the reason why man is a microcosm, as he comprises everything. All his limbs are in likeness and sign for the supernal [entities], as it is said: “From my flesh I shall see God” [Job 19:20].<sup>22</sup>

Let me first explain the symbolic valences of the terms used in the passage. The two preponderant powers are the two sefirot Tiferet and Yesod. Tiferet, the sixth sefirah, is the first preponderant power, since it mediates between the two sefirot Hesed and Gevurah. These two sefirot are mentioned at the very beginning of the passage as the arms of the world. The second preponderant power is the ninth sefirah, which mediates between the two legs, which correspond to the sefirot Netzah and Hod. This sefirah is a predominantly male potency. The heart symbolizes the last sefirah, Malkhut, which is predominantly female. Those sefirot are the supernal entities, corresponding to the human limbs.

In this passage Recanati capitalizes on different kabbalistic traditions: the concept of the two preponderant powers is unique to Nahmanides’ kabbalistic school;<sup>23</sup> the vision of man as comprising all the sefirot is drawn from R. Ezra of Gerona.<sup>24</sup> From the *Book of Bahir* he took the correspondences between the human and supernal limbs.<sup>25</sup> Last but not least: the terms pointing to symbolic relations, sign and likeness, reflect the impact of a seminal passage by R. Joseph Gikatilla on the symbolic relationship.<sup>26</sup> This is a perfect example of mosaic writing, combining several kabbalistic schools.

However, Recanati does not just put together disparate sources; he also imposes a unifying theme. He brings together the particular correspondences between the seven lower sefirot and the human body from the *Book of Bahir* and the general principle of the human body as comprising ten sefirot from R. Ezra in order to subvert the anti-anthropomorphic stand of R. Joseph Gikatilla. Whereas the Castilian Kabbalist, and even Recanati himself elsewhere, used these terms to undercut the anthropomorphic implications of the human-sefirotic similarities, by emphasizing a functional rather than formal relation between the higher and the lower, Recanati refers in this passage to a conspicuously anthropomorphic structure. Man, in fact the Kabbalist, is able to see, namely to contemplate God, by

starting from his own bodily structure. This is a leitmotif in Kabbalah,<sup>27</sup> and the symbolic function is to encourage this form of formulaically expressed relationship to God. However, despite the principle that everything on high generates its likeness on the mundane level, it seems that nothing like a pansymbolic strategy can be pinpointed in Recanati. By emphasizing the anthropomorphic structure as a starting point for a theory of symbolism, Recanati and his sources explicate a basic theological stand of the Bible: that man is created in the image of God.<sup>28</sup>

Let us ponder the way in which the different terms establishing or reflecting relations between the two levels of reality are used. The term translated as “paradigm,” in Hebrew *dugma*, is a loan from the Greek, and it points to the downward relationship. The higher generates the lower, which thus reflects the original. The terms translated as “sign” and “likeness,” in Hebrew *siman* and *dimyon*, reflect the more cognitive move upward. It is not a creational move but rather a return to the origin. From this point of view, the study and performance of the Bible should be understood not simply as interpreting the sense of the book, but as finding the truth, to refer to the distinction made by Spinoza.<sup>29</sup> However, whereas for the philosopher finding out the truth may be seen as much more an exegetical exercise, in the case of Recanati, interpretation and ritualistic activity are a direct encounter with the supernal reality. Elevation is not solely a deciphering of the meaning or a performance of a commandment, but an act of retracing the emanational process and ascending to the source. This ascent is not a merely cognitive one, a dim intuition of a reality that escapes human perception but is feebly reflected in the symbol, as modern scholars claim that the kabbalistic symbols do, but a much more controlled journey in the structure of the divinity. In his introduction to *Ta’amei ha-Mitzvot* Recanati writes: “Man has been made in the supernal paradigm, and so, when you elevate and dignify each and every commandment so that it arrives at God, blessed be His name, you will understand its meaning.”<sup>30</sup>

### 3. GOD AS TORAH, OR TORAH AS GOD

In the writings of two Kabbalists flourishing at the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth, we find a formula that conveys a total identification of the Torah, that is, the Pentateuch, with God. The first text is a late-thirteenth-century Castilian treatise named *Sefer ha-Yihud*, which deeply influenced Recanati, as we have mentioned above. In his introduction to the *Commentary on the Rationales of the Commandments*, he writes: “All the sciences altogether are hinted at in the Torah, because there is nothing that is outside Her [the Torah]. . . . Therefore, the Holy One, blessed be He, is nothing that is outside the Torah, and the Torah is nothing that is outside Him, and this is the reason why the sages of the Kabbalah said that the Holy One, blessed be He, is the Torah.”<sup>31</sup>



The identity established between the author and the book reinforces the two central religious values in Judaism, but it also changes them. The book becomes tantamount to the divine, while the divine is now conceived of as the Torah. It seems to me that this is quite a logical development in a religion based on a book, but it develops some forms of extreme mysticism. *Sefer ha-Yihud* is a work that, though extant in many manuscripts, has not attracted the due attention of scholars. This treatise, I would dare to say, is one of the most important kabbalistic writings of the thirteenth century, and one that had a special impact on all of R. Menahem Recanati's kabbalistic writings. Recanati's book containing the passage on the Torah as God is indeed extant in many manuscripts and is among the first kabbalistic writings to be printed. However, unlike other writings of this Kabbalist, which were translated into Latin and had a great influence on Pico della Mirandola's Christian Kabbalah, this one was not translated into any European languages, and its striking identification between author and book apparently did not leave any mark on the development of modern hermeneutics. There is, however, one major exception.

Recanati's passage discussed above was translated and briefly discussed in a major study by Gershom Scholem, dealing with the concept of the Torah in Kabbalah, originally delivered in German as a lecture at the Eranos conference at Ascona in 1954. As sometimes happens with these lectures, it was printed in parallel English and French translations in the UNESCO journal for humanities, titled respectively *Diogenes* and *Diogène*. For our purposes, the French translation, done by a very distinguished scholar of Judaica in Paris, Georges Vajda, is salient. It was printed in 1955–1956.<sup>32</sup> In Vajda's translation the passage reads as follows: "Car la Torah n'est pas en dehors de Lui, pas plus qu'il n'est Lui-même en dehors de la Torah."<sup>33</sup> This is a faithful translation, without being very literal. Nonetheless, the Hebrew original has nothing like "il n'est Lui-même en dehors de la Torah," because the term "Torah" that occurs in this phrase is an explication of a demonstrative Hebrew pronoun, *mimmenah*, "outside her." In the interest of making clearer the meaning of the text, the demonstrative pronoun has been fleshed out, and translated as if it were written *hutz me-ha-Torah*, "outside the Torah." The difference is a matter of style not of content, but it nevertheless shows how the French phrase emerged. The fact that this statement about the identity between the Torah and God was available in French in 1957 may account for the occurrence of one of the most famous statements in postmodern literary criticism: "There is nothing outside the text." Jacques Derrida could easily have had access to the French translation, and absorbed it for his own purposes, as he did in the context of another important statement found in another Kabbalist active in Italy, namely Abraham Abulafia.<sup>34</sup> In lieu of Recanati's "there is nothing outside Her," namely outside the



Torah, Derrida enunciated that “there is nothing outside the text,”—“il n’y a rien hors de texte” or, according to another version, “Il n’y a pas de hors-texte.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, he substituted the term “text” for “Torah.” Derrida’s *De grammatologie* was first printed in 1967, ten years after publication of the French translation of Scholem’s article. Recanati’s use of the phrase “there is nothing outside” in a theosophical sense, namely that there is nothing outside God, is found already in the thought of R. Azriel of Gerona, who deeply influenced Recanati’s theosophy.<sup>36</sup> However, the Catalan Kabbalist was much more concerned with a view of the divine will, whereas Recanati, influenced by Castilian Kabbalah, expanded the pantheistic view to apply to God Himself.<sup>37</sup>

The inclusion of everything in the Torah is interesting also from the point of view of Recanati’s symbolism. Reality, even God, is significant, since it is found within the Torah. The secular reality, namely his life in history, cannot possess a symbolic meaning, and this emphasis on the importance of the words and letters of the Pentateuch may well explain why we know so little about Recanati’s life and historical circumstances, and so much about his symbolic exegesis.

## II

# ECSTATIC KABBALAH FROM THE FOURTEENTH THROUGH MID-FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

### 1. CONTINUITIES IN ECSTATIC KABBALAH IN ITALY

The kabbalistic writings of Abraham Abulafia and Menahem Recanati did not simply survive in manuscripts, copied in a servile manner in the following generations. In fact they excited interest in the various forms of Jewish mystical lore among later generations of Kabbalists in several centers of Jewish culture, especially in Italy and the Byzantine Empire, though almost not at all in the Iberian peninsula. These two corpora were continued while also appropriating other forms of speculative literatures, kabbalistic or philosophical. Thus, although there was no pure school of either Abulafia or Recanati that continued their teachings in their pristine form, both thinkers exerted substantial and distinctive

influences upon other Kabbalists. In the case of Recanati both the numerous manuscripts of his writings surviving in Italy and his family's preservation of his oeuvre indicate his centrality in the development of Kabbalah in this Jewish center of culture.

We have already seen that elements of theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah were introduced from Spain beginning in the fourteenth century and were adopted in Italy, mainly through the wide influence of the anonymous early-fourteenth-century *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*, written in Catalonia. In Recanati's family there is solid evidence of an interest in theosophical Kabbalah, although his descendants did not echo his views in their kabbalistic treatises.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah strongly influenced a significant number of Kabbalists not only in Italy but also in the Byzantine Empire and the land of Israel. Here we shall be concerned only with its repercussions in Italy.

We noted at the end of chapter 2 the existence of kabbalistic treatises whose views strongly echo Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah. So closely do these books resemble one another that even as great an expert on Kabbalah as Gershom Scholem concluded that they were Abulafia's own writings, and it required a sustained philological effort to demonstrate that this was not the case but rather that, given the conceptual and terminological diversity conspicuous in these writings, we must assume the existence of more than one anonymous Kabbalist who composed these works.<sup>2</sup> With the exception of R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah Harar's *Sefer Sha'arei Tzedeq*, which is evidently the work of a direct student of Abulafia's, we do not know whether the Kabbalists who wrote two of the most important ecstatic writings, *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*<sup>3</sup> and *Sefer ha-Tzeruf*<sup>4</sup>—among other anonymous ecstatic treatises—were direct disciples of the founder of ecstatic Kabbalah. I assume the possibility that these works were written in the early fourteenth century in Italy, perhaps in Sicily. *Sefer ha-Tzeruf* survives in two different versions and was quite widely available, if we are to judge by the substantial number of manuscripts in which they are extant. It was translated into Latin in the fifteenth century by Flavius Mithridates and was studied by and influential on Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.<sup>5</sup> In the manuscripts in which this work survives there are also a variety of anonymous short treatises that I identify as either Abulafia's or as belonging to the ecstatic school; these still await a full analysis.

Although we may discern a strong Abulafian influence in some of the works discussed below, we must also consider to what extent those Kabbalists were going beyond Abulafia's distinctive Aristotelian-Maimonidean blend of perspectives. In my opinion, they reflect a process of differentiation within ecstatic Kabbalah, and the nature of this diversification will be one of the major preoccupations of this chapter. In any case, it should be pointed out that by its nature, ecstatic Kabbalah

is a more open form of knowledge than the theosophical-theurgical one. Whereas in some of the schools belonging to the latter trend the focus was on oral or written conceptual transmission, with key concepts being handed down from master to student, in ecstatic Kabbalah transmission was understood as more practical, focusing on initiating students into the manner of practicing techniques that would allow them to pursue a variety of directions on their own.<sup>6</sup> As we saw earlier, Abulafia himself praised his student Joseph Gikatilla for adding to his own knowledge from Abulafia's.<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere Abulafia wrote that "whatever is transmitted concerning this lore constitutes a 'head of chapter,' and this is why it needs the intellect, and it is called intellectual Kabbalah<sup>8</sup> because it is not like the other sciences, namely the propaedeutic ones, which are transmitted alone. . . . But this lore, known as Kabbalah, is impossible to transmit *in toto* in an oral manner, and not even in written form, even over [a period of] thousands of years. And whatever a Kabbalist attempts to interpret, everything is a hint and a 'head of chapter.'"<sup>9</sup> The affinity between the creative and the intellectual Kabbalah is quite important, and, as we shall see immediately below, creativity and speculation are also connected to each other in other cases in ecstatic Kabbalah.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. ON DEATH BY THE KISS IN ECSTATIC KABBALAH

A common denominator of *Sefer ha-Tzeruf* and of R. Nathan's *Sefer Sha'arei Tzedeq* is the presence of Neoplatonic terminology, which is marginal in Abulafia's authentic writings. However, both *Sefer ha-Tzeruf* and *Sefer Ner 'Elohim* retain his strong emphasis upon the experiential aspects of Kabbalah in presenting techniques for achieving mystical experiences. This more Neoplatonic proclivity may be the result of the anonymous ecstatic Kabbalists' absorption of kabbalistic material that was either not known to Abulafia or not accepted by him.

Before analyzing the topic of ecstatic death—a motif that had a great impact on the Renaissance in Italy—as found in some of the anonymous Kabbalists who followed Abulafia's path, we need to understand the shift from a more Aristotelian to a more Neoplatonic orientation. Let me start with a relatively early anonymous passage, apparently authored by a Geronese Kabbalist, where strong Neoplatonic terms and ways of thought are conspicuous. Dealing with the legend of the four sages who entered the mystical *Pardes*, the unknown Kabbalist writes about the first of these sages:

"Ben Azzai looked and died."<sup>11</sup> He gazed at the radiance of the Shekhinah like a man with weak eyes who gazes into the full light of the sun, and his eyes are dimmed, and at times he is blinded by the intensity of the light that overwhelms him. Thus it happened to ben Azzai: the light overwhelmed

him, and he gazed at it because of his great desire to cleave to it and to enjoy it without interruption, and after he cleaved to it he did not wish to be separated from that sweet radiance, and he remained immersed and hidden within it. And his soul was crowned and adorned, and [possessed] that very radiance and brightness to which no man may cling and afterward live, as is said, “for no man shall see Me and live” [Exodus 33:20]. But ben Azzai gazed at it only a little while, and then his soul departed and remained [there] and was hidden away in the place of its cleaving, which is a most precious light. And this death was the death of the pious, whose souls are separated from all concerns of the lowly world, and whose souls cleave to the ways of the supernal world.<sup>12</sup>

This passage does not reveal any special concern with theosophical Kabbalah, although I assume that the author was acquainted with this form of thought. It seems rather that the author may have drawn upon a philosophical source. In one of the epistles of Ikhwan al-Safa, an important collection of treatises belonging to the Shi’ite sect known as Ismailis, the spiritual development of the soul is described as follows: “When the soul awakens from the sleep of negligence and the slumber of foolishness . . . and is cleansed from material habits . . . it escapes and experiences its resurrection, it becomes luminous, and its substance is brilliant and its gaze is sharpened. It then beholds the spiritual forms, contemplates the eternal substances of light, and beholds the hidden things and secret mysteries. . . . Having contemplated these hidden things, it clings to them, even as the lover clings to the beloved. It becomes one with them, as light unites with lights, and remains eternally with them in bliss.”<sup>13</sup>

The vision of light while in the ecstatic state at the time of death is similar to what is found in a text probably belonging to the cluster of treatises related to *Sefer ha-‘Iyyun*, or *Book of Contemplation*. A passage appearing in several manuscripts belonging to this cluster asserts: “From the time that the righteous person departs to his eternal home, he sees the light of the sphere of the intellect, and immediately he departs, as if the Holy One, blessed be He, has created it and made it known to the eye. And Moses saw the light of the [supernal firmament called] Zebul, and immediately died. And why all this? Because the body has no strength to withstand it.”<sup>14</sup>

In contrast, Abulafia’s contemporary active in Spain, R. Isaac ibn Latif, writes in a more Aristotelian vein: “When the human intellect actually cleaves to the intelligibilia, which are the Agent Intellect, [the leaving] is [in the] the form of the kiss.”<sup>15</sup> Here the intellect rather than the soul is the subject of the mystical experience. Similarly, the much later R. Moshe Narboni quotes from a commentary on

Averroës' *On the Possibility of Conjunction*, which describes the "preparation" to cleave to the Agent Intellect: "Let Him kiss him with the kisses of His mouth, and let him receive the agent intellect in the light of his soul which rises upon her."<sup>16</sup>

Whereas Abulafia himself was much more inclined toward an Aristotelian expression of the mystical death, his followers and R. Menahem Recanati adopted Neoplatonic expressions for explaining this experience. I did not find any evidence that Recanati's discussions of death by the kiss influenced Abulafia's followers,<sup>17</sup> but I assume that the short treatise from the circle of *Sefer ha-'Iyyun* had arrived in Italy, since it is found in at least two Italian manuscripts. There it influenced the perception of the mystical death in an ecstatic treatise, the anonymous *Sefer ha-Tzeruf*:

When the soul is separated from the body, she has already apprehended the purpose of [all] purposes and has cleaved to the light beyond which there is no other light, and takes part in the life that is the bundle of all life and the source of all life, and he is like one who kisses something that he loves utterly, and he is unable to cleave to it until this time. And this is the secret of the kiss spoken of regarding the patriarchs, of whom it is said that they died with the kiss: that is, that at the moment that they departed they attained the essence of all apprehensions and above all degrees, because the interruptions and all the obstacles that are in the world left them, and the intellect returned to cleave to that light which is the [Agent] Intellect. And when he cleaves to truth, this is the true kiss, which is the purpose of all [spiritual] degrees.<sup>18</sup>

In the other version of this book we read:

Know that when the sphere of the intellect is turned about by the Agent Intellect, and man begins to enter it and ascends into the sphere that revolves upon itself, as in the image of the ladder, and at the time of ascent, his thoughts will be indeed transformed, and all the images will change before him, and nothing of all that he previously had will be left in his hands; therefore, apart from the change in his nature and his formation, [he will be] as one who is translated from the power of sensation to the power of the intellect, and as one who is translated from the tellurian process to the process of burning fire. Finally, all the visions shall change, and the thoughts will be confounded and the imaginative apprehensions will be confused, since in truth this sphere purifies and tests.<sup>19</sup>

The subject of the experience is described as a soul, the object of its cleaving as the sphere of intellect. These features and the image of light are all much more common in Neoplatonic literature than in Aristotelian thought. In the latter, the

soul does not cleave to anything but the intellect. Moreover, the intellect cleaves to the Agent Intellect and not to the sphere of intellect, a locution that stands for the idea of the empyrean, the highest heaven.<sup>20</sup> In the two passages, which complement each other as they describe different experiences of the sphere of intellect, Neoplatonism and Aristotelian terminology are combined.

From Italy this understanding of ecstatic death had an impact on a classic of Kabbalah composed at the end of the fourteenth century in the Byzantine Empire; the anonymous author of *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* drew a connection between the passage from the circle of *Sefer ha-'Iyyun* and the image of the kiss:

Know that at the time that the righteous person departs to his eternal abode, he sees the light of the sphere of the intellect, and his soul immediately departs and leaves the body. And know that he is shown it in accordance with the level of that righteous person and his cleaving to that light, and he immediately cleaves [to it], for there is no strength in the body to withstand the soul's longing when it sees that light; and Moses, as soon as he saw the light of the dwelling of the supernal Zebul, immediately cleaves there. And the vision of the light that is visible to the righteous whose soul is there is called the kiss.<sup>21</sup>

Here, as in *Sefer ha-Tzeruf*, death is the cause of ecstasy, and not vice versa. If my conjecture is correct about the existence of the small treatise from the literature clustered around *Sefer ha-'Iyyun* in Italy and its influence on *Sefer ha-Tzeruf*, we have an example of the transmission of Kabbalah from Spain to Italy and then to the Byzantine Empire, with ecstatic Kabbalah being instrumental in this mediation.

Although Abulafia's disciples generally accepted his system, they seem to have been unaware of the subtle but important distinction between literal and mystical death. Thus, even while basing themselves upon Abulafia, they repeated Maimonides' formulations regarding the separation between the body and the soul. Mystical death becomes an ideal, projected onto ancient heroes. So, for example, an anonymous Kabbalist, plausibly writing in Italy, and perhaps related to Abulafia's thought,<sup>22</sup> substitutes ben Azzai for R. Akiva as the one who died by the kiss. The statement survives in a unique manuscript, Ms. Vatican 441: "Ben Azzai likewise desired the secret and went beyond the bounds to seek it, and he died by the kiss."<sup>23</sup> Such a substitution is attested later in Abulafia's school. In R. Yehudah Albotini's sixteenth-century *Sullam ha-'Aliyah* we find the following description of the moment of pronouncing the divine name:

Without doubt, at the moment when he departs from the realm of the human and enters into the realm of the divine, his soul becomes separated [from

matter] and refined, cleaving to the root of the source from which it was hewn. And it happens that one's soul becomes entirely separated at that moment of separation, and he remains dead. Such a death is the most elevated one, as it is close to death by the divine kiss, and it was in this manner that the soul of ben Azzai, who "gazed and died," left this world, for his soul rejoiced when it saw the source whence it was hewn, and it wished to cling to it and to remain there and not to return to the body. Of his death it is said: "Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his pious ones" [Psalms 116:15]. Some of the masters of Wisdom and those who have engaged in such acts have said that one who does not wish his soul to separate itself from him during that vision ought to make his soul swear an oath, by a curse or by the Great and Awesome Name, prior to the act but while still in his own domain and in his human condition, so that at the time of the vision and the appearance, when he is no longer under his own volition, his soul shall not separate itself and cling to its source, but return to its container.<sup>24</sup>

Here again the impact of Neoplatonic views is visible in a classic of ecstatic Kabbalah. The soul is preexistent, "hewn from the source," and mystical death is tantamount to the return to the source. This is the reason for the double aspect of ecstasy—the fullness of human experience, on the one hand, and death, on the other.

Such a complex attitude reappears elsewhere in the writings of Abulafia's disciples. In a passage preserved in two manuscripts containing material from ecstatic Kabbalah we read: "And he explained [the verse] 'by the mouth of God'<sup>25</sup> as follows: this is compared to the kiss, and it [refers to] the cleaving of the intellect to the object of its intellection so closely and intensely that there is no longer any possibility for the soul [to remain in] matter, and that intense love called the kiss is a rebuke to the body, and it remains alone, and this is the truth. And on the literal level, [it means that] there was none of the weakness of the elements or any element of chance but the edict of God, may He be blessed."<sup>26</sup>

One of Abulafia's disciples, the anonymous author of *Sefer ha-Malmed*, designates those who receive the true Torah as "the seekers of the kiss" (*mevaqshei ha-neshiqah*). He conceives the kiss as one of the greatest secrets of the Torah, an emphatic description that points to the ecstatic understanding of religion as dealing not only with the revelation in hoary antiquity, but also as an ideal that may be achieved in the present by a small elite:

Indeed Moses received the Torah at Sinai and gave it over to those who sought the kiss, and this is a great secret; there is no discussion in the entire Torah that arouses the soul to its initial thought like this. And this is the



secret of the seekers of the kiss—that they may be cleansed of the punishment of Mount Sinai and receive the known cause on Mount Gerizim, upon which dwells the created light, which is holy to God; and the entire law hangs upon it, and also all deeds and the Tabernacle, and upon it revolve the heavens, which the entire people accepted and [nevertheless] did not accept [the law] upon themselves—that place which is the sanctuary of the soul with the intellect.<sup>27</sup>

The mountain is a metaphor for the place where the divine effluvia, namely the intellectual stream that permeates reality, dwell, namely the head of man. This theme recurs quite frequently in ecstatic Kabbalah.<sup>28</sup>

Another anonymous disciple of Abulafia, the author of *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*, writes: “He ordered us to hold our tongues against excessive speech concerning them [the sefirot] and to place a check on our thoughts and balances in our desire for the love of God, lest the soul become separated from the body in its great desire, and seek the kisses of the lips of He who pours forth wisdom and love.”<sup>29</sup>

Last but not least; in an anonymous *Commentary on the Pentateuch* that is close to Abulafia’s Kabbalah we find again the preoccupation with the kiss of death:

The mundane Temple corresponds to the supernal Temple, namely when man actualizes his intellect so as to cleave to God, then he is corresponding to the supernal temple, because there is no material things, but intellectual things, which encounter no hindrance. So too is man: then because of that affection he will die, as it is written: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” [Song of Songs 1:2], namely there are three kisses, because three persons died by the kiss, Moses and Aharon and Miriam. . . . You should know that when two lovers meet after they have not seen each other for a long time, they kiss each other so [ardently] that it seems that their soul will almost depart, so are [these three affected], because out of desire their soul exits and cleaves on high, and this is why the kiss is by mouth, because one’s vapor emerges and the other’s too, and they become one spirit out of love.<sup>30</sup>

As we saw in chapter 8, Recanati played a role in transmitting the Geronese views on death by the kiss—together with similar themes in the *Zohar*—to other Kabbalists, including a Spanish one, R. Yehudah Hayyat. As for the ecstatic Kabbalists, their treatments of death by the kiss influenced fifteenth-century Byzantine Kabbalah and R. Yehudah Albotini in Jerusalem in the early sixteenth century. Their discussions, permeated by philosophical themes, seem to have enabled ecstatic mysticism to flourish in kabbalistic venues less concerned with theosophical myths.

## 3. IMMANENTIST THEOLOGY

Abulafia's strong emphasis on the possibility of cleaving to the divine intellect presupposes an immanent divinity, understood as an intellectual being, within the mundane world. Immanentist visions of the ten sefirot are described by some of Abulafia's followers, and the occurrence of the two topics in the same circle may point to an affinity between them. So, for example, the author of *Sefer Ner 'Elohim* writes:

there is a war within the heart of man, which is generated by the first sefirah,<sup>31</sup> which is, in man, the good and the bad thought; and by the root, the branch, and the leaves the fruits will be born; and so, likewise, will happen to its [the first sefirah's] emanation<sup>32</sup> for good and for bad, namely the thinker will become wise, to act by means of wisdom<sup>33</sup> in whatever he does, good or bad, and likewise [in the case of] the understanding and knowledge of good and bad, that he may understand good and bad and discern between them . . . and the sefirot emanate the influx upon the heart, and this influx is differentiated according to different sorts, some of them natural, others accidental, other necessary, some of them voluntary . . . and God wishes the heart,<sup>34</sup> which means that the Merciful wishes the merciful heart, which pursues His attributes, as it is said: "just as He is merciful, so also you shall be merciful," and so also all the other attributes.<sup>35</sup>

The emanation involves the presence of divine powers not only in the mundane world in general, but also specifically within the hearts of humankind. According to the thirteenth-century Kabbalist R. Isaac ibn Latif, the verbs *hayah* (was), *hoveh* (is), and *ve-yihyeh* (will be) are present in the Tetragrammaton, and "they depict the structure of the world and its existence and its size and its ten sefirot."<sup>36</sup> Later in the same work Ibn Latif affirms that "the ten sefirot . . . are the size of the world" and that "the ten sefirot comprise the ten degrees which are the constitution of the world and its form and its size."<sup>37</sup> According to an anonymous commentary on the ten sefirot, titled *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, which has some conceptual affinities to Abulafia's commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, "the universal powers that are [immanent] in the entire reality are the ten sefirot."<sup>38</sup> This commentary, apparently written under the influence of ecstatic Kabbalah, should be compared with another Abulafian work, the anonymous *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*, which presents a rather pantheistic theory, combined with an immanentist perception of the sefirot: "God is in the entire world and within the world and outside the world in an infinite mode, and He rules the whole [world], and in Him is it maintained."<sup>39</sup> This immanent divinity is to be understood as the result of the identity between the

emanations, or sefirot, and their source: “God is [identical with] them, and they are He, but God emanated their forces on the created things and put them within.”<sup>40</sup> As against the theosophical speculations on the preexistence of the “roots” of the sefirot, and other views dealing with higher sefirot, or Tzahtzahot, characteristic of some kabbalistic schools in Spain,<sup>41</sup> this Kabbalist explicitly states: “His attributes are influxes and emanations and spiritual entities that arose with the creation of the world, and they emerged. That is to say, not that they were qualities inherent in Him in *potentia* and [then] passed in *actu* when the world appeared in *actu*; but He Himself emanated them with the world, since they are things necessary for the world. . . . And they are ten attributes, and they are divided in space, time, and soul.”<sup>42</sup>

I would like to emphasize the significance of the pantheistic formulations accompanying the concept of sefirot *qua* immanent powers. In both Ibn Latif and ecstatic Kabbalah, the formula “He is in all, and all is in Him” recurs several times; in Ibn Latif, it occurs in relation to the divine will,<sup>43</sup> while in Abulafia,<sup>44</sup> in early Gikatilla,<sup>45</sup> and in the author of *Sefer Ner ’Elohim*,<sup>46</sup> it refers to God Himself.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4. R. REUVEN TZARFATI

We have seen above that issues peculiar to Abulafia’s thought were transmitted in kabbalistic writings by his immediate followers. These issues rarely surface outside the sphere of ecstatic Kabbalah. Now it is time to consider a wider and more complex effect of Abulafia’s thought, one that resists categorization in one specific school. One of the most important among the minor Kabbalists between the period of Menahem Recanati, in the early fourteenth century, and Yohanan Alemanno, at the end of the fifteenth, is a rather neglected author, R. Reuven Tzarfati. This Kabbalist’s literary legacy has been identified in a pioneering study by Efraim Gottlieb, who established his authorship of an anonymous commentary on *Sefer Ma’arekhet ha-’Elohut*.<sup>48</sup> Tzarfati, who probably flourished in the mid-fourteenth century, was one of the first Kabbalists to synthesize ecstatic and theosophical Kabbalah in Italy, and, as mentioned earlier, his commentary was widely available in manuscripts and print and was translated into Latin by Flavius Mithridates.<sup>49</sup> Many of Tzarfati’s other kabbalistic treatises, found only in manuscript, are enigmatic, and their content still remains to be studied in depth.<sup>50</sup> Gottlieb has shown that Tzarfati wrote two other commentaries on kabbalistic treatises (presumably written by other Kabbalists), known as *The Small Parchment* and *The Great Parchment*;<sup>51</sup> a *Commentary on the Ten Sefirot*;<sup>52</sup> and a short untitled kabbalistic treatise.<sup>53</sup> Most of the codexes containing these treatises were copied in Italy and are preserved in Italian libraries.

Tzarfati’s Kabbalah is eclectic, and I cannot do justice to its complexity here. But it is clear that he accepted Abulafia’s theory about combination of letters, his

philosophical epistemology, and, to a certain extent, his metaphysics, which was indebted to the vision of the sefirot as the essence of God as formulated in *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*.<sup>54</sup> The role of this book in the history of Kabbalah in Italy merits independent analysis, which I cannot undertake here, but it should be mentioned that a commentary upon this book by a descendant of R. Menahem Recanati, R. Yitzhaq Elijah Finzi, survives in several manuscripts.<sup>55</sup> *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* represents the most systematic presentation of Nahmanides' thought, yet it largely abandons Nahmanides' esotericism. Though presumably composed in Catalonia, the book left few traces in Spanish Kabbalah but was very influential in Italy. Tzarfati's interpretation of this treatise according to Abulafia's Kabbalah thus constitutes a synthesis between a major book of Spanish Kabbalah, *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*, namely the original interpreted text, and ecstatic Kabbalah, which supplied some of the hermeneutical grid. Indeed, his book displays some of the most representative features of ecstatic Kabbalah. Among the numerous ecstatic elements there, let us focus on a specific congruence between one of his texts and a discussion of Abulafia's. The latter wrote in his *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*:

And it is stated in the *Haggadah*: "[The angel] Gabriel<sup>56</sup> came and taught him the seventy languages in one night."<sup>57</sup> And if you believe that [what was taught was] the actual languages, [then] you make a foolish error. Rather, this is Gabriel, regarding whom it was written: "Then I heard a holy one speak" [Daniel 8:13], that is, he was speaking in the holy tongue. . . . In actuality, he taught him the order of all languages, derived from the *Sefer Yetzirah* by very subtle means . . . so that he will recognize the order that reveals the ways of all languages, however many there may be. And it is not meant that there are necessarily only seventy languages or [even] thousands of them.<sup>58</sup>

The meaning of this passage becomes clearer if we compare it with the words of R. Reuven Tzarfati, who was well versed in Abulafia's doctrines. In his *Commentary on Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* he writes: "Know that the epitome of human perfection is that one knows the secret of the Angel of the Countenance by means of letter combination. Then he will know the seventy languages. Do not think that they are, literally, languages, for if you believe this, you foolishly believe in error. Indeed, the true faith is that you attain the perception of the Angel of the Countenance, whose name is identical with the Name of his Master."<sup>59</sup> This passage constitutes an excellent presentation of Abulafia's mystical ideal. Both the revelation of an angel, which is a metaphor for the Agent Intellect, and the linguistic technique used in order to attain it reflect the gist of ecstatic Kabbalah. Tzarfati

fills in a detail that, to my best knowledge, is missing from Abulafia's *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* or any other of his extant writings. According to the passage above, it is possible to attain to the knowledge of the seventy languages, and by their means to the epitome of wisdom,<sup>60</sup> which is the adherence to or union with the Agent Intellect, or, in the ordinary imagery of Jewish tradition, the perception of the "Angel of the Countenance," or "Gabriel," all this by means of letter combination. I would like to emphasize that the passages above do not reflect the disclosure of an esoteric topic that had been kept secret and revealed earlier, but rather the preservation of a passage that is simply missing in the extant works of Abraham Abulafia.

Important for an understanding of the intellectual ambience that is characteristic of the Abulafian school is the remark about the simple-mindedness of the believers in the plain sense of the rabbinic mythologems. This skeptical perspective is conspicuous in the last two quotations, and we shall see it below in chapter 20 in a passage from *Sefer Ner 'Elohim* concerning belief in the creation of the Golem. Such an attitude is also expressed by Abulafia in one of his discussions dealing with the experience of infants, speculating whether an untutored baby will speak Hebrew. In contrast to his more sympathetic master, the philosopher R. Hillel of Verona, Abulafia despises such simple-minded belief.<sup>61</sup> Thus both Abulafia and his followers in Italy displayed a rather skeptical attitude, more similar to the philosophical critical attitude than to the more fideistic approaches characteristic of the Ashkenazi Pietists or of the Spanish Kabbalists. The reverberation of Abulafia's attitude in Italy is therefore adding a special color to the Kabbalah in the peninsula.

## 5. THE ANONYMOUS *SEFER TOLEDOT 'ADAM*

Tzarfati was not the only Kabbalist in Italy whose writings reverberated with Abulafia's views. In 1444 an unknown author wrote a treatise titled *Sefer Toledot 'Adam*, which survives in a unique and largely neglected codex at Oxford's Bodleian Library, although there are several reasons to believe that the work was composed in Italy. The work presents strong philosophical interpretations of some rabbinic legends. Although its kabbalistic valence is not conspicuous, some of its views anticipate later developments in Kabbalah in Italy. In a few instances, its rather extreme Maimonidean allegorical interpretations of the scriptures are coupled with astromagical interpretations, influenced explicitly by R. Abraham ibn Ezra's views.<sup>62</sup> So, for example, we read: "On Jericho the influx of Saturn is found, which is the seventh of the planets, and this is the reason they circumambulated it seven times and the wall fell on the day of Sabbath, which is Saturn's day, and there was destruction, because the nature of Saturn is to emanate destruction."<sup>63</sup> Here, the

magical ritual of the Israelites is not performed during the Sabbath, but its repercussions are intended to occur then, all this in the context of the influx of Saturn. This astromagical orientation is combined with elements stemming from Abraham Abulafia and Ibn Latif. The following passage demonstrates Abulafia's impact:

If you wish to learn before a great master, who is the angel of prophecy, whose name is Raziel, and if you understand all that I have hinted of his power and his teaching, then you will know the secret of his name. And if you wish to be one of his disciples and to learn in his book, which is that of the completely righteous, and you wish to be inscribed with them immediately for eternity, then take care to study continually from [the age of] thirteen years until [the age of] forty years<sup>64</sup> in the book of the intermediate ones in front of the good angel Gallizur, who is the intellective master; and from forty years onward let your principal study be before Raziel, and then secrets of wisdom shall be revealed to you, for you shall already be a great man among the giants.<sup>65</sup>

Raziel is both the name of an angel that discloses secrets, in late-antique Jewish sources, and one of the theophoric names that Abulafia adopted for himself in order to point to his attainment to a certain spiritual level. The following passage from the introduction to Abulafia's prophetic books bears a certain resemblance to *Toledot 'Adam*: "I, Abubrahim the young, studied before Raziel my master for thirteen years, and while I was yet thirteen years old I was unable to understand a thing from his books."<sup>66</sup> Despite the differences between the two passages, both portray Raziel as a master, and the two works complement each other in their discussions of the appropriate periods of study: *Toledot 'Adam* deals with periods of study from ages thirteen to forty and from age forty on, while Abulafia's introduction speaks of the earliest period, lasting until the age of thirteen. Why the anonymous author failed to mention his hypothetical source in ecstatic Kabbalah, now presumably lost, is a question that I cannot answer.

This is not just a single case in the anonymous *Toledot 'Adam* of copying without attribution from the works of other authors. Already in the introduction, the author copies in succession from three different works of Ibn Latif without mentioning the sources:

- [1] This gate will be closed and not opened, and no unclean man will enter therein, but the God of Israel will come by it, and it will remain closed.<sup>67</sup>  
 [2] The speech of the man, who writes in his hand to God, for I have dared to speak and I am dust and ashes, and do not know any book.<sup>68</sup> [3] And

because I have chosen eternal life, my soul has longed and yearned, and goes from a temporary dwelling to a permanent dwelling, which is Hebron, Kiryat Arba, and ascends to the city of heroes, which is the city of the great king.<sup>69</sup>

The first two statements copy Ibn Latif verbatim; the third varies from the original only slightly. Even the title of the book, *Toledot 'Adam*, may also have been influenced by a lost work with the same title by Ibn Latif, although there can be no doubt that our treatise is not his.<sup>70</sup> Italy's status as an independent center of learning is surely confirmed by the fact that the writings of the Spanish Kabbalist Ibn Latif left almost no traces in Spain but were clearly well known in Italy, where manuscripts of his works have been preserved.<sup>71</sup>

The topic of prophecy recurs several times in *Toledot 'Adam*, and in some instances we may understand the author as pointing not to ancient experiences but to a more contemporary one.<sup>72</sup> Like Abulafia, this author introduces the technique of combining letters in the context of an exegesis of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*.<sup>73</sup> This special brand of combination will recur also in Yohanan Alemanno in Florence.

## 6. REVERBERATIONS

In its combination of astromagical themes with material stemming from Ibn Latif and Abulafia, *Toledot 'Adam* resembles two lists of kabbalistic works compiled in Italy toward the end of the fifteenth century. One was a list of works regarded by R. Yehudah Hayyat as "pernicious" and thus to be avoided; the other was a list of works that Yohanan Alemanno recommended for study. There is some overlap in their content. By their very existence, both lists attest to the presence of a certain tradition among Italian Jewish Kabbalists, and the discussions above support the possibility of a proclivity among them toward philosophy, magic, and ecstatic Kabbalah.

In addition to this internal congruence among some books written in the vein of ecstatic Kabbalah, we should take note of the importance of the writings of a contemporary of Abulafia, the Spanish Kabbalist Isaac ibn Latif, which we have already seen played a significant role in Italy. Like Abulafia, Ibn Latif displayed little interest in either theosophy or theurgy, and cultivated a blend of Kabbalah, with a focus on the divine names, and philosophy. Indeed, his most important treatise, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayyim*, opens with the statement: "This book links the science of Kabbalah with the science of philosophy."<sup>74</sup> Thus it is not surprising that he, like Abulafia, played only a very marginal role in the intellectual history of Jewish thought in Spain. In contrast, it was from Ibn Latif's *Sha'ar ha-Shamayyim* that Pico drew an interesting passage in his *Heptaplus*.<sup>75</sup>

It seems clear that by the middle of the fifteenth century Italy was the site of trends of thought that embraced various combinations of ecstatic Kabbalah, philosophical Kabbalah, and astromagic. Thus, the marriage between magic and Kabbalah, as Dame Frances Yates formulated the distinctive contribution of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, had antecedents in Italy among the Jews some decades earlier, as well as in Yohanan Alemanno, as we shall see in chapter 14.<sup>76</sup>



# I2

## THE KABBALISTIC-PHILOSOPHICAL- MAGICAL EXCHANGES IN ITALY

### 1. ITALY AS A MEDIAN PLACE IN JEWISH CULTURE

Italy is one of the sites where the tensions between Kabbalah and another form of Jewish thought, philosophy, are visible quite early. It is also one of the places where the syntheses between the two are numerous and conspicuous. The chief reason for these phenomena is the geographical location of Italy, between Western Jewish communities in North Africa, Spain, France, and Germany, and the Eastern communities, mainly in Babylonia, Egypt, and Palestine. The Italian peninsula was a place where many trajectories intersected, as indeed was Sicily. So, for example, Italian and Ashkenazi traditions mention the arrival in Italy of Abu Aharon ben Shmuel from Baghdad, bringing with him esoteric traditions that

were subsequently adopted by the Ashkenazi Pietists. According to a tradition preserved in a writing of R. Eleazar of Worms, one of the most important thirteenth-century masters of these Hasidim, the secrets that he preserved derived from hoary antiquity—actually from the time of the Second Temple—and were transmitted from the land of Israel to Babylonia, thence to Italy via Abu Aharon of Baghdad, and thereafter through the migration of the Qalonymos family from Italy to the Ashkenazi territories:

they received the esoteric traditions about the arrangement of the prayers, as well as the other esoteric traditions, rabbi from rabbi, all the way back to Abu Aharon, the son of Samuel the prince, who left Babylonia because of a certain incident and was therefore required to travel all over the world [as a penance]. He came to the land of Lombardy, to a certain city called Lucca. There he found our Rabbi Moses . . . and he transmitted to him all his esoteric traditions. This is Rabbi Moses ben Qalonymos, son of Meshullam bar Rabbi Qalonymos bar Yehudah. He was the first who emigrated from Lombardy, he and his sons, Rabbi Qalonymos and Rabbi Yequiel, and his kinsman Rabbi Itiel . . . Rabbi Qalonymos the Elder transmitted [the esoteric traditions]—as we have written—to Eleazar Hazan of Speyer. Rabbi Eleazar Hazan transmitted them to Rabbi Samuel the Pietist [he-Hasid], and Rabbi Samuel the Pietist transmitted them to Rabbi Yehudah he-Hasid [the Pietist]. And from him did I, the insignificant one, receive the esoteric traditions about the prayers, as well as other traditions.<sup>1</sup>

This passage is the most detailed and most historically oriented testimony about the arrival of Jewish mysticism in Europe. Although we may safely assume that some esoteric ideas and perhaps also books were already known in the eighth century in France,<sup>2</sup> nothing like such a detailed genealogy concerning the transmission of Jewish mysticism is available in any other document.

Whether some historical core exists beneath the trappings of this legend is still a matter of debate among scholars.<sup>3</sup> Although it is difficult to establish a firm historical basis for most of the details of this genealogy of secrets, it may well be that the general lines of a migration of knowledge from East to West are correct. The Ashkenazi masters elaborated upon the traditions they received, incorporating philosophical concepts stemming from the writings of R. Sa'adyah Gaon. It can be assumed that from the Ashkenazi centers the views of the Heikhalot literature and some of their own esoteric views reached Spain, where they had a smaller impact than in Germany and France.

An abundant long-distance transmission of knowledge is certainly well attested. R. Sabbatai Donnolo wandered to the East before composing his writings. R. Nathan

ben Yehi'el of Rome, the author of the famous rabbinic dictionary *Sefer ha-'Arukh*, was well acquainted with Eastern Jewish sources. R. Jacob Anatoli came to Italy from Provence, bringing with him the Provençal Maimonidean tradition. Later in the thirteenth century another Jewish philosopher, R. Zerahyah ben Sha'altiel Hen of Barcelona, was active in Rome, as we shall see later in this chapter. And as we saw in chapter 7, Abraham Abulafia brought to Italy a variety of kabbalistic writings, and many more arrived immediately afterward and were used by Recanati in his writings. According to some evidence, which needs detailed investigation, the arrival of R. Yohanan Alemanno's family in Italy from Aragon in the 1430s was instrumental in bringing some speculative literature from Spain. As we shall see below, both immediately before and after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, Kabbalists arrived in Italy from the Iberian peninsula. This flux of traditions would increase from Palestine and the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but that history lies beyond the temporal parameters of this book.

However, Italy was much more than a site of encounters for the various Jewish intellectual traditions.<sup>4</sup> The spiritual effervescence of the peninsula, and especially of Rome, during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance invited interactions between Jewish and Christian thinkers that were rare outside Italy. We know about contacts between Jacob Anatoli and Michael Scotus in the first half of the thirteenth century. Studies by Giuseppe Sermoneta have made it clear that R. Hillel of Verona, R. Yehudah Romano, and Immanuel of Rome absorbed significant aspects of Scholastic literature originally written in Latin.<sup>5</sup> Although his observation seems to have had no effect on later authors, R. Yehudah Romano was the first to mention explicitly the affinity between Platonic themes and the sefirot.<sup>6</sup> As Shlomo Pines has pointed out, it was much easier for Jewish authors in Italy to acknowledge Christian influence there than it was for their counterparts in Spain.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, during the Renaissance the boundaries between Jewish and Christian thought became quite porous. As a result, syntheses between Kabbalah and non-Jewish philosophies influenced subsequent kabbalistic literature more in Italy than elsewhere. Although R. Joseph ibn Waqar offered a complex synthesis between Kabbalah and philosophy in Castile that had some reverberations in Spain toward the end of the century,<sup>8</sup> and in Italy toward the end of the fifteenth century,<sup>9</sup> Spanish Kabbalah largely neglected Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah and was only marginally affected by Recanati's version of theosophy.

## 2. R. ZERAHYYAH BEN SHA'ALTIEL HEN'S CRITIQUES OF COMMENTARIES ON MAIMONIDES' *GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED*

The arrival in Italy, sometime in the 1230s, of a Maimonidean philosopher, R. Jacob Anatoli, precipitated the first sharp critique of one of the most esoteric

traditional topics in Judaism, the Account of the Divine Chariot, *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. The Provençal philosopher dismissed those who regarded the Account of the Chariot as “meaningless names” as “children without hearts.”<sup>10</sup> It is hard to establish whether Anatoli's targets were Provençal or Italian Jews. However, it was in Italy (and Sicily) that Abulafia later interpreted the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* as consisting of the letters of the divine names.<sup>11</sup>

The arrival of another philosopher in the 1270s, this time from Barcelona, provoked a similar polemic. In a letter to R. Hillel of Verona, following up on a brutal attack concerning the latter's “misunderstandings” of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, R. Zerachiah Hen enumerated three of the most important works dealing with esoteric topics, and claimed that in Maimonides' book

there are no secrets or enigmas from the category of the gematria or of the combination of letters, nor from the category of the names, the talismans [tzurot], and the amulets, used by the Masters of the Names [Ba'alei ha-Shemot], writers of the amulets, nor of the multiplicity of angels or anything mentioned in *Sefer Yetzirah* or *Sefer Raziel* or *Sefer Shi'ur Qomah*. Everything that the Gaon, our rabbi, blessed be the memory of this righteous, has mentioned from the words of the sages, blessed be their memory, small and great, concerning an issue related to prophecy, or dealing with the *Merkavah* or the account of the Creation, [which are] written in the Torah, all are from the category I have mentioned [namely things related to natural topics] or are related to their intention. And if someone has some secrets or enigmas or allusions or parables that are not from the category I have mentioned to you, they are all vain and worthless things.<sup>12</sup>

The term *tzurot*, translated above as “talismans,” is found in various medieval magical treatises.<sup>13</sup> It stems from the Hermetic understanding of magic, which entered Judaism slowly from the twelfth century on, a phenomenon that will be discussed later in this book. The other term, *Ba'alei ha-Shemot*, apparently refers to an indigenous Jewish form of magic, and Abulafia mentions it in an explicitly negative context.<sup>14</sup> This passage is part of a confrontation between universalist and particularist trends in Judaism. Maimonides, one of the major figures in the integration into Judaism of the naturalistic thought espoused in some Greek and Arabic philosophies, provoked both a rejection of his naturalization of religion and, as in the case of Abulafia and his possible sources, an attempt to interpret him in a more particularist way, by resorting to linguistic topics specific to Judaism, as we shall see later. Nature, which is one of Maimonides' main concerns, was largely supplanted by language, which the Kabbalists regarded as superior, either as a more powerful instrument of action, namely magic, or as an instrument to

accelerate the intellectual process to produce ecstasy. R. Zerahyah embodies an intellectual response to these two mystical-magical reactions to Maimonides: he sharply criticizes both Nahmanides' attempt to offer a non-Aristotelian picture of the world<sup>15</sup> and the attempts of ecstatic Kabbalists to infuse magical and mystical elements into the secrets of the *Guide*. The nonnaturalistic interpretations of the secrets of the *Guide* include at least two distinct categories. One deals with gematria and combinations of letters, two exegetical methods that mesh with Abulafia's approach to the *Guide*. The other category, dealing with divine names, talismanic figures, and amulets, seems to refer to writings different from those of Abulafia, who opposed magic, including linguistic magic.<sup>16</sup> No positive attitude to magic or a recommendation to use talismans and amulets can be found in any of Abulafia's surviving writings, including his commentaries on the *Guide*.

These two categories—the ecstatic-combinatory and the magical-talismanic—are not only plausible models of thought and praxis in themselves but are also corroborated by the syntax of R. Zerahyah's formulation of his critique. The importance of this distinction is even greater given the survival of a short literary work attributing an interest in magic and astrology and in divine names to Maimonides. In a spurious epistle ascribed to Maimonides, titled *Megillat Setarim*, magical names, talismanic magic, and angels are mentioned as if they were found in the *Guide of the Perplexed*.<sup>17</sup> This spurious epistle is not dated, and the passage from R. Zerahyah quoted above provides a plausible *terminus ante quem* for the emergence of some of the ideas included in it. Although this work is quite close to Abulafia's thought, I see no reason to attribute it to Abulafia himself, and the possibility that it was criticized by R. Zerahyah helps us to date it to the preceding generation, in the circle of Abulafia's teacher, apparently in Barcelona, or, what seems to me less plausible, to the time of his followers, later in Italy.<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting that in a manner quite reminiscent of R. Zerahyah's text pointing to two different groups, *Megillat Setarim* mentions three types of Kabbalah, the first being prophetic Kabbalah and the third "practical Kabbalah."<sup>19</sup> I see these categories as corresponding to the combinatory technique and the talismanic praxis respectively in Zerahyah's critique of the misunderstandings of the *Guide*. Certainly the content of the quotation from R. Zerahyah's epistle implies that Abulafia was not the only person in Italy who embraced a mystical approach to the *Guide*, although he may have been one of the sources for such a reading there.

This distinction between the two forms of misinterpretation seems to occur again in another possible reference to mystical reading of the *Guide*. Aviezer Ravitzky has pointed out that in Zerahyah's own *Commentary on the Guide*, he mentions "many persons whose minds are polluted by erroneous opinions" in connection with discussions about the interpretation of the term *ben*, son, as hinting at

divine names.<sup>20</sup> The affinity between this passage and Abulafia's similar interpretation of the term *ben* is clear. However, the fact that R. Zerahyah mentions "many persons" opens up the possibility that Abulafia was not alone in his eccentric reading of the *Guide*. Whether the other persons who espoused such a reading were students of Abulafia or earlier authors who had inspired his vision of the *Guide*, as he himself claims in the quotation above, is a question that cannot be answered definitively on the basis of the extant material. However, even if such a definitive answer is not within our reach on the basis of the extant material, I am inclined to opt for the latter alternative, for the following two reasons:

- [a] R. Zerahyah's critiques are relatively early, written during the lifetime of Abulafia, and I wonder if we can document the repercussions of his interpretations among his students in Capua, the town where he started to study the *Guide*. On the other hand, Abulafia expressly indicates that the secrets he is revealing have been received from several persons. Thus, although we cannot rule out the dissemination of Abulafian interpretations among some younger persons in Italy, to whom Zerahyah reacted, it seems more plausible to allow for the impact of the thoughts, and maybe even writings, that served as the sources for Abulafia himself, on the texts criticized by Zerahyah.
- [b] The talismanic reading of the *Guide* implied in Zerahyah's use of the term *tzurah* corresponds to the spurious epistle mentioned above, where the term *ruhaniyyut*, which here means astral spiritualities, crucial in talismanic magic, occurs.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in some ecstatic kabbalistic texts written after the death of Abulafia, such as some of the writings of R. Yitzhaq of Acre, the term *ruhaniyyut* recurs time and again. In any case, although I am not aware of a mystical-magical interpretation of the *Guide* in Spain, the existence of such a reading before the time of Abulafia seems plausible, for reasons that I have offered elsewhere.<sup>22</sup>

Let me return to the three esoteric books mentioned above in Zerahyah's critique. He claims that their content does not share any significant content with Maimonides' *Guide*. Philologically speaking, Zerahyah is certainly correct. Abulafia, notwithstanding his profound Maimonidean tendencies, based his system on *Sefer Yetzirah*, and his understanding of Maimonides' book relies on intensive use of combinations of letters to discover the secrets of the Torah.<sup>23</sup> Thus, it seems that Zerahyah had a good reason to deny the relevance of this approach for the contents of the *Guide*. However, whereas Maimonides did not even mention the *Sefer Yetzirah*, in my opinion deliberately, he strenuously attacked *Sefer Shi'ur Qomah*, the most anthropomorphic work in the Heikhalot literature. In

contrast, Abulafia and his student Joseph Gikatilla interpreted the anthropomorphic descriptions contained in *Shi'ur Qomah* from a philosophical standpoint, as if the late-antique book dealt with a macrocosmic vision and not with a theological concept: the huge sizes of the divinity.<sup>24</sup> Thus, again, a view that attracted Zerahyah's critique has something in common with a certain approach related to the *Guide* and found in Abulafia. Even in the case of *Sefer Raziel* a connection with Abulafia seems discernible. This magical-mystical book, found in a variety of versions, incorporated material stemming from *Heikhalot* literature.<sup>25</sup> In *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, written in Italy, Abulafia mentions this work twice;<sup>26</sup> and, as we shall see later, other versions of *Sefer Raziel* were available to and quoted by Yohanan Alemanno at the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>27</sup> The very title of the book offers another potential connection with Abulafia, who, as we saw earlier, adopted the name *Raziel* for himself. In short, only in Italy do we find mystical-magical interpretations of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, and their critiques. Neither of these were attested in Spain in such an explicit manner.

### 3. THE CRITIQUES OF KABBALAH IN ITALY

A comparison of the writings of Jewish authors active at the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth with the works composed by their immediate predecessors reveals a deep change in the attitude to Kabbalah over the two generations. The earlier authors, R. Moshe ben Yoav (Datillo), Moshe Rieti, R. Elijah del Medigo, and R. Yehudah Messer Leon, were much more conservative, closer to medieval Jewish philosophy, and unaware or suspicious of both magic and Kabbalah.<sup>28</sup> R. Elijah del Medigo's deep commitment to the ideas of Aristotle and Averroës undoubtedly lay behind his sharp critiques of Kabbalah in his *Sefer Behinat ha-Dat*.<sup>29</sup> I remain unconvinced by Kalman P. Bland's ambitious and interesting recent attempt, on the basis of all the extant passages referring to Kabbalah in the writings of del Medigo, to portray an evolution in the latter's attitude to Kabbalah.<sup>30</sup> Whereas Alemanno later praises most of the Kabbalists for their interpretation of the status of the *sefirot*, del Medigo condemns them on the same basis,<sup>31</sup> by subtly pointing out the resemblances between this mystical lore and Neoplatonism—a disparaging comparison for an Aristotelian thinker. Del Medigo's more explicit statements about Kabbalah are aimed at showing that, contrary to the views of the Kabbalists, the *Zohar* is not an ancient book, but a thirteenth-century text,<sup>32</sup> and that the theurgical approach to the commandments, a crucial topic of most kabbalistic thought and praxis, is idolatrous. He does not even mention the more philosophical approaches of Kabbalists, such as those of Abraham Abulafia, known by many in Italy. In contrast, though using Aristotelian and Averroistic concepts, both Alemanno and his younger contemporary R. David

Messer Leon interpret crucial kabbalistic topics philosophically. David Messer Leon uses Aristotelian categories, some of them adopted from Thomist texts, to describe the nature of the sefirot.<sup>33</sup> I assume that del Medigo's attitude to Kabbalah reflects both his experience in northern Italy, where he encountered Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's Christian Kabbalah and Alemanno's magical one, and also a negative attitude toward this lore in his motherland, Crete.<sup>34</sup>

In *Sefer Behinat ha-Dat*, R. Elijah del Medigo opposes unnamed authors who view the Torah and the commandments as a means to cause the descent of spiritual forces: "It is impossible to bring spiritual forces into the world in this way as do the magicians who employ forms and talismans. When we examine the words of the Torah, we find that the Torah strenuously opposes this practice, for these are idolatrous practices."<sup>35</sup> We may assume that these remarks are a criticism of Yohanan Alemanno's views. Del Medigo was a member of Pico della Mirandola's intellectual circle until about 1490, and it was there that he heard Alemanno's views discussed. Del Medigo's best-known comment on the Kabbalists' views is found in his *Behinat ha-Dat*, one of the first critiques of Kabbalah: "Most of them agree with the statements of the early philosophers, the negligibility of whose opinions is well understood by learned people. Whoever has seen the statements of the Platonists and these [kabbalistic] statements will know that such is the truth. I have already discussed this in another place and therefore I do not wish at this time to discuss the matter."<sup>36</sup> Coming from a committed Aristotelian thinker like del Medigo, his reference to "early philosophers" is clearly intended to diminish the status of the ideas with which the Kabbalists agree. His statement amounts to saying that the Kabbalists adopted obsolete ways of thought, which are inferior to the philosophic approaches accepted by himself. Del Medigo's mention of Platonists in the plural form may indicate an acquaintance with Marsilio Ficino's translations of Neoplatonic literature. In a remarkable passage in his commentary on Averroës' *De Substantia Orbis*, he compares specific kabbalistic and Neoplatonic themes:

These beings, which are called sefirot in accordance with their degree of reality, act by virtue of the power of the tenth one, which they call 'Ein Sof, and by virtue of the emanation reaching the sefirot from It. Therefore everything exists by virtue of the power of 'Ein Sof, for the sefirot are emanated from It and depend upon It.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, in their opinion the world order is derived from them. These opinions were taken from the propositions of the early philosophers, particularly from Plato. In their books, you will find these matters discussed at length. They construct proofs for these ideas in accordance with their own method. They say that one cannot ascribe any



name to 'Ein Sof, but 'Ein Sof may be apprehended by the intellect, as mentioned by Averroës in the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*.<sup>38</sup> This is known to one who has seen the books of these Platonists and the propositions of the early philosophers. In those books, you will also find statements concerning the *Shemittot*,<sup>39</sup> the destruction of the world and its reconstruction, as well as the transmigration of souls, so that you can find scarcely any difference between these philosophers and these Kabbalists insofar as terms and allusions are concerned. . . . In conclusion, they are nearly identical in principles and topics and in the matter of sacrifices. These statements are very far removed from the words of the Peripatetics and their principles.<sup>40</sup>

This comparison of Kabbalah and Platonism, though very general, is important for an understanding of the way in which the Kabbalah was able to enter Renaissance intellectual culture. The concurrence of the Kabbalah with certain aspects of ancient philosophy (discussed in the next chapter) endowed it with the aura of an ancient theology whose vestiges were eagerly sought by Renaissance thinkers. The conceptual proximity of the Kabbalah and Pico's thought concerning *prisca theologia* in particular enabled Kabbalah to become part of the efflorescence of Renaissance Platonism. The relationship of Platonism and Kabbalah had no theoretical significance for Jewish philosophers of an Aristotelian bent. Alemanno was interested in both Kabbalah and Platonism and tried to find points common to both. Understandably, this search for agreement was not pursued in a critical fashion; in some instances, there was no real connection between the kabbalistic and Platonic concepts. Furthermore, there was a clear tendency to superimpose Platonic or Neoplatonic formulations upon the Kabbalah.

Del Medigo's passage concerns a kabbalistic conception in which 'Ein Sof is identical with the Supreme Crown, *Keter*, the first sefirah. The most important exponent of this idea in the Spanish school was R. Joseph Gikatilla in his later kabbalistic writings. Two Kabbalist contemporaries of del Medigo in Italy also held this view: R. Elijah Hayyim ben Benjamin of Genazzano, and the Spanish Kabbalist R. Yitzhaq ben Samuel Mor Hayyim, who lived in Naples for a short time when del Medigo was writing his *Behinat ha-Dat*.<sup>41</sup> In this passage del Medigo therefore demonstrates familiarity with the dispute over the problem of the identity of 'Ein Sof with the Supreme Crown and, by extension, a solid acquaintance with theosophical Kabbalah. His rejection of the theurgical-magical aspects of this lore and his entrenchment in medieval Neo-Aristotelianism produced an antagonism not only to Kabbalah but also to the synthetic approach adopted by Pico della Mirandola. The fact that del Medigo left Italy and returned to Crete is surely an emblematic event, reflecting the strength of the new orientation in

Florentine Renaissance circles, as well as the abiding hostility to this orientation in the older, conservative Jewish elite.

I assume that the emergence and dissemination of Christian Kabbalah was an incentive for the increasingly systematic criticism of the Jewish Kabbalah by Jewish authors throughout the Renaissance, a trend that influenced del Medigo's project. A letter from him to Pico, in which he discussed kabbalistic books, indicates that he was responding to the nascent Christian Kabbalah.<sup>42</sup> We can find a more direct connection in the other important critic of Kabbalah, Leone da Modena, (Yehudah Arie'el of Modena). For him, the fact that Christians accepted Kabbalah was a major argument against its Jewish origin. With Modena's *'Ari Nohem* we enter a crucial phase in the Jewish criticism of Kabbalah, in which the need to counteract Christian Kabbalah contributed to a better understanding of this lore even among the Jews. The emergence in Italy of historical and philological critiques of Kabbalah, authored by persons who knew the Italian intellectual arena very well, is also closely tied to new critical developments in the humanistic circles in Italy, where there were widespread efforts to establish the authenticity and the historical background of important writings, including some very revered ones.<sup>43</sup> Even traditional Jewish Kabbalists occasionally studied or at least were aware of the content of Christian Kabbalah.<sup>44</sup> In some cases Christian ideas penetrated their works.<sup>45</sup> Among these were R. Mordekhai Dato, Abraham Yagel, Joseph Hamitz, Jacob Hayyim Tzemah, Abraham Kohen Herrera, and perhaps even Nathan of Gaza, the prophet of Sabbatai Tzevi.

# I3

## PRISCA THEOLOGIA

R. ISAAC ABRAVANEL, LEONE EBREO, AND  
R. ELIJAH HAYYIM OF GENAZZANO

### 1. KABBALAH AND *PRISCA THEOLOGIA* IN RENAISSANCE THOUGHT

Just as the emergence of critiques of Kabbalah in Italy reflected the influence of Italian humanism, with its more critical approach to texts, so we may assume that the Italian Renaissance affected the attitude to Kabbalah among some Jews. And indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, the emergence of Christian Kabbalah, with its missionary goals, prompted a more negative attitude toward Jewish Kabbalah among several Jewish authors.

One topic central to the understanding of Kabbalah in this period, which preoccupied many Renaissance scholars, was the concept of *prisca theologia*, the belief in the existence of an “ancient theology” whose basic tenets manifested themselves in

various religious and philosophical doctrines under different nomenclatures.<sup>1</sup> For example, Marsilio Ficino, one of the major exponents of this theory, named a series of ancient thinkers and mythical figures, among them Zoroaster, Hermes, Pythagoras, and Plato.<sup>2</sup> According to Ficino, the views of the ancient philosophers were in accord with Moses' religious outlook, a fact that conferred religious authority on their thinking. This attitude toward religious knowledge was adopted also by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and became quite widespread in the Renaissance.

In this chapter I want to analyze several statements that reveal a concordance between Jewish and other forms of traditions, and to discuss the significance of that concordance. This discussion establishes the likelihood that Jews were acquainted with Christian discussions stemming from Renaissance sources, integrated them, and adapted them to their own purposes. Kabbalah as a lore claiming a long pedigree could serve the Jews in counteracting Christian claims about the antiquity of a variety of theologies and their congruence with Christian tenets. Renaissance Italy was a major site of comparisons between some kabbalistic stands and the views of ancient philosophers. Here I shall focus on two contemporary figures, one a Spanish first-rank intellectual active in Italy, the other a more minor figure of Italian extraction. As we shall see in the next chapter, additional examples are abundant in Yohanan Alemanno's writings.

## 2. R. ISAAC AND YEHUDAH ABRAVANEL'S VIEWS OF *PRISCA THEOLOGIA*

Among the most learned and famous thinkers who arrived in Italy after being expelled from Spain was R. Isaac ben Yehudah Abravanel (1437–1508). One of the most important, influential, and recognized leaders of the Sephardi Jewry ever, Abravanel lived his last fourteen years in Italy. A prolific writer, he produced a comprehensive commentary on the Pentateuch, as well as several treatises dealing with the calculation of the end and other messianic topics. Though profoundly shaped by the Jewish Spanish culture, and a major representative of some of its most important intellectual directions, Abravanel acculturated swiftly to Italian intellectual life. In this limited framework, I cannot address the voluminous and multifaceted literary activity of this giant of Jewish thought<sup>3</sup> or even the general content of all the work he produced in Italy. Here we must restrict ourselves to some of his writings that are relevant to the topic of ancient theology.<sup>4</sup> On this topic as on some others, it emerges clearly that Isaac Abravanel's views on Kabbalah were shaped by the Italian Renaissance culture that his own views and that, more importantly, those of his son, Yehudah, known as Leone Ebreo, contributed much to the larger culture, both Jewish and Christian.

As a philosopher, Abravanel had been nurtured on the medieval philosophical traditions,<sup>5</sup> but he was also acquainted with kabbalistic doctrines. For Abravanel,

as for some other fifteenth-century philosophers in Spain, such as R. Hasdai Crescas, R. Joseph Albo, and R. Abraham Shalom, Kabbalah was part, though a modest one, of his broad culture, and the conservative bent of these Spanish thinkers influenced him. In his early treatise *Sefer 'Ateret Zeqenim*, written while he was still in Spain, Abravanel compares the kabbalistic vision of the sefirot with Averroës' view of attributes,<sup>6</sup> a leitmotif that is found also in other Jewish Renaissance sources. He seems also to have absorbed several topics widely treated in Jewish and Christian Renaissance literature, such as magical<sup>7</sup> and Platonic understandings of Judaism. He also quotes in his works from the Hermetic literature, recently translated by Marsilio Ficino. Thus in his treatise dealing with the creation of the world, titled *Mif'alot 'Elohim*, composed in 1498 in Italy, we read: "According to the divine truth all human souls were created before bodies came into existence at the genesis of creation, and this was the belief held by the greatest philosophers in ancient times, such as Hermes Trismegistus, given the name Hanoah,<sup>8</sup> and Pythagoras, Plato, and others. Yet indeed in the case of Aristotle we have not found an interpretation of this sort."<sup>9</sup> Although the antecedence of the soul is a common topic among authors of the Middle Ages, the direct reference to Hermes Trismegistus clearly indicates the influence of the Hermetic corpus, whose importance significantly increased during the last quarter of the fifteenth century in northern Italy. However, in addition to the mention of the name Hermes (here spelled *Ermes*, betraying an Italian pronunciation), the conceptual context in which Abravanel places him is the accordance between the view of the Torah and that of "the greatest philosophers in ancient times." The mention of Hermetic literature together with Pythagoras and Plato reflects an ecumenical attitude common in the circle of scholars to which Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola belonged. Although Abravanel's words here do not reveal which of the various Jewish spiritual trends he perceives as the "divine truth," they may imply a kabbalistic approach to the essence of the soul. In his *Yeshu'ot Meshiho*, a messianic treatise composed in Italy at the end of the fifteenth century, he wrote:

It was accepted by Abraham that a man without sons does not have a part in the world to come, as indicated in the sayings of our rabbis of blessed memory. For this was also the belief among some of the ancient philosophers,<sup>10</sup> as written in the book *The Eternity of the Soul and the Godhead*, attributed to the Egyptian Enoch, named Hermes Trismegistus. The explanation is that the childless man does not have eternity of the soul, the reason being that since, according to them, the soul is prior to the perfection of the body, they have agreed that the perfect or deficient compound is drawn to the perfect or deficient soul. Furthermore, there are souls who are barren by nature, as a

consequence of a deficiency in the perfection and eternity of the soul. Therefore, Man, carrying this soul, was childless and barren in the shape and image of the noneternal, until sexual procreation and the bearing of fruits came into existence. Indeed, the carrier of the perfect and eternal souls will bear fruit, as is implied in the commandment of the Pentateuch [Deuteronomy 20:19] that the tree of the field and the progenitor, the bearer of fruit, shall not be destroyed, in addition to their spiritual and eternal award, while that which does not procreate shall perish. Therefore, Abraham was not at peace with the promise of his exceeding great reward, because of his understanding that this reward refers to the reward of the soul. Hence he said to the Lord be blessed: “What wilt thou give me, seeing that I go childless?” [Genesis 15:2]. That is to say, how can you bestow eternity on me while I wander the world childless, without posterity.<sup>11</sup>

Once again, the Jewish tradition—in this case, the opinion of rabbis<sup>12</sup>—correlates with references from Hermes; as Abravanel indicates, the necessity of procreation can be explained in accordance with Jewish and Hermetic tradition. Thus, within the intellectual framework of the Renaissance Abravanel can compare without any noticeable reticence one of the most cherished topics in Judaism, procreation, to a similar view found in a pagan text.<sup>13</sup>

It is within this framework that we should consider another kabbalistic topic, Abravanel’s vision of the sefirot, as expressed in a short treatise composed in Venice in the early sixteenth century:

For of necessity things exist as a figuration<sup>14</sup> in the mind of the active agent before that thing comes into being. Indubitably this image is the world of the sefirot mentioned by the sages of the Kabbalists of the true wisdom [who said] that the sefirot are the divine figurations with which the world was created. Therefore they said that the sefirot are not created but are emanated, and that all of them united together in Him, blessed be His name, for they are the figurations of His loving-kindness and His willing what He created. In truth, Plato set down the knowledge of the separate general forms not as Aristotle understood them.<sup>15</sup>

The affinity between “separate general forms,” a conspicuously Platonic idea, and the sefirot as understood by Abravanel is presented without any historical explanation. However, the phenomenological relationship may be understood in terms of Abravanel’s own historical view that Plato studied with Jeremiah in Egypt and received his knowledge from the prophet.<sup>16</sup> Thus the phenomenological similarity is part of a historical relationship that confers on the Jewish sages,

viewed as Kabbalists, both precedence and, implicitly, superiority in matters of theology.

Let me elaborate upon the difference between the attitude to Plato in Abravanel and that of the medieval authors. As long as Abravanel could present an alternative to Aristotelianism that could be regarded as still more venerable than the Peripatetic master, as some medieval authors sought to do, Plato fulfilled a role both as a foil to the widely disdained figure of Aristotle and as a thinker who provided a philosophical parallel to some kabbalistic issues, so that the prestige of Kabbalah could be augmented even in the eyes of some philosophers. However, when the Platonic corpus became a cultural alternative, or at least a major source for theology, as it did during the Renaissance in Italy, Jewish authors preferred to stress not so much its affinity to Kabbalah, but rather Plato's status as a disciple of an important Jewish figure. Instead of allowing for two independent sources of knowledge, the Mosaic and the Greek or pagan, as happened in many cases in the Florentine Renaissance, the Jewish intelligentsia preferred to stress that truth stemmed ultimately from the Mosaic revelation, and that it had been subsequently accepted by Plato but distorted by Aristotle. In any case, Aristotelianism was a less influential philosophy among the Renaissance Jews than among their medieval predecessors, and thus a less dangerous form of thought. A similar phenomenon is discernible in the comparison made by Abravanel between the Kabbalah and Plato, again in his *Mif'alot 'Elohim*:

Plato has caught a slight glimpse of the truth of this matter. As a result he does not apply the Gate of Creation to the angels, but applies to them only the Gate of Emanation, since their existence does not originate in the primal matter, [a term] by which he designates the rest of the corporeal world. Furthermore, concerning nonexistence, which he accepts bounds them by nature, he does not assert their deterioration, as is the case with the other parts of the world, but their return and adherence to eternal life, which he calls Idea, that is to say, a divine quality. . . . And thus has been said by the Kabbalists, that the spiritual angels are the bearers of His Throne of Glory. It is therefore more appropriate that it be called Emanation and Aggregation than Creation and Construction, or Nonexistence and Absence.<sup>17</sup>

Despite Abravanel's explicit reference to Plato, it is the Neoplatonic view of emanation that he has in mind, beginning with Plotinus—in this case, referring to the emanation of the angels. According to Abravanel, Plato's approach is parallel to the Kabbalists' concept of emanation. In the passage quoted above from his answer to R. Shaul ha-Kohen, Abravanel compares Plato's Ideas with another kabbalistic topic. There, as in the quotation from the eschatological treatise

Yeshu'ot Meshiho, the similarity between a view peculiar to Plato and a Jewish view—in this case, as explicitly indicated, a kabbalistic approach—becomes apparent. Such an accord is not accidental, for, as Abravanel implies, Plato had acquired knowledge from Jeremiah in Egypt. In his *Mif'alot 'Elohim* we read:

The greatest among sages has said: “Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to earth?” [Ecclesiastes 3:21]. For this human spirit is a celestial nature, originating in the region of divine matters. Hence, it moves continually on its own behalf in a circular movement, just like the heavenly bodies and the stars. Therefore, Plato the sage has said that the soul moves of its own accord in a circular movement, both in the body and outside the body, both prior to merging with it and after the separation from it. For through this movement it shall obtain its essence and acknowledge its Creator. For He is the soul's active essence and perfection as long as heaven is on earth. In truth, this is a scientific clause fitting for one of his stature, a student of the prophet Jeremiah, may he rest in peace. And this spiritual corporeality is the bearer of the intelligent Spirit, which is the spirit within man's heart.<sup>18</sup>

Here Abravanel assesses not only the conceptual similarities between Jewish and Platonic views but also their historical filiation; Plato studied with the prophet. This topic recurs in Abravanel's *Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah*: “Following the destruction [of the Temple] he left for Egypt, and there he dwelled for many years, void of prophecy, until the day of his death, and, as attested by the rabbi and the Greek sages, Plato spoke to him in Egypt.”<sup>19</sup>

It is against this background that the conceptual framework of Abravanel's son, the famous Leone Ebreo, should be viewed. He was better acquainted than his father with Neoplatonic literature, in its Latin translation, and used it in his own work.<sup>20</sup> The “ancient theology” theory as presented in Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'Amore* provides a key to the understanding of his thought. There the younger Abravanel writes:

Since I am a follower of Moses in matters relating to the divine, I hold to this second theory, which is in accordance with Mosaic teaching. And Plato, who was more versed in ancient lore than Aristotle, was of this opinion; whereas Aristotle, who penetrated less deeply into abstract things, and unlike Plato had not the testimony of our ancient theologians, denied that which was hidden from his sight, and united primary beauty with supreme wisdom. With this his mind was satisfied, and without seeing further he affirmed supreme beauty and wisdom to be the first spiritual origin of all things.



Plato, however, having learned from the ancient fathers in Egypt, had a wider vision, even if it did not avail him to behold the hidden source of supreme wisdom or highest beauty; and the latter he made to be the second beginning of the universe, depending on the Most High God, the first cause of all things. And although Plato was for so many years the teacher of Aristotle, yet because he was instructed in the knowledge of things divine by our ancient fathers [*nostri vecchi*], his learning was more excellent and culled from better masters than that of Aristotle.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, the son like his father maintains that Plato acquired his knowledge from the Jews. But in spite of his claim that this took place in Egypt, he uses the term “our ancient [Jewish] fathers.” An additional major difference between father and son is the manner of introducing Aristotle into the succession of theologians influenced, albeit indirectly, by Judaism. Whereas the father describes Aristotle as opposed to Plato, the son speaks only of his “weaker,” namely vaguer, comprehension of the truth, which resulted in his erring. In my opinion we can describe the succession as follows: “Our ancestors” (the Kabbalists) are the “fathers” or elders who taught Plato, and he subsequently taught Aristotle. As regards the latter pair, it is clear that the process of instruction involved deterioration in the quality of comprehension. The same deterioration may therefore have also occurred in the case of the first pair: the elders and Plato. If this assumption is correct, then it is necessary to apply the rule that the first to come is superior to the rest, not only in the succession of transmission but also in the hierarchy of the sages. However, because Plato’s affinity to the sages surpasses that of Aristotle to Plato, it should be possible to use his views as a key to understanding the doctrine of the Jews.

Indeed, in the central issues dealt with above, such as the notion of the ideas and the approach to the essence and antecedence of the soul, Judaism and Platonism have, historically speaking, many points in common. The assumption above, however, was that Plato had acquired his knowledge from the Jews. Although the view that Plato was a student of Jeremiah is not unprecedented,<sup>22</sup> Isaac Abravanel does more than just indicate the existence of a connection between Plato and the Jewish prophet, as other authors had already done; he also presents well-defined Platonic views, which he compares with Jewish parallels. The exposure of the similarities serves obliquely to promote the view claiming a Jewish origin for Plato’s thought. Thus Abravanel employs the “ancient theology” theory, common among contemporary Italians, to support the notion of the superiority of Jewish thought, at least in terms of its antiquity.

Within the framework of the “harmony” between the ancient philosophers and the Jews, Isaac Abravanel also refers to Pythagoras. In his *Commentary on the*

Pentateuch he adopts the same line of argument that he did with Plato: “In truth the reason for levirate marriage is that which we find in our Master Moses, may he rest in peace, and Pythagoras agreed with him. This opinion is the ancient traditional opinion that the souls of the Jews are transferred or emerge from one body to the other.”<sup>23</sup> In his discussion Abravanel alludes to the possibility that this accord likewise is a result of influence. Discussing the essence of the transmigration of the soul, he writes:

And the religious proofs found for it in the hagiography by the Kabbalists have flourished. Likewise the sayings of our sages of blessed memory mentioned them, as also the divine Rabbi Shimeon bar Yohai explicitly mentioned them. And I shall embellish in lengthy discourse, while having no doubts at all. This was also the opinion of the ancient philosophers, as can be seen from the speech of the divine Socrates, which he delivered on his deathbed, as was quoted by Plato in his name, in his book on the immortality of the soul, which we call, in the language of the Greeks, *Phaedo*. He there brings the sayings of Socrates to his students, at the time that the court of law in Athens passed the judgment of execution upon him. This was also the opinion of Pythagoras,<sup>24</sup> as it was also of the rest of the ancients. Perhaps they had received [this opinion] from the first generations and from the age of the prophets. However, Aristotle, and his commentators likewise, completely rejected this opinion, believing on the contrary that the transmigration of souls is logically impossible.<sup>25</sup>

A similar Adamite line of transmission is found in the elder Abravanel’s Mif’alot ’Elohim; at the beginning of his discussion of the question of the creation of the world, he ponders the sources of Moses’ assumption that the world was created:

Perhaps Moses, our master, maintained this view by his own reason, because it was reached by his speculation, or because it was accepted and taught to him by his ancestors and elders. There is no doubt that this view was agreed upon by the [twelve] tribes, and Moses received it from Qehat, and Qehat received it from Jacob his grandfather, and Jacob received it from Shem the son of Noah, whom he saw and with whom he studied. And Shem received it from Methuselah, because the former saw and received from the mouth of Methuselah; and Methuselah from Adam, who saw it. . . . Thence this tradition [ha-Qabbalah] reached Moses from his ancestors and elders by means of four intermediaries.<sup>26</sup>

The Adamite tradition turns into a Mosaic tradition because the major inheritor of its content was Moses; here no place is allocated to the pagan figures. In contrast to the earlier quotation from Mif’alot ’Elohim above, where he proposes a

concordance between the Jewish view and the pagan one, when Abravanel deals with the emergence of the Mosaic tradition he turns to the earliest possible source: Adam. He prefers the argument of antiquity even to the argument of the superiority of Moses' prophecy, which was a principle of medieval Jewish philosophy. I suspect that this emphasis on the *prisca theologia* Adamita has something to do with the *prisca theologia pagana*: trying to counteract or subvert the authority of the pagan theologians, Abravanel not only identifies the most ancient of them, Hermes, with a biblical figure, but also ascribes to the Mosaic tradition a pedigree that can easily compete with the claims of the emerging Renaissance philosophy.

A perusal of Jewish medieval sources demonstrates that the argument for an Adamite tradition inherited by the Jews is not an innovation by Abravanel; it is found from time to time in both philosophical and mystical writings. So, for example, the unknown author of *Sefer Berit Menuhah*, an important kabbalistic writing dating from the fourteenth century, argues in the proemium that the divine name was transmitted from Adam to Seth, Enos, Yered, Methuselah, Lemech, Noah, Shem, Heber, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who transmitted it to his sons, especially to Levi, who handed it down to Amram, Moses, Aharon, and so on.<sup>27</sup> A similar view was advanced at the beginning of the fifteenth century by the Spanish Kabbalist R. Shem Tov ben Shem Tov.<sup>28</sup> I am not sure that these traditions served as a paradigm for the Abravanel; historically there is no obstacle.

However, a kabbalistic influence is more plausible in the case of the son, who mentions the Kabbalists explicitly. On the other hand, Jewish philosophers offered other lines of transmission. We have already mentioned the view of R. Yehudah ha-Levi as to the Adamite origin of the tradition inherited by the Jews. I have no doubt that this view of both philosophers and Kabbalists influenced the Abravanel; the father mentions it in *Mif'alot 'Elohim*.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, another medieval Jewish philosopher, R. Shem Tov Falaquera, had already traced the transmission of philosophical traditions to pre-Mosaic biblical figures such as Shem, Heber, and Abraham.<sup>30</sup> However, the exact source of Abravanel's view of the Adamite origin of wisdom does not matter very much; it is enough to know that Adamite claims were already available in Jewish tradition, and I assume that they were used to offer an alternative to other genealogies of truth as found in Ficino's writings. However, I would like to dwell upon this issue more. Someone can argue that it is merely a matter of coincidence that even in a work in which the ancient theologians are mentioned, Abravanel offers the classical Adamite line, as proposed by the twelfth-century Spanish Jewish philosopher Yehudah ha-Levi; and that even in the case of the son, who was undeniably better acquainted with Renaissance thought, the absence of the Ficinian line is insignificant. Nevertheless, I am skeptical about such an explanation. The preference for the Adamite line was more convenient,

since it would attribute to the Jewish tradition, and, in the case of the son, to the Kabbalah, a role more important than that attributed by Christian thinkers to a variety of pagan figures. In his treatment of Moses and the other lawgivers Ficino may conclude that Moses was perhaps considered the most important, but his status is not totally different from the others,<sup>31</sup> who were also conceived to be divinely inspired.<sup>32</sup> To attribute the Jewish tradition to Moses could mean no more than that it is a relatively late lore, which is comparable to all the others, some of them deemed to be even earlier than the Sinaitic revelation. In order to surpass the pagan figures in the matter of antiquity, it was more convenient to assume an Adamite origin for Judaism. In a period when pre-Adamite views were not yet widespread,<sup>33</sup> this was the maximum that someone could have done. In one of Ficino's discussions of the four-lettered divine names, he shows an acquaintance with an Adamite tradition concerning these names.<sup>34</sup> Thus the standard of antiquity proposed by Ficino had to be met by at least a similar claim of antiquity.

There is no doubt that the great majority of the medieval genealogies of religious knowledge, especially those related to Kabbalah, attributed the central role in the formation of the Jewish tradition to Moses and not to Adam. The Abravanel abandoned the particularist understanding of Judaism as stemming from a Mosaic revelation alone but preferred the backing of a tradition of a hoary antiquity, namely one deriving from Adam, which has a potential universalist scope. The uniqueness of the Jewish religion is based not only on the exceptional revelation to Moses as a unique religious leader, as some medieval thinkers claimed, but also on the ancient tradition originating with Adam, as preserved by the Jews.

### 3. R. ELIJAH HAYYIM BEN BENJAMIN OF GENAZZANO

A positive appropriation of the *prisca theologia* theory can also be detected in R. Elijah Hayyim ben Benjamin of Genazzano,<sup>35</sup> a late-fifteenth-century Italian Kabbalist, who seems to be one of the first who explicitly connected Zoroastrianism, Pythagoreanism, and Kabbalah. In the context of a discussion on the metempsychosis and Zoroaster he writes: "I have also found that similar views were held by Numenius the Pythagorean and by Orlandus.<sup>36</sup> Numenius, out of his love of Moses' Torah, thought that Moses' soul had been reincarnated in his own body.<sup>37</sup> . . . And as regards this statement,<sup>38</sup> according to which the Kabbalists maintained that human souls are reincarnated in animal bodies, I answer that this view is to be found only in the works of the later Kabbalists,<sup>39</sup> and I did not find any support for this view in our sages' statements. However, I have found that this is the opinion of a certain ancient philosopher, namely Pythagoras and his sect."<sup>40</sup>

From the way in which Genazzano has earlier presented Zoroaster, and from the way in which he describes Numenius as also having derived his knowledge

from Jewish sources, we may assume that this Kabbalist regarded the theory of metempsychosis as an authentic kabbalistic view, which subsequently reached Pythagoras in one way or another. However, with regard to the specific topic of reincarnation in animal bodies, the Kabbalist appears to be unable to corroborate it in earlier Jewish sources, and so mentions Pythagoras.

The implications are difficult to sort out: Does R. Elijah mean that Pythagoras preserved ancient Jewish traditions that do not occur in the “ancient” kabbalistic texts, but only in the later layers of Kabbalah? Or is he criticizing the later Kabbalists for inventing a new speculation regarding metempsychosis, on the ground of alien material extant in Pythagoreanism? Whatever the answer may be, it is obvious that this Kabbalist presupposes an affinity between Pythagoras and a major kabbalistic principle.

Let me turn to another main protagonist of the *prisca theologia*, Zoroaster. Although Ficino and Pico were reluctant to enroll Zoroaster in the tradition of unilinear transmission, several of Ficino’s contemporaries were not. For example, R. Elijah of Genazzano asserts: “Behold, I have found in an ancient book attributed to a wise man called Zoroaster the following statement: Metempsychosis was received by the Hindus from the Persians, and by the Persians from the Egyptians; by the Egyptians from the Chaldeans, and by the Chaldeans from Abraham.<sup>41</sup> They expelled him from their land, since they hated him because he said that the soul is the source of movement and causes the movement of matter and there are many souls.”<sup>42</sup>

It is conspicuous that on the theory of metempsychosis this Jewish Italian Kabbalist attempts to promote a unilinear tradition originating with Abraham, with Zoroaster only inheriting it from the patriarch. The source for this tradition, the Kabbalist asserts, is an ancient book. Thus we may assume that a pre-Renaissance source proposed a unilinear tradition in which Zoroaster was not the progenitor of the ancient wisdom but rather a disciple of the Mosaic lore. Indeed, the attribution of the kabbalistic theory of metempsychosis to Abraham assumes that Kabbalah, which for the Kabbalists constituted the esoteric interpretation of Judaism, had already been cultivated by this patriarch.<sup>43</sup> Such an assessment is corroborated by the fact that Zoroaster had already been presented in the Middle Ages as the student of Abraham, as well as by another passage referring to Zoroaster in the same book by Elijah of Genazzano: “It is known that Abraham our forefather, blessed be his memory, was a great sage, even before the King of the kings of kings revealed to him matters of astrology<sup>44</sup> and natural sciences, to a very great extent, as found in ancient books such as the *Book of Nabatean Agriculture*<sup>45</sup> and the *Book of Zoroaster* . . . dealing with the controversies that he [Abraham] engaged in with the Chaldeans, even before the divine presence was revealed to him.”<sup>46</sup>

Thus we learn that Genazzano possessed a book attributed to Zoroaster, in which Abraham was mentioned. Here, too, the underlying assumption is that Zoroaster learned something from Abraham about the natural sciences, a view that corroborates the tradition that Zoroaster was well acquainted with the seven liberal arts. This passage was in existence in an “ancient book,” possibly one of the writings of the fifteenth-century Byzantine Platonic philosopher Georgius Gemistos Plethon,<sup>47</sup> or in an even earlier source. The Jewish Kabbalist’s source was apparently known to Ficino, who cites Alexander and Eupolemus as authorities to the effect that Abraham taught Zoroaster astrology, which Abraham himself had learned from the successors of Enoch.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the Christian author was clearly in possession of a source asserting a unilinear tradition traceable from Zoroaster to Enoch, with Abraham as a direct mentor to Zoroaster. Thus, the absence of Zoroaster from Ficino’s genealogy of religious knowledge and philosophy may represent a deliberate choice not to include this figure in the line of the Jewish tradition, whereas in most of Ficino’s discussions he allows for the existence of a separate, independent line of transmission. As far as I know, Ficino mentions a relationship between Zoroaster and the biblical tradition only one other time, when stating that in Didymus’s *Commentary on Genesis*, Zoroaster was identified with Ham, the son of Noah, and that the Hebrews also called him Chanaan.<sup>49</sup> These two allusions to other sources are exceptional in Ficino’s voluminous work, where he usually presents Zoroaster’s place in the chain of the pagan philosophy as his own idea.

It seems clear that a tradition connecting Zoroaster with Abraham was available to both Jews and Christians in the Renaissance.<sup>50</sup> However, Jews were reluctant to grant a role to such a figure in the transmission of Jewish tradition. Ficino and Pico, in contrast, allowed for a multilinear transmission of philosophy and religious knowledge. In Ficino’s case at least, this choice of a multilinear option seems to have been deliberate, and also to have involved a change of mind: whereas in his 1476 treatise *De religione Christiana* he amasses a variety of quotations from patristic sources to prove the influence of biblical figures on the *prisca theologia*, in his later commentaries on Plato’s dialogues he presents the ancient theologians as totally independent from biblical influence. It is also possible that the difference in treatment is related to the very different subject matters of these books: in his “pagan” books dealing with Plato’s thought he proposes the multilinear approach, while in the Christian book he is much more unilinear.<sup>51</sup>

#### 4. SOME LATER DEVELOPMENTS

Through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Zoroaster was rarely mentioned by Jewish authors. The only exceptions that I know of are R. Gedalyah ben Yehiyah

and R. Abraham Yagel. Both quote a passage in which Zoroaster is described as follows: "Ancient Zoroaster was the father of all the magicians, the first of them all to write and compose books on this craft. He was Ham, the son of Noah. . . . In his wisdom he discovered the seven disciplines, wrote them on seven pillars of metal and on seven pillars of charred stone<sup>52</sup> so that it would be a memorial of his great wisdom and understanding for the generations to come."<sup>53</sup> Most of the details of this text can be found in earlier sources; Ficino was presumably the source of the identification of Zoroaster as Ham and as the master of the magicians.<sup>54</sup> In their inclusion of Zoroaster in the line of transmission of knowledge, Yehiya and Yagel inscribe themselves as followers of the Christian Renaissance thinkers. This affinity becomes obvious from Yagel's description of the ancient theologians, including Zoroaster: "the important sages among the gentiles never saw the lights of the Torah, not of worship, prophecy, wonders, and miracles. . . . Listen to what these sages spoke about the creator. . . . For the ancient sages saw the light of life."<sup>55</sup> Seeing the light of life is certainly a positive evaluation, although it seems to be much more a matter of natural knowledge that they reached independently, rather than a religious revelation that they did not enjoy.

At the end of the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth, in response to the strong Christian Renaissance culture around them, Jewish intellectuals showed ever greater openness to the notion of multilinear transmission of knowledge.<sup>56</sup> In doing so they effected a 180-degree change from a century earlier, when Jews like Abravanel and Genazzano transformed the Christian multilinear theory of *prisca theologia* into a unilinear one.

# I4

## R. YOHANAN BEN YITZHAQ ALEMANNO

### 1. A COSMOPOLITAN INTELLECTUAL

Northern Italy had a significant Ashkenazi population at least from the late thirteenth century. One of the most important Jewish intellectuals in the period under discussion, Yohanan Alemanno, was born in Mantua in 1435 or 1436, the son of a certain R. Yitzhaq, who apparently made his living selling manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> Yohanan's grandfather R. Elijah was a physician; he had either been born in Germany or his family had come from there, and he lived for a while in France and then in Aragon, where Yitzhaq presumably married a Spanish woman. The entire family accompanied Elijah to the Vatican, where the king of Aragon sent him on an embassy, while the family apparently remained in Italy. Alemanno, who believed in



the importance of climate as a determinant of different qualities in humans, saw himself as embodying the best qualities of all four countries experienced by his family. The family name that he adopted, Alemanno, was the Italian version of “Ashkenazi,” and he was very proud of his extraction.<sup>2</sup> The young Yohanan studied with a famous figure in Mantua, R. Yehudah Messer Leon, and received the title of doctor.<sup>3</sup> For many years he lived in Florence, where he had an association with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, whom he mentions explicitly in one of his books, and played a role in the life of the Jewish community there.<sup>4</sup>

The date of his death is not clear. He was still alive in 1505, when he was working on an unfinished commentary on Genesis, ‘Einei ha-‘Edah. And it may be that a scholar in Jerusalem, writing to Italy in 1522, referred to him when he mentioned that a certain “very old man,” *ha-Yashish*, named Yohanan Ashkenazi, a “universal man,” *hakham kolel*, had come to Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> I am inclined to accept this identification not only because of the complete correspondence in names and age but especially because of the epithet *he-hakham ha-kolel*, the Hebrew form for *uomo universale*, which accords perfectly with Alemanno’s vast culture. Indeed, in his writings he displays a stunning spectrum of knowledge, including not only the classical Jewish layers of literature but also Arabic and Jewish philosophy, Kabbalah, the sciences, and magic.

Alemanno left a substantial literary heritage, most of which still survives in autograph manuscripts. It consists of a lengthy commentary on the Song of Songs, titled *Hesheq Shlomo* (The Desire of Solomon), of which only the introduction has been printed as *Sha’ar ha-Hesheq*.<sup>6</sup> This is perhaps the longest commentary on this biblical book, and it is one of the first Renaissance books to emphasize the importance of this king as a builder, magician, and mystic. As Alemanno explicitly confesses, he was encouraged by Pico della Mirandola to write it. Another voluminous book, *Hei ha-‘Olamim*, deals mainly with the different stages of human development.<sup>7</sup> His much shorter, unfinished commentary on Genesis survives in an autograph manuscript, as does a lengthy and very precious untitled treatise that contributes very important material for the understanding of his positions on Kabbalah.<sup>8</sup> Last, but not least, in Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234 (Reggio 23), we have the large autograph *Collectanea* of Alemanno’s notes, containing quotations from a welter of sources important both for understanding the genesis of Alemanno’s thought and for mapping what Jewish material was available in Florence in the last third of the fifteenth century.

## 2. SEFIROT AND TRANSCENDENTALS

Alemanno’s basic approaches to knowledge can be described as on the one hand a systematic hierarchical arrangement of different forms of speculative literature, and on the other as hermeneutical.<sup>9</sup> Here I would like to describe briefly the

hermeneutical approach, which involves the interpretation of one system of thought, the kabbalistic one, in relation to the basic theses of another system. We can designate Alemanno's hermeneutical approach as intercorporeal, a term I propose for understanding many of the medieval developments in systematic exegesis of the Hebrew Bible, involving the application of concepts taken from other bodies of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> This intercorporeal approach is reflected strongly in the following passage:

The ancients believed in the existence of ten spiritual numbers. . . . It seems that Plato thought that there are ten spiritual numbers of which one may speak, but one may not speak of the First Cause, because of its great concealment. However, they [the numbers] approximate its existence to such an extent that we may call these effects by a name that cannot be ascribed to the movers of corporeal bodies. However, in the opinion of the Kabbalists, one may say so of the sefirot. . . . This is what Plato wrote in the work *ha-'Atzamim ha-'Elyonim*<sup>11</sup> as quoted by Zekharyahu in the book *'Imrei Shefer*.<sup>12</sup> From it follows that in Plato's view, the first effects are called sefirot because they may be numbered, unlike the First Cause, and therefore he did not call them movers.<sup>13</sup>

Alemanno was undoubtedly aware of the semantic similarity between the terms *sefirot* and *mispparim*, both Hebrew words for "numbers." Both were considered as separate, namely spiritual, beings, and therefore he could assume that the affinity between the two concepts was not accidental. Again, on the basis of this quotation alone, one may assume that Plato—actually Proclus, a version of whose thought was quoted here from an unknown translation of *Liber de Causis*—not only presented a doctrine of separate, namely spiritual, numbers similar to the kabbalistic sefirot, but did so independently of the kabbalistic traditions. Elsewhere, however, as we have seen in chapter 13, Alemanno expresses the view that Plato studied with Jeremiah.<sup>14</sup> Alemanno is interested in the nature of the sefirot mostly as part of a cosmological discussion; in one of his round notes in the margin of a quotation from a commentary by R. Yehudah Hayyat, a Spanish Kabbalist whose activity will preoccupy us later, on *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*, we read: "They said that the sefirot are intermediary between the world of eternal rest, that is, *'Ein Sof*, and the world of motion, that is, the world of the spheres; this is the reason why sometimes they are in a state of rest and sometimes in motion, as it is the nature of the intermediary, composed as it is from the extremes."<sup>15</sup> Instead of the dynamic view of the sefirot in the work of the Spanish Kabbalist, copied by Alemanno, as connected to human activity through the commandments related to the processes in the sefirotic world, what I have called theurgy, Alemanno adopts a view of the sefirot as intermediary, closer to the theory of vessels or instruments, whose motion is caused by their ontological status and not by human acts. In the cultural environment

of Alemanno, in the works of R. Yehi'el Nissim of Pisa, whose grandfather was Alemanno's patron, and whose uncle, R. Yitzhaq of Pisa, was Alemanno's student, we find a similar stand, though with a peculiar emphasis:

The upper creatures are a paradigm for the lower creatures. This is because every lower thing has a superior power from which it came into existence.<sup>16</sup> This resembles the relationship of the shadow to the object that casts it. . . . Even the ancient philosophers such as Pythagoras and Plato taught and made statements about this. However, the matter was not revealed to them in a clear way, but they walked in darkness, they attained and they did not attain [*noge'a ve-'eino noge'a*], since the universals and the forms indicated by Plato hinted at this. . . . And since they did not receive the truth as it is but groped like the blind in darkness, so were their speculation and sayings. And we shall hold to the words of our ancient sages, which are true and were received from the prophets, blessed by their memory. And we shall assume that if this is so, the lower things need the upper one, this being a strict necessity, and the upper things need the lower one, to a limited extent, so that the entire world turns out to be one entity [*ke-'ish 'ehad*], and in this manner each of the individual things will be distributed to the ten sefirot as if you will say that a certain creature is to be attributed to a certain sefirah.<sup>17</sup>

The similarity between the sefirotic realm and the lower beings is perceived as similar to the Platonic and Pythagorean views.

However, R. Yehi'el Nissim asserts, the pagan philosophers did not receive the naked truth but a dim revelation, different from the clear vision of the Jewish sages and prophets. The reason for and significance of the difference are not explicitly indicated; I shall try to guess them from the context. The similarity is manifestly correct as far as the paradigmatic relationship of the upper and lower beings is concerned; in both cases the lower world reflects the upper one. However, the limited dependence of the upper on the lower one seems to be the nexus of the divergence between the Jewish and pagan sages. For the Kabbalists, the upper world, namely the sefirot, requires human worship in order to function in a perfect way, a view that is foreign to Plato. Moreover, according to R. Yehi'el Nissim, the possibility of influencing the supernal powers is related to the fact that the sefirotic realm is to be conceived as having an anthropomorphic structure; thus man, by reflecting this structure in his shape, can also influence it by his deeds. This point, elaborated by the Italian Kabbalist in a discussion immediately following the quotation above, is a crucial view of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, and R. Yehi'el Nissim correctly comprehended the difference beyond the affinity

between the two types of thought. Elsewhere this author portrays Plato in similar terms:

From the words of Plato it seems that he is close to the view of the sages, blessed be their memory, when he says that the lower and corporeal world is in the likeness and image of the upper world. And he also said that there are forms in the divine mind, named universals [kelalim], which are similar to the individuals. Nevertheless it seems to me that he did not enter [the inmost part] to know truly the depth of the significance of the Torah and her sages, blessed be their memory, but he remained outside the court, he attains and he did not attain; therefore, he and the other ancient [philosophers] could not know the truth of the quintessence of the things, but they came close [to the Jewish sages] as it was said in the Midrash *ha-Ne'elam*:<sup>18</sup> "They are close to the path of [kabbalistic] truth."<sup>19</sup>

As in the case of the earlier quotation above, this one is followed by a long discussion of the centrality of man in ensuring the unity of the world. Here, too, the ultimate knowledge is the awareness not only of the paradigmatic relations but also of the dynamic influence of religious deeds, the *mitzwot*, on the higher world. Plato was acquainted with the starting point of the lore of Kabbalah, its structural parallelism, but the application of this parallelism in actual religious life escaped him. In the first discussion, it seems that the Kabbalist is attributing to Plato the status of an inhabitant of the cave who did not receive the clear-cut revelation of the source, or the ideas, since they are merely dependent on the shadows, in contrast to the Kabbalists, whose revelation of the truth is complete. In the second quotation, the Kabbalist uses the well-known image of the palace, found in the *Guide*, to indicate that Plato was not acquainted with the inmost secrets of theology. The dynamic relationship so characteristic of the theurgical mysticism in Judaism disappears in the comparison of the Platonic ideas with the kabbalistic sefirot.

In general, Alemanno describes Plato as being in positive relation with Jewish culture; in his commentary on the Song of Songs, *Hesheq Shlomo*, he distinguishes between two ancient types of philosophers. The first was "the sect of the ancient ones, from hoary antiquity up to the generation when prophecy disappeared. They and their sons and disciples thirstily drank in their [the prophets'] words up to Plato, who was in their [the prophets'] days and in their times. The second sect commenced when prophecy ceased and the days of the evil came, from the time of Aristotle and later, up to our days."<sup>20</sup> Here Platonic lore is clearly described as being the result of the influence of the Hebrew prophets. In fact, valid philosophy is considered as contemporary with ancient Israelite prophecy and as having ceased together with it.

## 3. KABBALAH AND MAGIC

The philosophically oriented interpretation of Kabbalah is accompanied by a magically oriented interpretation of this lore. The two readings of Kabbalah are not contradictory of each other, but are sometimes even reinforcing. Magic was understood in many contexts as part of the order of nature, *magia naturalis*, and knowledge of the sefirot was tantamount to knowing the highest powers that governed the world and so being able to manipulate what happened on the mundane level. Alemanno is one of the most outspoken authors of what I propose to call the talismanic model in Kabbalah, namely one in which the main purpose of religious activity is the drawing down of the supernal spiritualities, stemming from the celestial bodies and the sefirotic realm, by performing a certain ritual.<sup>21</sup> As we saw in chapter II, the anonymous *Sefer Toledot 'Adam* had already combined ecstatic Kabbalah with astromagic. Alemanno, however, offers a much more learned and sophisticated synthesis of Kabbalah and magic. An outstanding example of this model occurs in his *Liqqutim*, or *Collectanea*, in a description of the following ritual. At first the Kabbalist recites divine names, which he reads to himself from a Torah scroll:

After the external cleansings of the body and an inner change and spiritual purification from all taint, one becomes as clear and pure as the heavens. Once one has divested oneself of all material thoughts, let him read only the Torah and the divine names written there. There shall be revealed awesome secrets and such divine visions as may be emanated upon pure clear souls who are prepared to receive them as the verse said: "Make ready for three days and wash your clothing" [Exodus 19:15]. For there are three preparations: of the exterior [the body], of the interior, and of the imagination.<sup>22</sup>

By reading the Torah as a series of divine names, man receives an initial infusion of power. This reading is preceded by a series of "preparations" that are reminiscent of the purifications performed by the Jews before the giving of the Torah at Sinai. The second stage of the process is described in a continuation of the passage. The Torah scroll itself becomes imbued with the spiritual force. At this time, "the writing of God, the spirit of the living God, shall descend upon the written scroll." In the expression "the writing of God" Alemanno refers directly to the giving of the Torah at Sinai as described in Exodus. A personal experience of the revelation of the law is a conventional notion in the Kabbalah. What is new and striking in the process described by Alemanno is the similarity of the ceremony to the ritual of dedication found in books of magic:

When a man devotes a great amount of time, the intermittent becomes habitual. When he immerses himself in these things, then such a great efflux

will come to him that he will be able to cause the spirit of God to descend upon him and hover above him and flutter about him all the day. Not only that, but “the writing of God, the spirit of the living God” will descend upon the scroll to such a degree that the scroll will give him power to work signs and wonders in the world. And such are the books called *segretti*, and all the incantations are the secret words [*segretti*] that come from evil spirits. Therefore, the Torah forbade these practices. The Torah of Moses, however is entirely sealed and closed by the name of the Holy One, blessed be He. Therefore, its powers are many, and such is the book of Psalms. This is a great secret, hidden from the eye of the blind and the cunning.<sup>23</sup>

Thus in Alemanno’s *Collectanea* we find both elements of Pico’s definition of the practical Kabbalah: first the reading of divine names in the Torah, and then the reception of efflux. The connection between the use of divine names and the reception of emanation is also mentioned in the book *Takhlit he-Hakham*, better known in medieval Christian Europe as *Picatrix*, a work read by both Pico and Alemanno: “Aristotle said . . . in ancient times, divine names had a certain ability to bring spiritual power to earth. At times, these powers descended below. At others, they killed the man who used them.”<sup>24</sup> Neither in Alemanno nor in this quotation from *Sefer Takhlit he-Hakham* is there any mention of practical Kabbalah.

Careful study of Alemanno’s statements indicates that the practice he suggests is related to the Torah scroll. The words of the Torah are, according to his view, a series of names from which meaning may be derived by reference to another source: “The ancient sages said that all the Torah is but one name, and all its words are powerful names and each and every verse is an additional name.”<sup>25</sup> This view originated in the books *Sefer Shimmushei Torah* and *Sefer Shimmushei Tehilim* and in similar traditions, which reached the Kabbalists R. Ezra, R. Azriel, and R. Moses ben Nahman in Gerona.<sup>26</sup> But Alemanno gives the doctrines an unequivocally magical interpretation. The Torah read as a series of names is translated into an instrument of magic: “Anyone who knows the science of the stars and constellations that emanate upon the creatures on Earth may interpret the entire Torah according to the signs and rules of astrology. This is true of the masters of both theoretical and practical astrology. Any man, either good or evil, who knows the work of the pure and impure angels who are superior to the stars may draw their fragrance upon our heads, for he has given a kabbalistic interpretation to the entire Torah. This matter includes the masters of both the speculative and the practical sciences of the sefirot.”<sup>27</sup>

The Torah may be read in two ways, astrologically and kabbalistically. Each way has a speculative and a practical component. It seems to me that through the

practical interpretation of the Torah (the reading of the divine names), one “may draw their fragrance upon our heads.” This drawing down of the divine influx upon oneself is both a magical and a mystical attainment, achieved by means of the ritualistic recitation of the Torah. If my analysis of Alemanno’s view is correct, then his understanding of practical Kabbalah is similar to Pico’s. Both consider the practical Kabbalah to include the use of divine names, which are connected to the descent and activation of spiritual forces in the world. The definitions of practical Kabbalah found in the writings of Pico and Alemanno share another common point. Pico considered as forbidden those kabbalistic practices that employ divine names to charm devils.<sup>28</sup> This distinction between pure and impure forms of practical Kabbalah is suggested by the previous quotation from Alemanno about pure and impure forces above the stars. At the end of the quotation from the *Collectanea*, Alemanno mentions incantations that are forbidden by the Torah. These are different from the reading of the Torah in a magical way, which is permitted.

For Alemanno, then, the reading of a Torah scroll becomes a process for the acquisition of magical powers originating in the emanation of higher forces, and this process has two stages. The person receives an initial pulsation of the divine efflux, and only then, after he has become habituated, can he receive the additional efflux, “the spirit of the living God.” Alemanno describes this second stage as “bringing down into oneself the spirit of God” (the phrase is from the *Sefer Yetzirah*), thus enabling the person to perform signs and wonders—in my opinion an adaptation of the famous magical formula *horadat ha-ruhaniyyut*—the causing of the descent of the astral spirituality—which appears in many of the texts that Alemanno had before him, as well as in his writings.<sup>29</sup> The assumption that these are cognate idioms is supported by the fact that the expression occurs in the context of a discussion of magic. Although Alemanno’s interpretation of the Torah by the method of practical Kabbalah appears in a manuscript written at the beginning of the sixteenth century, now in Paris, it is likely that Alemanno formed his opinion on the matter earlier than that. In his *Behinat ha-Dat*, as we saw in chapter 12, R. Elijah del Medigo opposed those who viewed the Torah and the commandments as a means of causing the descent of spiritual forces. We may assume that del Medigo’s remarks are a criticism of Alemanno. Del Medigo was a member of Pico’s intellectual circle until about 1490 and probably heard Alemanno’s view expressed by intellectual colleagues.

The analogous structure of the magical and a kabbalistic reading of the Torah described in Alemanno’s untitled treatise has an interesting parallel in his *Collectanea*: “The astrologer studies every one of the creatures in relation to one of the seven planets. In the same manner, the Kabbalist studies every word of the Torah, as stated before in connection with the commandments of the Torah. That



is, he studies the sefirah to which it is related. The astrologer studies the movements and governance of the stars. In the same way the Kabbalist knows what will happen to people in the future by reference to the influence and efflux of the sefirot. This is in accordance with the activities and movements of those who perform the commandments and divine service. This method is superior to that of the astrologer.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus kabbalistic study of the Torah is no longer seen as leading to preoccupation with the hidden processes of divinity. The Kabbalist has become a “superastrologer” who utilizes his knowledge to foresee the future. A similar conception is found in Pico’s *Theses*, where we read: “Just as true astrology teaches us to read the books of God, so too does the Kabbalah teach us to read the books of the law.”<sup>31</sup> The practical side of astrology can be identified with *magia naturalis*, for it teaches the way to receive the influx of higher powers. Kabbalah is a higher form of magic because its speculative foundation is, as Pico emphasizes here, superior to that of astrology. In his book *Shir ha-Ma’alot*, Alemanno declares practical Kabbalah to be superior to astrology, but dismisses astral magic based upon the science of the stars:

The Kabbalists say that every limb of a man’s body has a spiritual power corresponding to it in the sefirah Malkhut.<sup>32</sup> . . . When a man performs one of the commandments by means of one of his corporeal limbs, that limb is readied to become a seat and home for the supernal power that is its likeness. . . . Our patriarch Abraham [Abulafia] was the first to discover this wondrous science . . . as proven by his book *Sefer Yetzirah*, which was composed in accordance with this principle. It demonstrates how the likeness of each and every limb is to be found in the celestial spheres and stars and how matters stand in the spiritual world, which he terms the world of letters. . . . And study how this ancient science resembles the ancient science of astrology, which found that every limb and form and corporeal body that exists in the world of change has a likeness in the world of celestial motion in the stars and their forms. The astrologers prepared every thing in a way as to receive the efflux proper to it. However, this is a material craft that is forbidden, flawed, and impure. But the wisdom of Abraham is a spiritual craft that is perfect and pure and permitted, and his sons, Isaac and Jacob, followed in his path.<sup>33</sup>

Alemanno’s words indicate the nature of the new interpretation of the Torah. In his view, the Kabbalists learn about future events from the Torah. This method is superior to that of the astrologers, who learn from the stars. As demonstrated, practical Kabbalah teaches man how to make contact with magic forces. Thus, Kabbalah is transformed from speculation upon the mysteries of the divinity as an end in itself into a sophisticated means of exerting human influence superior to astrology or magic. This change in the essence of Kabbalah appears in the



writings of both Alemanno and Pico, his student, but I believe that Alemanno was its source. This opinion is supported not only by the chronological data but also by the fact that Alemanno's view of Kabbalah as magic belongs to his broader conception, while in Pico's writings the subject receives only limited treatment in a few sentences. For Alemanno, the Torah had unique properties, and the Kabbalah amounted to instruction in their application. For him, Moses was a magician who knew how to make use of kabbalistic principles:

The Kabbalists believe that Moses, peace be with him, had precise knowledge of the spiritual world, which is called the world of sefirot, and divine names, or the world of letters. Moses knew how to direct his thoughts and prayers so as to improve the divine efflux that the Kabbalists call "channels." Moses' action caused the channels to emanate upon the lower world in accordance with his will. By means of that efflux, he created anything he wished, just as God created the world by means of various emanations. Whenever he wanted to perform signs and wonders, Moses would pray and utter divine names, words, and meditations until he had intensified those emanations. The emanations then descended into the world and created new supernatural things. With that Moses split the sea, opened up the earth, and the like.<sup>34</sup>

Alemanno's view of Moses was an old idea found also in many non-Jewish sources.<sup>35</sup> The magic power of the word is described in a kabbalistic context, and here Moses becomes a kabbalistic magician. Alemanno also uses this approach in evaluating prophecy in general: "A prophet has the power to cause the emanation of divine efflux from 'Ein Sof upon the hyle [hylic matter] by the intermediary of the sefirah Malkhut. In this way the prophet performs wondrous deeds, impossible in nature."<sup>36</sup> The Tabernacle and Temple also have a clearly magical function. Alemanno describes them as a sort of great talisman, which enabled the Jews to receive the divine emanations of the sefirot. In his *Collectanea*, Alemanno offers four explanations of the nature of the Tabernacle and its vessels, of which the third and fourth are relevant:

For the people were educated to believe in the possibility of causing spiritual forces and emanations to descend from above by means of preparations made by man for that purpose, such as talismans, garments, foods, and special objects . . . just as when Moses our master, peace be with him, prepared the Golden Calf. The intention was only to cause the spiritual forces to descend by means of a physical body. In Ibn Ezra's opinion, they made a figure of Aquarius in midsky and Taurus rising, for those had the power necessary to ease their way in the wilderness, a desolate place. In

Nahmanides' opinion, they directed their meditation to the figure of the ox on the left-hand side of the Merkavah in order to be protected from the attribute of strict judgment. Therefore, they had to make an ark and vessels capable of receiving those emanations. The fourth reason was to increase those actions such as the offering of sacrifices, which give protection and cause good emanations to descend and forestall the bad emanations, which descend from the stars and their heavenly courses. The purpose of most of the commandments is to safeguard the prophetic efflux, which issues above and descends upon the human intellect. Therefore, it was necessary to have various heavy large vessels and a tabernacle to contain them.<sup>37</sup>

The Tabernacle is described as a complex talisman that “guards” and “causes the descent” of spiritual forces. The idea that the Tabernacle “guards” the descent of spiritual forces requires some clarification. From the context it is clear that this is not simply protection against “evil events.” Just after the passage above, Alemanno clarifies: “When Israel observes the Temple service, the Holy Spirit rests upon its noble men, for the power of the human soul is increased, and they prophesy.”<sup>38</sup> This trend of thought continues the views of the fourteenth-century Spanish thinkers, whose relationship to Kabbalah was rather loose, but the connection to this mystical lore becomes much stronger in Alemanno's Kabbalah, and in some forms of Safedian Kabbalah.<sup>39</sup>

This attribution of the making of the Golden Calf to Moses is very strange; I have found no parallel to it in Hebrew literature.<sup>40</sup> It is part of a magic understanding of Judaism, which has few parallels in Jewish high culture. However, Giordano Bruno reports as a doctrine of the “Kabbalists” that Moses prepared the Golden Calf and the Brass Serpent, under the aegis of the planets, for magical purposes.<sup>41</sup> This view is consonant with Alemanno's reflection in the introduction to his commentary on the Song of Songs, where he writes:

Astrologers, necromancers, chiromancers, and masters of pagan crafts have rituals, rules, special places, incense, garments, and set times and preparations in order to receive those impure spiritual forces. These descend upon those who manipulate them by means of the relation of those objects to those forces, as the masters of these crafts know. So, too, there are activities, foods, garments, preparations, and sacrifices, incense, and places and times that enable one to receive and cleave to the pure spiritual forces that descend from the world of the sefirot. These actions concern the esoteric knowledge of the Torah and the particulars of the commandments, which cause Hebrew souls to cleave to [the sefirah] Malkhut. Malkhut is the source of oral law, which explains all the secrets of the Torah and details of the commandments.<sup>42</sup>

Magic and Kabbalah share a technique for causing the descent of spiritual forces to earth. They differ, however, in their goals. The magician directs his efforts at the stars, from which he hopes to receive beneficial emanation. The Jews seek to receive, and cleave to, the emanations of the sefirot. In his *Sefer Hesheq Shlomo*, Alemanno declares the descent of spiritual forces to be the principal goal of the endeavors of King Solomon: “Both Solomon’s good and his unseemly actions indicate that his lifelong goal was to cause the descent of spiritual forces to earth. He did all this by offering thousands and tens of thousands of sacrifices in order to cause the Holy Spirit to descend upon him . . . and he made a great dwelling for the Lord his God, in order to bring the Shekhinah [down] to earth.”<sup>43</sup>

Alemanno’s words fell upon attentive ears, and other writers echoed his ideas. For instance, a short treatise apparently written by R. Yitzhaq ben Yehi’el of Pisa, whom Alemanno mentions in the introduction to his *Shir ha-Ma’alot*, expresses a view about the purpose of the Temple similar to Alemanno’s:

To cause a supernal power to descend and perform a certain action, one must minister to that power by means of rituals proper to it. These rituals prepare it [the power] to perform the desired action. . . . The greatest providence concerns the perfection of the soul and its becoming divine. The noblest service possible is that instructed by the Torah. For after He gave the command concerning the Tabernacle, God said this: “And I shall dwell in the midst of the Israelites” [Exodus 29:45]. That is to say, it is necessary to safeguard the receptive power so that the supernal powers descend. For the receptive power safeguards the relation [of the upper and lower worlds] by means of particular garments, sacrifices, places, and actions, performed at certain times. When one of those particulars is missing, the desired goal will not be achieved. Moreover, harm will replace the hoped-for gain.<sup>44</sup>

In fact, Alemanno proposes to see in the complex combination between theurgy and magic a higher form of human activity, and, according to one of his notes, the last topic to be studied after someone has accomplished his kabbalistic studies is magic.<sup>45</sup>

#### 4. KABBALAH AND ASTROLOGY

As we have seen, magic is strongly connected to astrology, and both are connected to Kabbalah. This nexus is evident in a long *Commentary on the Ten Sefirot*, authored by Alemanno and found in his untitled treatise:

and the third [sphere] is that of Saturn . . . and it is a supreme and noble one, higher than all the other planets, which is the reason that the ancient sages said about it that it generated all the other planets. . . . And they say that

Saturn is the true judge and the planet of Moses, peace be with him.<sup>46</sup> The angel of Saturn is Michael,<sup>47</sup> the great minister, so called because of his great power in divine matters, and he is the ministering angel of Israel.<sup>48</sup> And the astrologers who have described Saturn say that it endows man with profound thought, law, and the spiritual sciences [*hokhmot ruhaniyyot*],<sup>49</sup> prophecy [*nevu'ah*],<sup>50</sup> sorcery [*kishshuf*],<sup>51</sup> and prognostication and the Shemittot and Yovelot.<sup>52</sup> The Jewish people and the Hebrew language and the Temple are under its jurisdiction. Saturn's major conjunction is with Jupiter in the dominion of Pisces<sup>53</sup> [and] occurs to assist the nation and the Torah and its prophets. This planet endows the people with perfection in sciences and divine matters such as the Torah and its commandments, out of its sublimity, because it is spiritual. . . . It is concerned only with thought, understanding and design, esoteric knowledge and divine worship and His Torah, and the Sabbath day is in its sway, because its nature causes material existence to cease . . . and all the operations that do not correspond to it are forbidden [during the Sabbath], because it corrupts and destroys all [kinds of] destructions. And lightning [fire] should not be done under its aegis, because it is cold. . . . And if they keep its spiritual rules and laws, it will impart a spiritual influx abundantly. But if they do not keep the way of God, it will spit forth everything that is bad: prophecy will occur to fools and to babies in an insufficient manner, and to women and to melancholics,<sup>54</sup> and to those possessed by an evil spirit and maleficent demons that obliterate the limbs,<sup>55</sup> and bad counsels and sorceries, and anxieties and erroneous beliefs.<sup>56</sup>

This complex passage represents a Saturnization of Judaism, a development that was inspired by views expressed in the writings of R. Abraham ibn Ezra and his commentators—all well known to Alemanno—and even in the writings of some Kabbalists. None of them, however, was so outspoken as Alemanno is in this passage. The nexus between Saturn and the sefirah Binah points to an astrological understanding of Kabbalah. But although there were some definitions of Kabbalah at the end of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries that integrated the views of astromagic, and conceived it as creating a connection between the supernal and the lower realms,<sup>57</sup> none of Alemanno's predecessors, among either philosophers or Kabbalists, so explicitly pointed out the deep affinity between so many central values in Judaism: the Torah, the Temple, the land of Israel, Moses, prophecy, the Sabbath, and esoteric knowledge on the one hand; and Saturn on the other. Though based on earlier medieval sources written in Spain by Jews, Alemanno's passage is reminiscent of the importance attributed to Saturn by his Florentine contemporaries, especially by Marsilio Ficino.<sup>58</sup>

Alemanno is one of the most outspoken representatives of what I call the magical-talismanic model in Kabbalah, which had an impact on some forms of Safedian Kabbalah and thus on eighteenth-century Hasidism.<sup>59</sup> Though well aware of the ecstatic literature written by Abraham Abulafia, and the variants of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah as represented especially by Joseph Gikatilla and Menahem Recanati,<sup>60</sup> Alemanno chose to give astromagical topics a much greater place in the economy of his vision of Kabbalah.

To be sure: kabbalistic theosophy has not been identified with astrology, and from the cosmic point of view the latter has been explicitly subordinated to the former: the sefirot are conceived of as governing the planets. But even within the terms of this clear hierarchy, a more static vision of the sefirot, understood in Alemanno as instruments of the divine activity, is visible in his writings, so in this respect he follows Recanati's instrumental theological approach.<sup>61</sup> But in his combination of the variety of kabbalistic literatures and models with astrology, magic, and alchemy,<sup>62</sup> Alemanno's writings come closest to occult phenomena in later European esotericism.<sup>63</sup>

## 5. A CONVERSATION ON *DIGNITAS HOMINIS*

Let me address now a nonkabbalistic issue, but one of great interest for the history of Western thought. As I have attempted to show elsewhere, Alemanno embraced a type of anthropology very close to Pico's.<sup>64</sup> Let me adduce a manuscript note found in the *Collectanea*, which deals with question of the free will of man:

The greatest proof in existence of the fact that man has a free will [ba'al behirah] is that all the creatures manifestly follow their aim [takhlitam], determined for them by nature, and this is obvious in the case of the vegetables and animals and the spheres, with the exception of man, who does not have, by [his] nature, an aim to follow straightforwardly and constantly, without changing [the path]. But every man has one aim, [chosen] by his free will, and thereby the orders of man [Sidrei ha-'Adam] are different from [those of] all the [other] creatures.<sup>65</sup>

The assumption that nature regulates the behavior of all beings except man, who chooses his aim freely, seems to coincide with the view of Pico that man does not have a determined nature, but shapes himself. The human will is emphasized here as the principle of the individuation of man in comparison to all other creatures. However, this passage does not mention the transformation of man into a different being as the result of his free choice, as Pico maintained.

Alemanno quotes this passage in the name of someone who told it to him, or, more exactly, "from his mouth," mi-pi. Thus we are obliquely told that the person

was a contemporary of Alemanno and someone who had direct relations with him. Unfortunately, the name of the person does not occur; instead there is an acronym, HQYDL. These letters do not signify anything in Hebrew, so they require decoding. I propose to decode them as follows: Q, for the word *Conte*; Y for the name Yohanan, namely Giovanni; DL are difficult and may stand for a form of *della Mirandola*. Although this proposal may seem rather strange, it perfectly conforms to the way Alemanno wrote Pico's name in the introduction to his commentary on the Song of Songs: *ha-'Adon, 'Adoni Qonti Yo'ani Delamirandola*.<sup>66</sup> The H of the acronym apparently stands for *ha-'Adon*, and the continuous spelling of *Delamirandola* accounts for the use of the letters DL.

On the basis of this suggestion, let us examine a Hebrew text, adduced by Yohanan Alemanno in the name of an unidentified person, who is in my opinion no other than Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: "The view of those who maintain that out of God [the soul has appeared] involves the views of those who maintain that it is God who is to be worshiped and to Him we should cleave, since it is possible that she [the soul] shall return to the source whence she was extracted, as it is said: 'and the spirit shall return to the Lord who gave her' [Ecclesiastes 12:7]. And the other opinion involves all the other false opinions and the variety of idolatry, because they think vain [things] that to Him she will not cleave but to one of the spiritual forces, to whom it is possible to cleave. Understand this because it is a wondrous [issue]." <sup>67</sup>

This is a fine example of the exchange of ideas concerning one of the most cherished concepts of the Renaissance. It is less important to point out now who is the first source. What I see as more important is the concordance between the authors, whose relations were not only a matter of reading common texts but also of discussions on intellectual topics. The oral exchange is therefore an important part of the scene of Jewish-Christian relations in Renaissance Florence. Characteristic of this type of relationship is that the Jewish author mentions his Christian interlocutor much more often than the Christian author mentions his Jewish one. Although we may speak of a greater openness toward Jewish thought in the Florentine Renaissance, its appropriation was hardly accompanied by explicit acknowledgment of the personal contacts and the specific debts that Christian authors owed to their teachers.<sup>68</sup>

# 15

## JEWISH MYSTICAL THOUGHT IN LORENZO IL MAGNIFICO'S FLORENCE

### 1. PATRONAGE AND RENAISSANCES

Many of the important cultural centers and developments in medieval and pre-modern times were shaped by political and social rulers who were concerned about intellectual and spiritual matters. Without the considerable material investments of Frederick II in Naples and Alfonso Sabio in Toledo<sup>1</sup> in the thirteenth century, Robert of Anjou in Naples in the fourteenth century, Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici in Florence in the fifteenth century, and Rudolf II in Prague in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, European culture would be much poorer. One of the main consequences of this intellectual court culture was that the elite were attracted by the ruler's interest to his milieu or that of his small

entourage, that they were the beneficiaries of a system of patronage involving both power and money, and that as a result the culture produced in this environment was typically elitist, and thus its intended audience and actual influence were very restricted. The thought and other products of the few were intended for the few. We shall explore the implications of this fact at the end of this chapter.

Many of the products connected with these rulers were translations—chiefly from Arabic in the case of the first two, from Greek in the case of Lorenzo the Magnificent, and in the other cases from both languages. Voluminous speculative corpora, extant in Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew, were seen as potential sources of inspiration. Jews played an important role as translators: in Naples, R. Jacob Anatoli;<sup>2</sup> in Toledo, a considerable number of Jews; and in Florence, Flavius Mithridates<sup>3</sup> and, to some extent, R. Elijah del Medigo.<sup>4</sup> In this role the Jews were powerful intermediary figures, enabling their Christian patrons to learn about older, and for them inaccessible, forms of thought. As the late professor Giuseppe B. Sermoneta showed,<sup>5</sup> their translations opened the way for cultural renaissances in several regions of Italy. Although Sicily remained a major site for converging cultural encounters both in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, I want to focus here on the existence of distinct forms of Jewish spirituality in Florence at the end of the fifteenth century.

## 2. SOURCES OF FLORENTINE JEWISH SPECULATIVE LITERATURE

Translations were an important factor in the burgeoning of the Florentine Renaissance. Two major corpora were translated in the entourage of Lorenzo de' Medici: Greek Neoplatonic and Hermetic texts, and Hebrew kabbalistic treatises and a few philosophical ones. Both corpora, though already known in a very fragmentary way by a few Christian thinkers, some of them converts from Judaism, became increasingly influential because of their acceptance by seminal figures in the Florentine court: Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. There can be no doubt that the Hellenistic corpus translated by Ficino, and the kabbalistic one translated by Mithridates—and to a lesser degree the material found in the circle of Pico and Pier da Spoleto—are the most important sources for intellectual developments in the writings of the late-fifteenth-century Florentine thinkers and in Europe as a whole. Scholars dealing with Ficino's translations have long recognized the contributions of the kabbalistic corpus and other occult and philosophical treatises,<sup>6</sup> and more recently the translations from Hebrew were analyzed in detail by the late professor Chaim Wirszubski.<sup>7</sup> However, the Latin translations from Hebrew by no means exhausted the range of Jewish writings available in the Florentine milieu. There Jewish thinkers acted not only as translators but also as mediators of texts, themes, and ideas that existed in earlier, untranslated writings.



Oral discussions and the shared study of texts also provided vital opportunities for the transmission of knowledge from one intellectual group to another. During discussions the Jewish masters could transmit not only interesting passages or disparate motifs but also more general views, based upon their written sources. In the case of an individual like Yohanan Alemanno, who had access to a vast number of medieval books, we may reasonably assume that he was able also to absorb their content in just such a creative way, through fluid dialogical situations of common study by Jewish and Christian intellectuals, just as Flavius Mithridates was able to translate his kabbalistic Hebrew sources in a rather creative, though strongly biased, manner.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. TWO MAIN LITERARY CORPORA IN RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

During the last third of the fifteenth century, Florence was the arena of speedy appropriation of two huge speculative corpora, previously marginal to Western Christian culture. One of these was the corpus of ancient Greek and Hellenistic treatises translated by Marsilio Ficino from Greek into Latin, which were not only translated but also immediately printed. By now we have not only Ficino's translations in print, but also most of his original sources. All these texts have been studied in detail, and the picture of their speculative cargos is clear.

The other corpus consisted of translations into Latin of a large number of kabbalistic treatises, achieved by Flavius Mithridates, a convert to Christianity, in the mid-1480s. Mithridates' translations have never been printed, although most of them are extant in manuscripts in several major libraries. Until Wirszubski undertook the first detailed analysis of these manuscripts, their content was largely unknown.

Thus, before the end of the 1480s an intellectual in Florence had access to a variety of forms of thought previously inaccessible to Westerners. The first person known to have taken advantage of this unique situation, and even to have been instrumental in encouraging Mithridates' translations, was the young count of Mirandola, Giovanni Pico. Enjoying good relations with both Ficino and Mithridates, he not only enjoyed their literary output but also contributed his own views, based upon a variety of syntheses of ideas found in these two voluminous corpora.

Several sources allow us to construct a more detailed literary inventory of Jewish speculative texts available in Florence.

[a] A letter from R. Elijah del Medigo to Pico, which includes a list of kabbalistic books, with their titles in Hebrew.<sup>9</sup> Del Medigo's writings in both Hebrew and Latin also constitute a comprehensive source about

the extent of knowledge of Kabbalah at the end of the fifteenth century in Italy.

- [b] The voluminous writings of R. Yohanan Alemanno, another companion of Pico, which abound in quotations from hundreds of medieval sources, most of them written in Hebrew, and only very few of them unknown from Hebrew sources.<sup>10</sup> In some cases Pico seems to have quoted from Hebrew books already known to Alemanno and also quoted by him, but not translated into Latin.<sup>11</sup>
- [c] The writings of R. Abraham Farissol, who stayed for a while in Florence and was acquainted with a large number of Jewish books;<sup>12</sup> and the epistles of R. Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim, a Spanish Kabbalist who corresponded with R. Yitzhaq of Pisa and apparently also visited him in Florence. Another Jewish writer, active in Florence in the middle of the fifteenth century, was R. Moshe ben Yoav. His writings, which have already attracted the attention of Umberto Cassuto,<sup>13</sup> remain available only in manuscript and at the margin of modern scholarship.
- [d] The large corpus of kabbalistic writings translated by Flavius Mithridates into Latin and compiled by Wirszubski.<sup>14</sup> Although some of the manuscripts he translated may reflect the intensive interest in Kabbalah while he was still living as a Jew in Sicily, it seems possible and even likely that when converting to Christianity in Rome, he brought with him Hebrew manuscripts from Sicily. It is also possible that the manuscripts he translated from Hebrew in Florence were already available in that city. In any case, his Latin translations should be enumerated among the kabbalistic books that were extant in Florence, whatever the precise provenance of the original Hebrew manuscript.
- [e] Hebrew manuscripts copied in Florence in the mid-fifteenth century and still available in Florentine libraries, as well as manuscripts copied in Florence but now held elsewhere.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. A VARIETY OF JEWISH SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS IN LAURENTIAN FLORENCE

Rather than compiling a list of titles of books available in Florence, which any reader of Hebrew manuscripts can do, I want to distinguish among three forms of spirituality found in distinct literary corpora that had a deep influence on at least some scholars in Florence: various versions of Jewish Kabbalah, the literature of Hasidei Ashkenaz, and two major books of Arabic provenance that should be located on the vague boundary between Neoplatonism and mysticism. Though different in essence from the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah of Spanish

origins, the specific form of Muslim spirituality presented in the books described in the next chapter has some affinities to a form of Kabbalah well known in Italy, the ecstatic one.<sup>16</sup> Both types of lore, the ecstatic Kabbalah and the two Arabic books, operated within similar Neo-Aristotelian universes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and in both the role of some mystical elements is evident; both exemplify versions of what can be called “rationalist mysticism.”<sup>17</sup> Both forms of spirituality were present separately in Florence among some Jews in the 1480s. Last but not least: it is in the circle of the Jewish authors in this city that a medieval treatise, having much in common with the Neoplatonic and linguistic magic of Kabbalah, attributed to Apollonius, and translated from Latin into Hebrew, is mentioned for the first time.<sup>18</sup>

Beginning in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, a significant change is discernible in the circle of these masters. R. David Messer Leon, who mentioned that his father had warned him not to study Kabbalah, was nevertheless attracted by this lore, which played an important role in his writings.<sup>19</sup> This is also the case in the writings of R. Yohanan Alemanno, a former student of R. Yehudah Messer Leon,<sup>20</sup> and in a commentary on the ten sefirot by R. Abraham de Balmes. Both Alemanno and, to a lesser degree, David Messer Leon also became interested in “natural magic,” a lore that did not attract the attention of their older Jewish contemporaries in Italy. This shift is consonant with the new ambiance dominant among some of the Christian intellectuals in Florence. Neoplatonic and Hermetic magic and, in the case of Pico, also Kabbalah moved from the obscure fringes to the full light, together with a significant strengthening of Neoplatonism, which came to rival Aristotelianism in significance. Thus we see a significant parallel between Jewish and Christian intellectuals, active in precisely the same period and in the same geographical area.

However, whereas for the Christian intellectuals kabbalistic, magical, and Neoplatonic ideas were relatively novel, stemming as they did mainly from newly translated corpora of writings, for the Jews Kabbalah had already become part of the curriculum of Jewish texts studied by many prior authorities. Magic, or in many cases we should better say the theory of magic that they accepted was already found in medieval Hebrew texts, although its ultimate origins were Arabic or even Greek. This was also the case with regard to many of the Neoplatonic motifs. It was in this period that Solomon ibn Gabirol, known to the Christian scholars as Avicbron, was quoted again and again by several Jewish thinkers. Thus, although the direction of the changes in the Jewish and Christian circles was very similar, different types of sources fueled it. If for the Christians we may speak about a Renaissance in the fuller sense of the word, namely the return of a mode of thought that had been largely forgotten in European culture and religiosity for many

centuries, in the case of the Jewish authors we see an oscillation between a marginal role for elitist magic in some sources and its centrality in others. However, the basic question is what induced the new form of writings among the Jews. It is obvious that Ficino's enterprise, a major factor in the emergence of the spiritual physiognomy of the Christian Renaissance, significantly predates similar developments among the Jews.

Even so, the sources that attracted the greatest interest of contemporary Jews in occult issues were Judaeo-Arabic texts. The Jewish authors did not explain this parallel shift, and I wonder whether in fact they were aware of this shift. How should we explain this concomitance? Did the Florentine ambiance prompt some Jewish intellectuals to look for counterparts to the Christian Renaissance in their own tradition? This explanation, however, seems to me to explain only marginal phenomena. So, for example, the fascination with Jewish mysticism, almost totally absent in Ficino but on the other hand so vibrant in Pico beginning in the mid-1480s, can hardly explain the parallel interest in this lore among the younger generation of Jewish intellectuals. The interesting question is why the Greek and Hellenistic corpora translated by Ficino, which resonate so strongly with medieval Jewish material, left so few traces even among Jewish authors who embraced magic as a worthwhile worldview. In fact, at least part of Giovanni Pico's fascination with magic was induced by the subtle changes introduced by Flavius Mithridates' calculated mistranslations into the texture of the kabbalistic texts. The fact that the magical interpretation of Kabbalah surfaced at the same time in the Latin translations by Mithridates and in Alemanno's writings on the one hand, and the interest in magic in the corpus of Neoplatonic and Hermetic writings translated by Ficino and rendered in his own books on the other hand, is an interesting quandary of intellectual history. The fact that Ficino translated the Greek texts cannot explain, alone, why the ideas contained in these texts immediately became so attractive. What is so fascinating in this dual turn to elite magic is not the possibility of mutual influences, which would have been natural in the case of authors who certainly were aware of each other, and were eventually even acquainted with the content of each other's writings, but the possibility of a parallelism that may be described as reciprocal osmosis. If there was an influence, the agents of its transmission have not quoted the similar books that predisposed different authors toward similar ideas; I would speculate that an imponderable *esprit du siècle*, a *Zeitgeist*, invited similar speculative tendencies.

But time alone is not the only significant factor explaining this strange but powerful development. Outside northern Italy it would have been very difficult to detect a similar development concerning Kabbalah among either Jews or

Christians. Although a proclivity toward magic was conspicuous in an important circle of Spanish Kabbalists during the 1470s,<sup>21</sup> it took a totally different direction. Unlike the *magia naturalis*, accepted by Ficino, Pico, Alemanno, and to a lesser degree David Messer Leon, the group of Kabbalists in Spain cultivated a violent, demonic form of magical Kabbalah intended to destroy the prevailing historical and religious order, including Christianity, for the sake of bringing the Messiah. It was a redemptive rather than a natural magic, focused upon solving historical rather than personal problems.<sup>22</sup>

There were four main ways in which Kabbalah was understood by Jews, Spanish and Italian, at the time of the Renaissance in Florence: the particularist approach of the Spanish Kabbalists, the Neoplatonic approach, the magical or Hermetic one, and the Aristotelian one. Since the Neoplatonic and magical interpretations of Kabbalah have already been surveyed in the previous chapter, I want to focus here on the particularist stand of the Spaniards versus the more universalist stand of the Italian Jews, as represented here by the rather neglected Aristotelian interpretation of Kabbalah.

### Spanish Particularism

Sometime at the end of the 1480s or the very beginning of the 1490s, a Spanish Kabbalist named R. Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim was active in Italy.<sup>23</sup> From his pen only two epistles survive, both addressed to R. Yitzhaq da Pisa, an inhabitant of Florence. The letters deal with one of the classic kabbalistic issues, namely the nature of the ten sefirot. From their wording it is clear that the writer was acquainted with the addressee, and that he was aware of the spiritual ambiance of the latter's circle. Mor Hayyim advises R. Yitzhaq to pursue his special attitude toward Kabbalah, namely that this lore should not be interpreted by means of rational concepts, unlike a certain R. Yohanan, whose approach seems to be different. There is good reason to identify this Yohanan with the mentor of R. Yitzhaq da Pisa, Yohanan Alemanno, whose intellectual approach to Kabbalah was precisely the opposite of the particularist attitude of the Spanish Kabbalist. It should be mentioned that the case of Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim is not exceptional; some few years later, in the mid-1490s, another Spanish Kabbalist who had arrived in northern Italy, R. Yehudah Hayyat, expressed particularist attitudes, apparently also in reaction to Alemanno's thought, and perhaps also to other, unspecified Jewish Italian intellectuals.<sup>24</sup>

### Kabbalah and Aristotelianism

Although the Florentine Renaissance is better known for its Neoplatonic propensities, we should remember that Aristotle was never deserted by either Pico della

Mirandola or Yohanan Alemanno. Nor was Aristotelianism disapproved of in Florence in general.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, although the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah adopted some important Neoplatonic views,<sup>26</sup> Aristotelian elements were vital in the form of Kabbalah that was known especially in Italy: the ecstatic Kabbalah. An adept of Maimonides, Abraham Abulafia had integrated significant Aristotelian elements into his metaphysics, physics, and psychology. And in some other cases, such as the early writings of R. Joseph Gikatilla, the Aristotelian worldview was accepted, despite critiques of some of the concepts of this philosophical system. Both Alemanno and Pico were well acquainted with writings belonging to ecstatic Kabbalah, and quoted often from Abulafia's books.<sup>27</sup> David Messer Leon and Abraham de Balmes also incorporated Aristotelian elements into their kabbalistic discussions. Therefore, at least for an Italian thinker during the Renaissance, Kabbalah could be understood, and in fact indeed was understood, in the context of both Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophy. A large-scale examination of the issues related to the various Aristotelian-kabbalistic syntheses during the Renaissance is beyond our scope here. For our present purpose, it will suffice to consider how two scholars who were in contact with Pico—Yohanan Alemanno and Elijah del Medigo—dealt with the issue. The passages discussed below seem to reflect attitudes original with these two authors rather than a repetition of Abulafian Kabbalah.

In Alemanno's writings we can discern two different attitudes to the relation between medieval Aristotelianism and Kabbalah. The first one incorporates a hierarchical approach, the second a hermeneutical one. In Alemanno's hierarchy of knowledge, Aristotelianism sometimes occupies a lower place, but it is nevertheless treated positively, in contrast to Pico, whose main project was to attenuate or even bridge the chasm between Aristotle and Plato.<sup>28</sup> Alemanno's main strategy is to organize the different forms of knowledge, philosophical, mystical, and magical, within a comprehensive hierarchical scheme. He is interested, for example, in the mystical implications of Averroism, conceived of as allowing the union between the human and the Agent Intellect, the latter being lowest among ten separate, spiritual and cosmic, intellects. Immediately after mentioning this spiritual achievement, Alemanno characterizes the Kabbalah of R. Isaac ibn Latif and that of Abraham Abulafia as higher, since they allow the union of the human spiritual faculties with higher entities than the Agent Intellect.<sup>29</sup> Thus Alemanno presents not a flat, horizontal correspondence between Kabbalah and Aristotelianism, à la Pico, but an attempt to construe its elements in structural terms. He sees Averroës, the most orthodox of the medieval Aristotelians, who at the same time allowed for the possibility of the epistemic union of the human with the Agent Intellect, as offering a metaphysics and an epistemology that may

contain some mystical elements but allows only for the adhesion of the human intellect to a relatively lower ontological being in the worlds of separate intellects. The Jewish Kabbalists, who immediately follow Averroës in Alemanno's hierarchical organization of knowledge, are presented as able to achieve higher spiritual attainments. Therefore, Averroism is not Kabbalah, but it can be used as a means to the higher, spiritual attainment that is the prerogative of Kabbalah. Alemanno's strategy is an example of distinction hierarchise<sup>30</sup> between the two lores, both valid in themselves, though operating on various ontological levels, and inspired by different metaphysical assumptions.<sup>31</sup>

In other cases, Alemanno uses Averroistic views in order to explain kabbalistic issues. Let me adduce one example. A classical kabbalistic problem is the nature of the relation between the Infinite, or 'Ein Sof, and the ten sefirot. In some kabbalistic texts, known in Italy in the 1480s and early 1490s, namely during the creative period of both Alemanno and Pico, the assumption was that the Infinite was identical with the first sefirah, Keter. Other texts, however, assumed that although the Infinite transcended the sefirotic realm, the latter realm was nevertheless divine, and therefore the divinity consisted in both the Infinite and the ten sefirot.<sup>32</sup> In other words, no essential difference between the two constituents of the divine world was assumed. Alemanno, who was acquainted with these views, adopted a third one, from earlier sources, with some modifications: the realm of the sefirot should not be conceived of as divine, and a sharp demarcation should be drawn between the Infinite, which alone was to be conceived of as divine, and the sefirotic realm. For Alemanno, the crucial question was how to explain the emergence of multiplicity from unity, of the finite from the Infinite. He enumerated the Kabbalists who had adopted this theological view distinguishing between the sefirot and the divinity, and decided that they constituted the majority, and therefore that their views should be accepted. However, he was concerned with offering an explanation that could be defended intellectually. To do so, he resorted to two Aristotelian books:

The sefirot are emanated [entities], while He, blessed be He, is the Emanator; they are numbers,<sup>33</sup> but they do not transcend the [category of] number.<sup>34</sup> Thus the words of R. Shimeon bar Yohai should be understood and interpreted, insofar as Keter [is concerned], together with all the sefirot. He has announced the mystery of unity, because they are, from one perspective, one, and from other perspectives many, as it is the truth for those who are initiated.<sup>35</sup> And this is obvious to reason, as [revealed] in the book *The Quality of the Adherence*<sup>36</sup> and in *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*,<sup>37</sup> [to be read in order] to understand this issue, despite the difficulty of realizing it at the beginning of study.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, in Ibn Tufail's book, as adduced elsewhere by Alemanno, we read as follows: "It is not correct to say about the separate intellects either that they are many or that they are one, neither that they are [identical with] Him nor that they are separate from Him."<sup>39</sup> This is precisely Alemanno's view of the sefirot and their relation with the Infinite. This is a very interesting example of how an Italian Kabbalist interpreted—in fact misinterpreted—the classical book of Spanish Kabbalah, the *Zohar*, by resorting to views dominant in Arab Muslim philosophy. Implicit in Alemanno is a much more open approach to the nature of Kabbalah: it is not only the patrimony of some few initiates, but it is possible to decode it by means of alien forms of wisdom. Alemanno's Kabbalah is, in fact, though not always in his rhetoric, an exoteric lore, one that may be understood by reading concepts found in books, without resorting to oral traditions. Alemanno's recurring reliance on Ibn Tufail and Averroës shows that a Renaissance thinker might accept Aristotelianism, even in its Averroistic formulation, and at the same time have an explicit and totally positive attitude toward Kabbalah.



# I6

## OTHER MYSTICAL AND MAGICAL LITERATURES IN RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

### 1. HEIKHALOT LITERATURE AND HASIDEI ASHKENAZ

Although all three main kabbalistic models, the ecstatic, the theosophical-theurgical, and the magical, were well represented in kabbalistic literatures available in Florence at the end of the fifteenth century, the spectrum of Jewish texts dealing with mystical topics was much more variegated. In addition to these literatures, there were extensive writings concerned with two other forms of spirituality. Their impact may have been less profound than that exercised by kabbalistic literature, but nevertheless they should not be ignored.

The earliest form of Jewish mystical literature, the so-called Heikhalot literature stemming from late antiquity, had been preserved mostly by the Ashkenazi Pietists.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the few manuscripts containing this literature were copied in Italy.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the impact of this literature can be detected very early on Italian soil, long before the arrival of Kabbalah.<sup>3</sup> In Renaissance Florence several of the main treatises of Heikhalot literature are well represented in R. Yohanan Alemanno's writings.<sup>4</sup>

Another form of medieval Jewish mysticism, which was relatively widespread in Laurentian Florence, was that of Hasidei Ashkenaz. This form of mysticism had flourished in the Rhineland in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in some small circles of pious Jews, who produced a considerable body of writings consisting of numerology, descriptions of various hermeneutical devices, exegetical tracts, theological and theosophical speculations, psychological discussions including mystical techniques, magical practices such as creations of the Golem,<sup>5</sup> and treatments of the nature of the divine names.<sup>6</sup> This literature expanded to Spain and Italy in the second third of the thirteenth century, although its impact there was smaller than in Germany,<sup>7</sup> and in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries its influence declined drastically throughout Europe. Nevertheless, these writings are represented both in Flavius Mithridates' translations into Latin and in Alemanno's writings.

This recurrence again raises the question whether Mithridates brought his original Hebrew texts from Sicily or found them in northern Italy. In my opinion the latter alternative is more plausible. Unlike Sicily, northern Italy was an area deeply influenced by Ashkenazi culture, which flourished in the second half of the fifteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Though born in Mantua, Alemanno himself was, as his name demonstrates, of Ashkenazi origins. What are the Ashkenazi books that were known to the Florentine authors in the 1480s?

- [a] Mithridates translated Rabbi Eleazar of Worms's book *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*, under the title *Liber de Anima*,<sup>9</sup> and a treatise attributed to a student of Rabbi Eleazar, *Keter Shem Tov*, under the title *Corona Nominis Boni*.<sup>10</sup>
- [b] Yohanan Alemanno quotes in his various writings several Ashkenazi works, most notably Rabbi Eleazar's *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*<sup>11</sup> and *Sefer Hasidim*.<sup>12</sup>
- [c] Alemanno quotes a tract titled *Beraita' de-Yosef ben 'Uzziel*, a work that is part of the corpus designated by modern scholars as the "circle of the special cherubim."<sup>13</sup>

The texts enumerated above, and many others that cannot be adduced within the framework of this survey, show that Alemanno was well acquainted with most of the Jewish mystical writings stemming from medieval Spain, Italy, and Germany, and also with much earlier Jewish mystical sources, which belong to the Heikhalot literature.<sup>14</sup> With the major exception of the *Zohar*, with which Alemanno was only poorly acquainted, he had access to a very impressive array of mystical

texts. Indeed, when we also take into account Ficino's translations, demonstrating acquaintance with the most important Greek and Hellenistic speculative writings, Florence in the period of Lorenzo de' Medici can be regarded as the place where the most extensive Jewish and Greek corpora were found. We must also take note of the importance of Arab culture, in this case mediated by Flavius Mithridates' knowledge of Arabic and Alemanno's fascination with two Arabic books. Although Florence cannot be compared to tenth-century Baghdad or to thirteenth-century Toledo, the sites of significant encounters among the three major monotheistic cultures, this city should be granted at least third place in importance. Although the acquaintance of Florentine figures with Arab culture is too large a subject to be dealt with here—and Mithridates' teaching of Arabic to Pico has already been dealt with by Wirszubski—we should take note of two Arabic treatises that attracted the attention of Alemanno.

## 2. MUSLIM PHILOSOPHICAL SPIRITUALITY IN JEWISH GARBS

Two works by Muslim philosophers invite special consideration, because although they were not translated into any European language before the end of the fifteenth century, they exercised a strong influence on Alemanno's thought: Abu Bakr ibn Tufayl's *Hayy bin Yoqtan* (The Living Son of the Awakened) and Ibn al-Sīd al-Bataliyusi's *Kitab al-Hada'iq*, also known as *The Book of the Imaginary Circles*. Both texts had been translated into Hebrew and were widely quoted by medieval and Renaissance Jewish writers.

The profound influence of Ibn Tufayl's classic on Jewish thought and mysticism still awaits a detailed analysis. Since its emergence in Spain in a Hebrew translation, together with the commentary of Rabbi Moshe Narboni, in the mid-fourteenth century, many leading Jewish thinkers were substantially influenced by this treatise.<sup>15</sup> Besides Narboni, the influence of the book is visible in the writings of Joseph ben Shem Tov,<sup>16</sup> Abraham Bibago,<sup>17</sup> Isaac Abravanel,<sup>18</sup> Yohanan Alemanno, and David Messer Leon.<sup>19</sup> What appealed to these thinkers was the work's unusual combination of philosophy and mysticism. The ascending movement of the mind from specific objects to intellectual abstractions, basically an Aristotelian approach, was complemented, and sometimes conceived as transcended, by mystical movement, which was described in more Platonic and unitary terms.<sup>20</sup> For thinkers in the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, the work demonstrated that while remaining faithful to philosophy it was possible to find a way to transcend it. Although this attitude exerted little appeal in Spain in the fifteenth century, it struck a sympathetic chord among Renaissance figures in Italy.

Alemanno's opus was deeply influenced by Ibn Tufayl; he compared the difference between this Arabic thinker and the other philosophers to that between

Moses and the other prophets.<sup>21</sup> A document printed by Umberto Cassuto attests that *Hayy bin Yoqtan* was a book very dear to Alemanno,<sup>22</sup> who wrote some interesting glosses on it;<sup>23</sup> and it appears that Alemanno's son, Yitzhaq, shared its contents with Giovanni Pico's nephew, Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola.<sup>24</sup> Here, then, we have evidence of the independent evolution of Jewish thought, and also of its active influence in the Christian Renaissance. Ibn Tufayl's work, with its complex forms of spirituality, served as an immediate and powerful catalyst for the emergence of new forms of Jewish spirituality.<sup>25</sup> The assumption permeating Ibn Tufayl's book is that it is possible to arrive at the highest intellectual and mystical experience through a natural process, which starts with independent contemplation of nature and culminates with total immersion in the divine realm.<sup>26</sup> This autodidactic approach seems consonant with the concept of the development of human nature in the writings of some Renaissance figures.<sup>27</sup>

As I have attempted to show in some earlier studies, another Muslim book, the Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean treatise known as *The Book of the Imaginary Circles*, influenced Alemanno and Pico in Florence, as well as Rabbi Isaac Abravanel and Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'Amore*.<sup>28</sup> It seems to me that some major topics, such as Pico's concept of the dignity of man<sup>29</sup> and some aspects of his view of nature,<sup>30</sup> were informed by views found in Al-Bataliyusi's tract, apparently by the mediation of Yohanan Alemanno, who was very fond of this work. In the case of the two Abravanel, *The Imaginary Circles* significantly affected their cosmic hierarchies, described by means of the image of a circle.<sup>31</sup> Both Alemanno and Isaac Abravanel quoted long passages verbatim from this book. Although Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Leone Ebreo never explicitly quoted from it, several significant similarities between views found in Al-Bataliyusi's text and in the works of these two most formative figures of the Italian Renaissance offer possible connections that may be a fertile field for investigation.<sup>32</sup>

The exceptional influence of these two Arabic books on one Jewish thinker, namely Alemanno, may be only idiosyncratic. However, it is still a fact that Alemanno served as a conduit of such types of spirituality to Christian intellectuals. Alemanno's deep concern with the philosophically oriented spirituality stemming from Islam and his speculative interpretation of Kabbalah found their way into the more general understanding of this mystical Jewish lore in Christian texts, as exemplified by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Johann Reuchlin.

#### "Apollonius" "Sefer Melekheth ha-Muskelet

Ficino's Latin translations from Greek were the main avenue for the transmission of Hellenistic philosophy, magic, and mysticism into Renaissance thought. Medieval Neoplatonic and Hermetic ideas also contributed in a minor way to this

transmission,<sup>33</sup> as did some Jewish sources.<sup>34</sup> Here, however, I want to deal not with themes and ideas but with a whole book translated into Hebrew which brings together magic and linguistic combinatory practices, and which is extant, in a very fragmentary manner, only in the writings of Yohanan Alemanno and his circle. Alemanno describes a very large book, some 300 pages long, named *Melekheth ha-Muskket*, attributed to Apollonius of Tyana, which had been translated from Latin into Hebrew a century earlier in Provence by a certain Shelomo ben Nathan Orgieri.<sup>35</sup> Some long quotations from this work are to be found in Alemanno's writings, and excerpts from it survive in a manuscript produced by a copyist employed by the Florentine family da Pisa, to which Alemanno was very close.<sup>36</sup> The magical content of the book is reminiscent of the *Golden Flowers*, also attributed to Apollonius, and indeed it was known to Christian magicians in the fourteenth century. King Solomon plays a major role in the book, as well as combinations of letters, resembling what we find in Kabbalah.

#### Picatrix

One of the most influential books in the domain of magic, *Takhlit-he-Hakham* (The Aim of the Sage) is known in the West by the title of its thirteenth-century Latin translation, made in Castile, *Picatrix*. Scholars have already documented the profound influence of this book on Renaissance magic.<sup>37</sup> Alemanno mentions the work as one of the books on magic that must be perused by anyone who wishes to attain perfection.<sup>38</sup> Here I want to clarify the Italian contexts of the two Hebrew translations of this treatise from Arabic, both of which constitute abridgments of the larger work.<sup>39</sup>

- [a] The most important abridgment was made from the Arabic version and survives in two manuscripts under the title *Takhlit he-Hakham*.<sup>40</sup> Both manuscripts, Ms. Munich 214, folios 46a–101b, and Ms. London, British Library Or. 9861, folios 1a–38b, were copied in Italy at the end of the fifteenth century.
- [b] A fragment of the second abridgment of *Picatrix* is preserved in two manuscripts that were part of the same codex, Ms. New York, JTS 2470 (ENA 2439), folios 1a–10b, and Ms. New York, JTS 2465 (ENA 1920), folios 1a–5a. These two manuscripts were also copied in Italy. On folio 10a in the first manuscript we read: “This book was translated from Aramaic into Arabic and from Arabic into Hebrew, but this translation is not the first Hebrew translation. From Hebrew it was translated into Latin and from Latin this translation was made, praise to God.” At the end of the second manuscript we find: “The translation of the first chapter of the

book *Ghayat al-Hakim* has been completed, thank God, and was translated from a Christian translation, most of which is incorrect, as their translation is in no way clear.” These references to a translation from Latin (*la’az*) seem to point to the Renaissance period. In any case, the Hebrew translation was made after the first Arabic translation and certainly after the Latin one, whose date is unknown.

- [c] A small portion of the Hebrew text of *Picatrix* has been preserved in Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1352 (Mic. 228), folio 177a. Adolph Neubauer published part of it in his catalogue of Oxford manuscripts. This manuscript, too, was produced in Italy.

Thus three Hebrew translations of *Picatrix* survive in Italian manuscripts written at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries. At the same time the Latin translation of *Picatrix* was widely disseminated among scholars of the Renaissance. R. Yohanan Alemanno, who was involved in intellectual activities of the type pursued at the academy in Florence, was one of the few to mention the Hebrew version of *Picatrix*. In this case, as in others, Alemanno continued developments in matters of magic that took place in late-thirteenth-century Spain in Jewish culture, which were also consonant with the intellectual concerns of Florentine intellectuals like Giovanni Pico and Ficino.

### *Sefer Raziel*

Another Hebrew work on magic that enjoyed widespread distribution among Christians in Renaissance Florence is the anonymous *Sefer Raziel*. This composition differs in many respects from the better-known *Sefer Raziel ha-Malakh*. François Secret has given a detailed description of the content of *Sefer Raziel*, and I will supplement his remarks by reference to the Hebrew translation, which was unknown to him.<sup>41</sup> The Hebrew version is found in two manuscripts, the more complete of which is New York, JTS 8117, folios 59–100. A large fragment survives in an inferior version in Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1959, folios 98b–131b. This translation was also made in Italy:

In the name of the God of Israel, I shall begin to copy *Sefer Raziel*. Pay close attention and know that I found this book in two versions, the first in Hebrew and the second in Latin. The names of angels and intelligences are different in each work, but in practical terms there is no difference in any respect. Since no one who practices may succeed in any of these actions without knowing this book, I have chosen to copy it, using each one of the names of the intelligences, so that the practitioner will not have to consult other books, which have no value whatsoever.<sup>42</sup>

The translator's remarks bear close examination. It would seem that the translator had before him two identical compositions whose textual variation concerned only the names of angels. Comparison of this composition as found in Ms. New York, JTS 8117, with parts of the translations quoted by Secret indicates that the Hebrew work was an actual translation and not merely an integration of different versions already existing in Hebrew.

### 3. BETWEEN EXTERNAL INFLUENCE AND INTERNAL RESTRUCTURING

The three Jewish thinkers who were connected to Florence, Moshe ben Yoav, Elijah del Medigo, and Yohanan Alemanno, the last two of whom were related directly to Pico, exemplify the various forms of the attachment of the Jewish intelligentsia to their medieval legacy, and the dominant role of Arabic philosophy, including mystical philosophy, in the very heart of the Italian Renaissance. The intellectual traits echoing the Italian Renaissance that can be found in the writings of Jewish inhabitants of Florence, most notably in Alemanno's books, seem to reflect a restructuring of already existing themes and ideas. Instead of outright innovation or unquestioning acceptance of the views characteristic of their Christian contemporaries, we find a web of various emphases, a restructuring of ways of reading some texts, and combinations of lores that had previously been regarded as unrelated. The precise role of the new ideas aired by Christian Italian intellectuals in the economy of Jewish thought is a matter that cannot be answered easily, but there can be no doubt that close relations existed between the intellectuals belonging to the two religions.

One of the reasons for the relatively smooth shift from Jewish medieval to Jewish Renaissance thought is that some types of thinking and action were accepted in some circles of medieval Judaism but not in Christianity. Their emergence in the latter constituted a novelty, which created tensions. The centrality of Ficino's and Mithridates' translations to the transformation that generated the Christian Renaissance cannot be compared to the relatively better acquaintance of Jews in the Middle Ages with ideas found in the Neoplatonic-Hermetic corpus, and the mastery of the kabbalistic literature by some of them during the Renaissance. For many of the Jews the kabbalistic, Neoplatonic, and Hermetic ideas were much less a novelty than for Christians. Moreover, an opening up among some Jewish intellectuals toward the Christian philosophical culture, less evident among their Christian contemporaries, can be discerned during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. For example, Italian Jews drew upon scholastic writings as well as Arabic philosophical writings; long quotations from Thomas Aquinas and Egidio Romano can be found in the writings of Hillel of Verona and of Yehudah and Immanuel Romano.<sup>43</sup> In addition, many Jewish writers approached the role of

magic much more positively than did Christian medieval and early Renaissance writers.<sup>44</sup> Thus Alemanno could rely upon his medieval predecessors, whereas for Ficino or Giovanni Pico the adoption of natural magic from Hellenistic pagan sources or from some forms of Jewish Kabbalah constituted a much more dramatic departure, which provoked some strong reactions from ecclesiastical circles. Likewise, the role of external action, namely of the complex Jewish ritual, which was consonant with the importance attributed in magic to external acts, seemed to be greater in Judaism than in Christianity.<sup>45</sup> The complex system of commandments, interpreted in some few texts either theurgically or magically, created for the elite Jews the assumption that human acts were of paramount importance, since they were able to influence extrahuman realms. This anthropological approach was more consonant with Neoplatonic and Hermetic magic than with medieval scholasticism's view of the human condition.

Last but not least: the Neoplatonism of Alemanno is almost entirely of Jewish and Arab provenance, and it was only marginally influenced by Ficino's translations.<sup>46</sup> Thus, once again, it was possible to shift more easily from the strongly Aristotelian-oriented Jewish philosophy to a more Neoplatonic one, on the basis of already existing material. The important question, however, is what prompted this shift. Did it reflect a development within Jewish thought that only incidentally bore some resemblances to similar phenomena in Christian circles in Florence? Or should we invoke again the imponderable principle of osmosis in order to allow for a much more open and reciprocal relationship between Jewish and Christian intellectuals? Were the principles of the organization of knowledge among the Jews affected by the changes taking place in the overwhelmingly Christian Florentine intellectual circles? Our existing state of knowledge makes it difficult to answer this question in a detailed and conclusive way. Much more research will be needed before we can offer a detailed picture of the relations between the Jewish and Christian intellectual elites. Meanwhile, however, Stéphane Toussaint has recently established that Ficino appropriated two passages from the Judaeo-Arabic culture, one from *Hayy bin Yoqtan* and another, dealing with astromagic, from R. Samuel ibn Zarza, with whose writings Alemanno was well acquainted.<sup>47</sup> This acquaintance merely demonstrates the complexity of the situation: scholars in Florence presumably exchanged relevant information, and this reciprocity should be taken into account when analyzing the development of both Florentine intellectual milieus.

#### 4. ECLECTICISM AS A SYMPTOM OF ELITISM

If we compare Alemanno's voluminous writings with those produced in Toledo in the last decades of the thirteenth century, or those of R. Yehudah Loew, known as



the Maharal, in Prague in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, one major difference is obvious. The *Zohar*, Gikatilla's classical work on Kabbalah produced in thirteenth-century Castile, was composed as an organic discourse and did not include quotations from many and variegated speculative sources. In contrast, Alemanno's strong eclecticism, which is reminiscent of that of Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, seems to be a hallmark of this circle in Florence. Alemanno's attempt to offer a comprehensive hierarchy and Pico's attempt to produce a concordance among the different systems are more representative of this epoch, when the surfacing of new corpora was a determinative development. However, whereas Alemanno's very learned books remained at the margin of subsequent Jewish thought as a whole, the *Zohar* and the writings of Maharal became part and parcel of Jewish religion and culture. It was not the content of the ideas presented by Alemanno that prevented his thought from being absorbed by later generations, but rather the way in which they were expressed. The Jewish community was looking for a clear-cut message, not for attempts to offer a synthesis or a hierarchical view of knowledge. Rabbi Moshe Cordovero's similar amalgam of magic, theosophy, and ecstatic Kabbalah during the mid-sixteenth century had a great success, becoming one of the major sources for eighteenth-century Hasidism. The eclectic nature of Renaissance discourse and its tendency to deal with comprehensive pictures of the world were concerned more with breadth of knowledge than with presenting a coherent and consistent religious way of life. The writings produced by intellectual virtuosi such as Alemanno and his Christian contemporaries were directed at impressing their few colleagues rather than at shaping the lives of masses of people. Although Alemanno was more concerned with his religious community than Giovanni Pico was, its welfare was not the main target of his thought or the major topic of his writings.

It was only when Jewish masters, especially some masters in sixteenth-century Safed, started to open their writings to wider consumption by adopting an intentionally less eclectic and pompous style that the syntheses between Kabbalah and magic spread beyond tiny circles of Jewish literati. Thus we can trace the movement from the elitist eclecticism of Alemanno and David Messer Leon to the more accessible style of Isaac Luria and many of his followers, from the style of Renaissance eclecticism to the style of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz. Thus modern Hasidism has much in common conceptually with the blend of Hermetic magic and theosophical and ecstatic lore that can be discerned in the writings of Jewish and Christian Kabbalists of the Renaissance.<sup>48</sup>

The patronage-based court circles of Renaissance Italy, like their earlier counterparts in the Roman and Byzantine Empires, advanced the development of

human culture by providing the ambiance and the means for elitist attainments. One consequence of this environment, however, intended or not, was the limited influence of its attainments on larger audiences. A culture that flourishes in the shadow of powerful figures responds, even if not always consciously, to the rarefied needs of the dominant elite.

# I7

## SPANISH KABBALISTS IN ITALY AFTER THE EXPULSION

### 1. THE ARRIVAL OF THE SPANISH KABBALISTS

Spanish Kabbalah arrived in Italy in two major waves: the first, at the end of the thirteenth century, influenced the writings of Abraham Abulafia and Menahem Recanati, as we saw in chapters 7 and 8. The first Spanish arrivals shaped their kabbalistic sources in very significant ways, sometimes in response to the Italian predisposition to a more speculative approach. In contrast, the second major wave brought individuals who had been strongly shaped in a different intellectual environment, with different kabbalistic texts and religious proclivities, and who adapted themselves to only a marginal extent to the Italian ambiance. Indeed, they rather resisted the Italian Kabbalah they encountered.

Most of the few detailed studies we have on the Spanish Jews who arrived in Italy after 1492 center upon influential figures such as Isaac Abravanel or Yitzhaq Arama, who were not Kabbalists.<sup>1</sup> I am not aware of any significant attempt to map and analyze in detail the influx of Spanish Kabbalists. Six of these Kabbalists arrived in Italy and lived there for a while between 1490 and 1500: R. Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim, R. Yehudah Hayyat, R. Joseph ibn Shraga, R. Joseph Alqastiel,<sup>2</sup> R. Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi,<sup>3</sup> and R. Yitzhaq ben Hayyim ha-Kohen.<sup>4</sup> At least one more Kabbalist, R. Abraham Saba, is reported to have visited Italy before his death, but we need more information in order to confirm this possibility.

Mor Hayyim, Hayyat, and Ibn Shraga wrote kabbalistic works in Italy, and they will preoccupy us in the following pages. Because it still remains to be confirmed whether Alqastiel's influential kabbalistic responsa addressed to R. Yehudah Hayyat were composed in Italy, I shall refer to his work only tangentially. Ha-Levi visited Italy but apparently did not write anything there, although at least one short passage, to be discussed below, is relevant to our understanding of the relationship between Jewish Kabbalists and their Christian contemporaries. Finally, we shall not be much concerned with Yitzhaq ha-Kohen, whose knowledge of Kabbalah does not appear to have been deep.

R. Yehudah Hayyat is, in my opinion, the most productive and influential of the generation of expelled Spanish Kabbalists active in Italy. Few kabbalistic treatises were produced in the first generation immediately after the expulsion; much more was written by Sephardic Kabbalists in the other centers of Jewish life: the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, and the land of Israel. But though not numerous, most of the writings produced in Italy had a significant impact on the course of Kabbalah; Hayyat's *Minhat Yehudah*, in particular, became a major kabbalistic classic, whose deep influence is visible throughout the kabbalistic literature, in Italy and elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the epistles of Mor Hayyim, although they have reached us in only a few manuscripts, left a deep imprint on discussions of the nature of the sefirot in the Ottoman Empire and later in the Safedian Kabbalah.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. R. YEHUDAH BEN YA'AQOV HAYYAT

The vicissitudes of R. Yehudah Hayyat after the expulsion from Spain are relatively well documented. In the preface to his commentary on *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*, *Minhat Yehudah*, his single kabbalistic treatise, he reports his travels, some of which included terrible experiences during his departure from the Iberian peninsula and while in North Africa. Nevertheless, there are many crucial details that we do not know, and they may affect our understanding of the formation of his thought. So, for example, we do not know where he studied Kabbalah, who his main master was, or what his kabbalistic views were before the expulsion. We

know that he was a Spaniard, although we do not know in what particular region he lived. It seems that he was already a well-known and respected figure in Spain, since he presents himself as a teacher of an unspecified community and also reports the reaction of the Sephardic Jews in Italy to his plight.<sup>7</sup> From the fact that he left Spain from Lisbon, we may assume that he was a Castilian Jew, not a Catalanian.

Sometime during the winter of 1492–93 he sailed from Lisbon with his family and some 200 other people. Because plague was widespread on the ship, it wandered for four months, being refused entry at any port, and finally fell prey to Basque pirates. The combination of sickness and famine persuaded half of the refugees to convert to Christianity; others, including Hayyat's wife, died. After being detained at anchor for two months in Malaga, the craft was allowed to leave. Hayyat arrived in Fez, in North Africa, where a Muslim acquaintance of the Kabbalist initiated a libel. Apparently Hayyat had organized a festival celebrating the occasion of the defeat of the Muslims by the Catholic kings in 1492 before the expulsion, which in the view of the Muslim passengers constituted a denigration of Islam. He was rescued by the Jews, to whom he gave 200 books in return for the ransom. After a stay in Fez, in the autumn of 1493 he left for Naples, where he may have witnessed the French invasion in 1494, and then traveled on to Venice, where he was very well received by Spanish refugees whom he calls "nobles."

Sometime around the mid-1490s Hayyat arrived in Mantua, where he met another famous refugee from the expulsion, R. Joseph Yavetz, a conservative thinker and the author of several theological and exegetical treatises.<sup>8</sup> Yavetz and other "nobles and wise men" secured a promise from him to write a commentary on *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* because "their soul desired to contemplate the delight of the Lord and visit his palace," and he composed his commentary in order not to "prevent them from learning."<sup>9</sup> Another reason for undertaking this project was his own very high evaluation of the book on which he was asked to comment; according to Hayyat, it was the gateway to kabbalistic issues that were not disclosed by other books of Kabbalah. Last, but not least, Hayyat mentions that another Kabbalist, whose name he does not know,<sup>10</sup> had already produced a commentary, widely available in the province of Mantua, that did not properly reflect the actual content of *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*.<sup>11</sup> None of the three factors mentioned by Hayyat as motives for undertaking his commentary is related to the expulsion or to any messianic expectations.

Hayyat mentions that while he was still in Spain he collected pieces of the *Zohar* from various places, as well as most of the literature related to it.<sup>12</sup> He is convinced that his devotion to the *Zohar*, and to Kabbalah in general, preserved his life throughout the ordeals of the expulsion. Indeed, he presents all the autobiographical details

reported above in order to demonstrate the apotropaic function of the *Zohar*. Parts of the *Zohar*, mainly the *Tiqqunei Zohar*, serve as the major source of the views and quotations that permeate the commentary.<sup>13</sup> Hayyat claims in his preface that the *Zohar* was practically unknown by the earlier Kabbalists, even by some important ones;<sup>14</sup> he supports this statement by quoting a passage from one of the later layers of the *Zohar* to the effect that the book will be revealed during the last generation, namely the generation of the Messiah. Hayyat indicates that this is his generation, and he asserts that as a result of study of the *Zohar*, the Messiah will come. This assertion of the eschatological role of the study of the *Zohar* may gratify modern scholars who discern a messianic change in Kabbalah as a result of the expulsion. However, such a reading is, in my opinion, at least an exaggeration: Hayyat collected the various parts of the book while in Spain, therefore before the expulsion. Whether messianic hopes nourished his activity before that event cannot be established on the basis of our current knowledge. However, if messianism indeed played a significant role in his kabbalistic activity, he never explicitly relates it to his experience of the expulsion. Moreover, the argument concerning the eschatological effect of study of the book is not an innovation with Hayyat, but a view he quotes from the *Tiqqunei Zohar*. And although we now know that Hayyat wrote his commentary earlier than was commonly supposed,<sup>15</sup> it seems that already in the circle of *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, namely before the expulsion from Spain, the relation between study of the *Zohar* and redemption had been adapted from still earlier sources.<sup>16</sup> In any case, it seems clear that Hayyat did not plunge into a project of bringing the Messiah by printing or otherwise disseminating the *Zohar*. His two sentences concerning its eschatological role had no impact on the bulk of his single masterpiece, *Sefer Minhath Yehudah*.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, in *Minhat Yehudah* Hayyat challenges the *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* whenever it contradicts the kabbalistic views of the *Zohar*. So, for example, he writes: "I shall stand up and strengthen myself in order to struggle against the rabbi [namely the author of *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*] concerning this topic."<sup>18</sup> Hayyat wonders why the anonymous author followed the view of Nahmanides, R. Shlomo ibn Adret, and their disciples, who espoused a worldview different from that of the *Zoharic* literature. His mythical orientation, informed by the *Zoharic* theosophies,<sup>19</sup> compels him to challenge the philosophically oriented interpretation of *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*.<sup>20</sup> Thus in his commentary Hayyat presents the views of the *Zohar* much more than he elucidates those of *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*. The fact that Hayyat wrote an entire work on a book whose spiritual messages he did not entirely accept may reflect the situation that Spanish Kabbalists confronted in Italy: because writing on the *Zohar* itself was not attractive to the Italian Jewish Kabbalists, he used their interest in *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* to disseminate a great

dose of mythical Kabbalah under the pretext of clarifying an essentially antimythical text.<sup>21</sup> However, by structuring his kabbalistic discourse around this specific book, with its systematic approach to Kabbalah, Hayyat implicitly adopted the problematic dominant among the Italian Kabbalists: discussions of the nature of the divine world, namely the questions concerning the essence of the divine manifestations. This systematic, almost Scholastic, form of explicating their own views was widespread among the Italian Kabbalists, but less so in the Kabbalah composed before the expulsions from Spain.

Hayyat was also unhappy with the kabbalistic views of another Italian Kabbalist, whose name he does not mention.<sup>22</sup> However, as Efraim Gottlieb has indicated, it is reasonable to assume that the Kabbalist was R. Elijah Hayyim of Genazzano, who flourished in the decade before Hayyat's arrival in Italy.<sup>23</sup> Hayyat's critique centers on the divergences between his own instrumental view of the sefirot and the essentialist one adopted by Genazzano, with the latter's assumption (explored in chapter 5 above) that 'Ein Sof was identical with the first sefirah. This purely kabbalistic disagreement offers another example of the uneasiness of the Spanish Kabbalists with what was written in this field in Italy.

### 3. R. JOSEPH IBN SHRAGA AND R. ASHER LEMLEIN

Both R. Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim and R. Yehudah Hayyat expressed their criticisms of their contemporaries in rather mild terms; no sharp or explicit attack upon a living Italian Kabbalist is extant in their writings. A third Kabbalist, also a refugee from Spain via Portugal, adopted a different approach. R. Joseph ibn Shraga, a Kabbalist less known, less important, and less influential on the course of Kabbalah,<sup>24</sup> nevertheless enjoyed great veneration during his lifetime.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes referred to as the Kabbalist from Agrigento, he wrote a commentary on the liturgy and several small kabbalistic explanations of various topics, all of them still in manuscript. Several folios containing kabbalistic commentaries on some pericopes are extant in two manuscripts, and this writing was dedicated to R. Leon Sinai of Cologne, the son of R. Shmuel of Cologne. According to a manuscript note, this enterprise was not completed because the author died of an illness.<sup>26</sup> No great originality is discernible in these writings; they rely heavily on the theosophy of the *Zohar*, including views from *Tiqqunei Zohar*, which are quoted extensively. It seems that Ibn Shraga occasionally "adopted" (and passed off as his own) texts that had been written in Spain long before he was born,<sup>27</sup> a fact that reflects not only his personality but also the plight of the knowledge of Kabbalah in Italy. Exemplary of this situation was an affair in which he was involved that has already attracted the attention of scholars.<sup>28</sup>

At the very beginning of the sixteenth century, the elderly R. Moshe Hefetz, whose identity still requires some research, asked R. Asher Lemlein some questions

related to the kabbalistic concept of metempsychosis. Lemlein's answers were brought to the attention of Ibn Shraga, who, though not asked to react, wrote a polemic against Asher's somewhat eccentric interpretation.<sup>29</sup> The vitriolic tone of Ibn Shraga's remarks is also typical of Lemlein's when he is discussing Spanish practices and thought.<sup>30</sup> One of the reasons for Lemlein's nonrepresentative views, judged from the vantage point of the Spanish Kabbalah, was that his sources were ancient mystical texts, from the *Heikhalot* literature, *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, and ecstatic Kabbalah, none of them vital for an understanding of Spanish Kabbalah's view of metempsychosis.<sup>31</sup> This encounter between the Ashkenazi-Italian author and the contemporary Spanish Kabbalist embodies the chasm between these two Jewish cultures.<sup>32</sup> Here we must restrict ourselves to considering only the rhetorical aspect of the controversy, without entering into matters of substance.

From the outset Ibn Shraga depicts the views of R. Asher as "an inverted world,"<sup>33</sup> a locution drawn from the Talmud,<sup>34</sup> and thus a justification for the necessity to react. Drawing heavily from the *Zohar* and *Tiqqunei Zohar*, Ibn Shraga rejects Asher's solutions to R. Moshe Hefetz's questions one by one, calling an answer "damaging" or affirming that it is "destroying the Torah in its entirety" or that it consists in "vain things."<sup>35</sup> Just as Hayyat conveys total disagreement with contemporary Italian Kabbalah, so Ibn Shraga rejects every one of the kabbalistic answers provided by Lemlein.

#### 4. LITERARY GENRES OF SPANISH KABBALISTS IN ITALY

One possible avenue for detecting a change in the content of kabbalistic thought is the examination of a shift in the literary genres used in order to express it. So, for example, the technical handbooks of Abulafia reflect his emphasis on the experiential aspect of Kabbalah, whereas the popular Cordoveran Kabbalah reflects an exoteric trend. An examination of the genres used by the Spanish Kabbalists in Italy may help us to determine whether there was in fact a change in the content of their thought.

Hayyat's *Minhat Yehudah* is a commentary on another kabbalistic book, the anonymous *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*. As we learn from Gershom Scholem's description of the commentaries on this book, *Minhat Yehudah* was preceded by at least one major commentary, that of R. Reuven Tzarfati, which itself influenced Hayyat. However, as far as we know, commentaries on *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* were not widespread in Spanish Kabbalah, and Hayyat's testimony that the Mantuan nobles asked him to write it may indicate that they were eager to learn about the Sephardic perspective on this book. Thus it seems safe to assume that the Italian environment, as well as concepts prevailing in Italy, informed his writing to a very limited extent. Joseph ibn Shraga's writings reflect the same conservative mood:



his commentary on prayer, his fragments of homiletic commentaries on Genesis, and his interpretation of kabbalistic secrets, as well as his eschatological text, faithfully represent Sephardic literary genres prevalent before the expulsion. The two kabbalistic epistles of R. Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim, sent before the expulsion, reflect the Scholastic movement toward clarification of theological issues that was dominant in Italy among the Italian Kabbalists. Among these three Kabbalists no significant change in literary genres is apparent relative to those cultivated in Spain and Italy. Since all these genres were in existence before the expulsion, there is no way to argue that this event pushed the Kabbalists to adopt other modes of expression.

Several types of Kabbalah existed in Italy in the generation of the expulsion, operating on different levels and in different ways. Whereas Spanish Kabbalah was particularist, antiphilosophical, and conservative, Italian Kabbalah, both Jewish and Christian, was much more universalist, more inclined to magic, and subject to interpretation through the use of a variety of philosophical trends.<sup>36</sup> A monolithic, generalized vision of such a variegated literature prevents a proper understanding both of its nature and of the different roles it played in the Italian culture.

## TWO DIVERGING TYPES OF KABBALAH IN LATE-FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY

### 1. THE "GOOD" KABBALISTIC BOOKS

Much of the discussion so far is based upon the assumption that there was a significant difference between the various kabbalistic trends that developed in Spain and the history of Kabbalah in Italy. In the latter case, different organizations of ideas, themes, and models that originated on the Iberian peninsula were transported to Italy and transformed there. Some of these kabbalistic themes and models had been marginalized in Spain but flowered in Italy. As we have seen, for example, ecstatic Kabbalah as formulated by Abulafia and the predominantly theosophical-theurgical Spanish Kabbalah were dramatically diverging trends that came to be regarded as rivals. In fact Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah was

banned from Spanish soil by R. Shlomo ibn Adret, a highly regarded Kabbalist there.

Perhaps the most important document exemplifying the rupture between the two types of Kabbalah, which contended in Italy in the generation of the expulsion from the Iberian peninsula, is the index of books compiled by R. Yehudah Hayyat in the introduction to his *Minhat Yehudah*. The index consists of two lists of kabbalistic books, “good” and “bad” ones, namely recommended books and books he sharply criticizes, and these lists reflect not only his propensities but also, in my opinion, basic trends in Kabbalah as evident in Spain and Italy during that generation. Let me start with the recommendations of the Spanish Kabbalist:

These are the books that you shall approach [tiqrav 'eleihem]: *Sefer Yetzirah*, attributed [ha-mekhhkhuneh] to R. Aqiva, blessed be his memory; *Sefer ha-Bahir*, attributed to R. Nehuniah ben ha-Qanah, should be a diadem to your head; the *Book of the Zohar* “should not depart from your mouth” [Joshua 1:8]; and the books of R. Joseph Gikatilla and those of R. [Moshe ben] Shem Tov de Leon, you “shall tie them about thy neck” [Proverbs 6:21]; and the secrets of Nahmanides should be written upon the table of your heart; and the books of R. Menahem Recanati, “thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy arm” [Deuteronomy 6:7]; and *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* with my present commentary “shall be as frontlets between thy eyes” [ibid.], and then you will be successful in your ways and then you will be illuminated.<sup>1</sup>

These books embody the classical theosophical-theurgical trend of Kabbalah, which had dominated Spanish Kabbalah since the second half of the thirteenth century, as well as Hayyat's conception of a sustained historical progression from Abraham the patriarch, to R. Akiva, to R. Shimeon bar Yohai, the alleged author of the *Zohar*, followed by the medieval Kabbalists. Hayyat's use of biblical verses can be seen as a strategy to canonize these books. These writings represent the sources for most of *Sefer Minhat Yehudah*; thus the exaltation of the *Zohar* is in line with the general trend of Hayyat's own form of Kabbalah.

## 2. THE “BAD” KABBALISTIC BOOKS

Before presenting his list of recommended kabbalistic books, Hayyat deplores the widespread presence of sources (including the anonymous commentary on *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*) that interpret kabbalistic texts “according to philosophical presuppositions [haqdamot be-filosofiyah]; but this is not the way, neither is this the city [2 Kings 6:19].”<sup>2</sup> Then he expatiates on the other books “that have been disseminated in this province [Mantua], kabbalistic books that confuse the pure mind.”<sup>3</sup> First to be mentioned is “the divine sage, R. Isaac ibn Latif, blessed be his

memory, the author of *Sefer [Sha'ar]<sup>4</sup> ha-Shamayim* and *[Tzurat] ha-'Olam<sup>5</sup>* and *Tzeror ha-Mor* and *Sefer Ginzei ha-Melekh*, whose words are more precious than gems; but insofar as his words concern the science of Kabbalah, one of his feet is within while the other is without [Kabbalah]. Consequently, you may see only a small part of them, but not see all of them. And if God tells me to do it, I shall distinguish the fine flour from refuse." Although Hayyat respects Ibn Latif as a religious thinker, he should not be studied as a Kabbalist.

The criticisms of Abulafia are much more severe, amounting to the most intensive and virulent assault on the views of this controversial Kabbalist. Hayyat admits that he has seen "many books"<sup>6</sup> by Abulafia, but he refers to only three by name: *Sefer 'Or ha-Sekhel*, *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, and one of Abulafia's commentaries on the *Guide of the Perplexed*. He describes the founder of ecstatic Kabbalah as "mad," and his books as "replete with imaginary things and fakes invented by his heart."<sup>7</sup> Hayyat calls Maimonides himself *he-hakham ha-'Elohiy*, "the divine sage";<sup>8</sup> his critique is aimed not at Maimonides' philosophy,<sup>9</sup> but at the synthesis of philosophy and Kabbalah. Unlike the Italian Jews and Christians of the same period, who incorporated nonkabbalistic forms of knowledge into their books of Kabbalah, Hayyat refused to do so. Last in Hayyat's list of books to be avoided are the works of Shmuel ibn Motot, a late-fourteenth-century Castilian philosopher who occasionally ventured into the kabbalistic realm: "The sage Matut; you should not pay attention to his ways, neither come close to the entrance of his door, since he has a wicked rod<sup>10</sup> in his hand, in order to cause you to deviate from the right way and go to the crooked one."

These three authors and the anonymous commentary on *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut* have two features in common: all combine Kabbalah with philosophy, and thus "confuse the pure mind"; and all were widely accessible in the environs of Mantua. Such a blend of Kabbalah can be found in the writings of a Mantuan Kabbalist who flourished precisely in the period of Hayyat's stay in the area: R. Yohanan Alemanno, who was born in Mantua, was educated there, and probably returned to that city after a stay in Florence, was mounting a sustained effort to explain Kabbalah in a more rational way, praising the virtues of "the Kabbalah that is understood by reason."<sup>11</sup> It is clear that Alemanno was acquainted with Hayyat's book very early; indeed, he seems to be the first author to have quoted from *Sefer Minhat Yehudah*.<sup>12</sup> Hayyat's emphasis on the centrality of the *Zohar* as the sole sound form of kabbalistic thought stands in marked contrast to the marginality of the Spanish classic in the fabric of Italian Kabbalah during his lifetime. Neither Alemanno nor his contemporary Italian Kabbalists were well acquainted with this book, and he quotes it only very rarely, in many cases in a Hebrew translation.<sup>13</sup> As such, it reflects the confrontation in Italy between two types of Kabbalah.

## 3. KABBALAH AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE GENERATION OF THE EXPULSION

The Spanish Kabbalists who arrived in Italy after the expulsion reacted with polemics to their encounter with a different kabbalistic paradigm. In them, the Spanish Kabbalah that had prevailed in the fifteenth century, which rejected any role for philosophy in pure Kabbalah, faced an Italian Kabbalah that combined a variety of intellectual trends: Kabbalah, philosophy, and magic.<sup>14</sup> Yet we should not view the ensuing clash between the two paradigms, the purist or particularist one versus the synthetic or universalist, as a direct product of the terrible events surrounding the expulsion. Both before and after that watershed, Spanish Kabbalists, most notably the circle affiliated with *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, strenuously rejected philosophical speculations.<sup>15</sup> However, members of this circle were not active in Italy. The more moderate views of another Spanish Kabbalist, R. Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim, provide more relevant evidence that the situation and the reaction of Yehudah Hayyat were independent of the expulsion crisis.

Two years before the expulsion, R. Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim visited Italy for a while on his way to the land of Israel.<sup>16</sup> On Italian soil he met at least two people interested in Kabbalah, and he wrote two letters to one of them. R. Yitzhaq of Pisa, apparently staying in Pisa or Florence, is the addressee of these letters; the second person, mentioned only in passing, was a certain R. Yohanan who enjoyed a close association with R. Isaac, and whom I propose identifying as R. Yitzhaq's teacher, R. Yohanan Alemanno.<sup>17</sup> In one of his letters Mor Hayyim expresses the hope that whenever his views differ "from the view of R. Yohanan, let God safeguard him, I am sure that you will find, because of the quality of your mind, the reason for my deviance."<sup>18</sup> Later in the letter Mor Hayyim becomes much more insistent: "when you inquire into these matters, you should not follow the [views] of those sages who regard the intelligibilia as the root [of their speculations] and interpret kabbalistic matters in a way that accords with philosophy [*iyyun*]. But you shall regard Kabbalah as your root and you shall make an effort that the intellect will agree with it. But if your excellency is not able to do it, you should know that there is a limit to the intellect, but that the Kabbalah, which was received from the mouth of a prophet, is higher than the intellect, so that it can correct whatever the intellect has distorted."<sup>19</sup>

We should not reduce the warnings of Mor Hayyim to an attempt to neutralize the influence of Alemanno's philosophization of Kabbalah. It seems that the Spanish Kabbalist regarded as dangerous any effort to introduce speculative approaches when interpreting Kabbalah. In the other letter to R. Yitzhaq, written some months earlier, he declares that his views on the nature of the *sefirot* can be ascertained by reading "all the books that agree with the view of R. Shimeon bar

Yohai [namely the alleged author of the *Zohar*] regarding the emanation of the sefirot and their expansion. But rational inquiry concerning these matters is something forbidden to us.”<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the philosophical approach of Yohanan Alemanno, which attracted the criticism of Mor Hayyim, the works of Alemanno’s younger contemporaries, and perhaps also companions, R. David Messer Leon and R. Abraham de Balmes,<sup>21</sup> as well as a kabbalistic epistle that may have been written by R. Yitzhaq of Pisa,<sup>22</sup> combined Kabbalah and philosophy. Whereas Alemanno tended to introduce Neoplatonic concepts, as well as the Aristotelian ones espoused by medieval thinkers, the other two Renaissance Kabbalists were decidedly more sympathetic to various forms of Aristotelianism. In the case of Messer Leon, the impact of Thomism and of theosophy is also evident, as Hava Tirosh-Rothschild (Tirosh-Samuelson) has shown.<sup>23</sup>

The Christian Kabbalists in Italy understood Jewish Kabbalah as a conduit of and pregnant with a theological message that both adumbrated Christianity was at the same time consonant with philosophical stands, Platonic and Neoplatonic, Hermetic and “Zoroastrian.” Thus Pico della Mirandola compared a certain kind of Kabbalah to the “Catholic philosophy,” namely the universal philosophy.<sup>24</sup> But Johann Reuchlin’s approach to Kabbalah was much more explicit and instructive. For him, as for Pico—and many modern scholars of Kabbalah—there was no great significance in whether a Kabbalist was an Italian Jew or a Sephardic one. Their belief in the single message of a transspatial Kabbalah blurred the differences between developments in the two countries. Thus, seduced by the image of the greatness of the Spanish Kabbalah, Reuchlin invented an imaginary encounter in Frankfurt between a Spanish Kabbalist, named Simon ben Eleazar, and a Pythagorean thinker named Philolaus and a Muslim figure named Marranus. Since the names are overtly symbolic and not historical, I assume that the use of the name Simon for a Kabbalist is related to the figure of R. Shimeon bar Yohai, the alleged author of the *Zohar*, despite the fact that Reuchlin does not quote from this book. The explicit purpose of the conversation among these figures is to help introduce Pythagoreanism in Germany, a mission that preoccupied Reuchlin throughout *De Arte Cabalistica*. In this effort he sought to emulate Marsilio Ficino, who introduced Plato in Italy, and Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples, who “brought out Aristotle” in France. Reuchlin believed that Kabbalah was one of the sources of Pythagoras’s thought;<sup>25</sup> he laments: “I have only been able to glean from the Hebrew Kabbalah, since it derives in origin from the teachers of Kabbalah, and then was lost by our ancestors, disappearing from southern Italy [Magna Graecia] into the kabbalistic writings.”<sup>26</sup>

This is a fascinating reversal of the medieval Jewish complaint about the loss of the sciences among the Jews as a result of the exile. The Christian Kabbalist argues

that Kabbalah preserves the ancient philosophy that otherwise would be lost; he is writing about “the symbolic philosophy of the art of Kabbalah so as to make Pythagorean doctrine better known to scholars.”<sup>27</sup> In combining the glamor of Sephardi greatness in matters of Kabbalah with the Italian conception of Kabbalah, Reuchlin produced a hybrid whose main figure, a Sephardic Kabbalist, would in reality have vehemently protested against such an understanding of Spanish mystical lore.

The speculative similarities between the Jewish and Christian conceptions of Kabbalah in Italy may indicate a reciprocal osmotic influence. I do not want to undertake here a discussion of such a complex issue. However, the possibility may serve as the background for a fact that is paramount for some aspects of our discussion here: the Italian Kabbalists in the period under scrutiny were self-taught thinkers. Few of them, if any, studied with authoritative figures in the domain of this lore. Thus we could expect a certain uncertainty in their responses to criticism by the Sephardic Kabbalists. However, although they respected the Spaniards’ positions and writings, the Italian Kabbalists were not ready to bow to their authority. I am inclined to attribute such an attitude to the feeling that their speculative and open trend, and not the Sephardic reticence toward philosophy, was more attuned to the spirit of their age, as expressed by the renaissance of philosophy and the emergence of the philosophical understanding of Kabbalah among Christians.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. THE ZOHAR AND ITALIAN KABBALAH

Like Yehudah Hayyat, Mor Hayyim assumed that in matters of Kabbalah the *Zohar* was the ultimate authority,<sup>29</sup> and he, too, was hostile to philosophical intrusions. Also like Hayyat, he complained that “the *Book of the Zohar* is not available in its entirety in one province, but it is dispersed throughout all the provinces. This passage I have copied from the *Book of the Zohar* that I have found in the academy of R. Eliezer, let God safeguard him, in the city of Lisbon.”<sup>30</sup> Such a confession would have been meaningful only in a place where the *Zohar* was very little known. Had considerable parts of this book been available in Italy, no one would have mentioned in what specific Portuguese academy he had copied one of the most profound and important parts of the *Zohar*. Mor Hayyim’s analysis of the Zoharic passage was intended to counteract the view, represented by R. Menahem Recanati’s “instrumental” theosophy, that the sefirot were not identical with the divine essence.<sup>31</sup> Mor Hayyim—in my opinion correctly—interpreted the text of the *Zohar* as pointing to the opposite view, that the sefirot were identical with the divine essence. He presented this interpretation both as his own Kabbalah and as “the Kabbalah of all the sages of Sefarad [*Kabbalat kol hakhmei Sefarad*], blessed be their memory, since all of them decided that the sefirot are not created

[entities].”<sup>32</sup> By referring thus to the Sephardic sages, Mor Hayyim placed himself in specific opposition to the stand of the Italian Recanati. The awareness of the existence of a Sephardic Kabbalah reflects awareness, very similar to that of Hayyat later on, that his traditional mystical view was representative of Spanish Jewish thought. Indeed in his two letters to R. Yitzhaq of Pisa Mor Hayyim wrote the epithet *Sephardi* after his name.<sup>33</sup>

Although Mor Hayyim focused his criticism on Recanati,<sup>34</sup> his mention of Alemanno prompted a strong reaction. Copying the Zoharic text that had been translated into Hebrew and interpreted by Mor Hayyim, but without mentioning the Spanish Kabbalist’s interpretation, Alemanno offered a very different interpretation.<sup>35</sup>

The voluminous works of Yohanan Alemanno demonstrate a strong nexus between the Zoharic Kabbalah of Spain and the relative ignorance of this seminal book in Italy. The role played by the *Zohar* in his earlier works is marginal. A few quotations from the *Zohar* appear in his later works, sometimes in Hebrew and many of them drawn from R. Menahem Recanati and Hayyat’s *Minhat Yehudah*. In his study program, where he lists several kabbalistic writings to be studied by the ideal student, the *Zohar* is not mentioned at all.<sup>36</sup>

The *Zohar* is also absent from the writings of R. Asher Lemlein, another Kabbalist active in northern Italy, as Efraim Kupfer noticed three decades ago.<sup>37</sup> Even more persuasive are the statements of R. Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim to his Italian addressee, R. Yitzhaq of Pisa, himself a Kabbalist. In his first letter he copied a passage from the *Zohar* in its original Aramaic. Unfortunately, we do not have the answer of Yitzhaq of Pisa, but in his second letter Mor Hayyim wrote: “Since we are not familiar in this country [namely Italy] with the Jerusalemite Targum [namely Aramaic], I decided to translate it into Hebrew word by word; then I shall divide the passage into paragraphs and explain each one separately, to the extent that I am able to do so.”<sup>38</sup>

There is no reason to doubt this evidence; it demonstrates that in Italy not only were even Kabbalists unable to find large portions of the *Zohar*, but also they found it difficult to read, since the Aramaic dialect in which it was written was unknown to them. Even translations into Hebrew failed to provide enough help, and the translated texts had to be explained in detail. On the other hand, Alemanno asserted that “the sages of Israel were already divided among themselves and were confused about the question whether the sefirot are the essence of the Godhead or whether they are separate from Him, as can be seen from a passage attributed [meyuhas] to Rashby in the *Book of the Zohar*, found [in the hands of some] few persons, in addition to the translation into Hebrew, because of its profoundness in the language of the Jerusalemite [namely the Palestinian Talmud].”<sup>39</sup>



This is quite valuable testimony of the marginal role played by the *Zohar* among the Italian Kabbalists. Moreover, since the small fragment discussed by Alemanno is identical with that sent to and translated for Yitzhaq of Pisa, we may infer the paucity of Zoharic literature among Italian intellectuals interested in Kabbalah. An inspection of the kabbalistic sources of R. David Messer Leon seems to confirm this conclusion. The same conclusion emerges from an inspection of the kabbalistic literature translated by Flavius Mithridates for Pico della Mirandola. In his very massive project of translations, which in my opinion reflect the kabbalistic literature extant and studied in Italy, and much less in Spain, we find no significant Zoharic passage. To the extent that the book was known or quoted, the clear intermediary source was R. Menahem Recanati's *Commentary on the Torah*.<sup>40</sup> Even later, in the kabbalistic writings of Johann Reuchlin, composed at the very end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, that is, precisely the period under scrutiny here, the *Zohar* played a very marginal role.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, the *Zohar* was quoted by Spanish converts to Christianity who wrote about Kabbalah, as were Zoharic texts that are not to be found in the extant Zoharic corpus.<sup>42</sup> Thus, it is evident that even among the Christian Kabbalists, the dichotomy between Spain and Italy in knowledge of the *Zohar*, and its availability, remained significant.

Against the background of the neglect, not to say ignorance, of the central book of Spanish Kabbalah among Kabbalists in Italy, the insistence on the importance of the *Zohar* by the two Spanish Kabbalists active there is much easier to understand.

# 19

## JEWISH KABBALAH IN CHRISTIAN GARB

### 1. SEEKING THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIAN KABBALAH

The historical beginnings of both Jewish and Christian Kabbalah remain matters of debate among scholars.<sup>1</sup> Precisely when a certain phenomenon is regarded as coming into being depends on the presence of the conceptual minimum required to define it. The dominant scholarly definition of Kabbalah regards its crucial component as a concern with the ten divine powers, the ten sefirot. In line with this view, Jewish Kabbalah emerged in Languedoc in the last decades of the twelfth century, and Christian Kabbalah in the final decades of the thirteenth. But if we turn to another way of defining Kabbalah, found already in the eleventh century, as an esoteric tradition concerning the divine names, the situation becomes much

more complex.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, some passages dealing with divine names recur in Christian texts early in the thirteenth century, in the discussions of Joachim de Fiore.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the same century and early in the next, Arnauld of Villanova wrote a whole treatise dealing with the divine name.<sup>4</sup> Whether this treatise reflects the impact of Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah remains to be investigated.

However, it is possible to approach the question from another angle: instead of regarding the passage of some traditions from one type of religion to another as the defining moment of the emergence of a certain new phenomenon, we should perhaps consider the absorption, especially the creative one, of the techniques that are characteristic of one type of lore by a thinker belonging to another religion. In our case, the question would be not when a Christian adopted some forms of Jewish esoteric traditions but when a Christian thinker adopted a kabbalistic type of thinking. Thus, the occurrence of a certain technique of interpreting the first word of the Bible by separating its letters in the work of the twelfth-century English theologian Alexander of Neckham,<sup>5</sup> or of the peculiar combination of letters by means of concentric circles and the theory of a hierarchy of glories in that of Ramon Llull,<sup>6</sup> apparently under the influence of Jewish sources, may fit this second approach.

Lacking in these examples is the Christian writer's explicit awareness that, when dealing with divine names or with combinatory techniques, he is operating in a realm of esoteric Jewish lore. However, such awareness apparently already existed in the last third of the thirteenth century, when Alfonso Sabio's nephew, Juan Manuel, testified about his famous uncle: "Furthermore, he ordered translated the whole law of the Jews, and even their Talmud, and other knowledge, which is called *qabbalah* and which the Jews keep closely secret. And he did this so it might be manifest through their own law that it is a [mere] presentation of that law which we Christians have; and that they, like the Moors, are in grave error and in peril of losing their souls."<sup>7</sup>

If this passage is reliable, and I see no reason to doubt it, then a significant segment of kabbalistic literature had been translated as early as the 1270s. According to this testimony, the goal of Sabio's project of translation was to save the souls of the Jews and Muslims. However, the uses of Kabbalah in the writings of converts like Alfonso de Valladolid or, later, Paulus de Heredia did not capture the imagination of their contemporaries or produce effects in European culture. Not until the writings of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in the mid-1480s did those Jewish elements become a significant part of any defined Christian circle or come to constitute a tradition in their own right.

Christian Kabbalah is, *prima facie*, an enigma. Until the end of the fifteenth century, Jewish Kabbalah was considered by Jews themselves to be an esoteric

lore; conceived to be the core of Judaism, it was to be transmitted only to a few initiates both in manuscripts and orally. Yet it seems that in a very short time this closely guarded, peculiarly Jewish religious tradition found a place in Christian religious thought.

The study of Christian Kabbalah goes back some decades. The first comprehensive study of some of the major issues and texts of Christian Kabbalah, by Joseph Blau,<sup>8</sup> did not address how Kabbalah was transposed into a Christian idiom, and how Christians came to accept such a peculiarly Jewish type of lore. Perhaps the earliest and greatest contributor to an understanding of the literature of Christian Kabbalah was François Secret, who surveyed and described the available material in Latin and Italian,<sup>9</sup> although few of his writings address the conceptual aspects of this literature.

Another outstanding scholar of the Renaissance, Dame Frances Amelia Yates, in explaining the emergence of magic and the mysticism in the amalgam of Renaissance thought, asserted that Kabbalah was an important component, emerging at the end of the fifteenth century and becoming even more important in the sixteenth and seventeenth.<sup>10</sup> But Yates was not a student of Jewish Kabbalah, and she herself acknowledged that she was not competent to assess the ultimate contribution of Kabbalah to Christian culture. In fact she attributed more importance to this type of Jewish lore than seems warranted.<sup>11</sup>

The most important contributions to an understanding of the emergence of the Christian Kabbalah came from Gershom Scholem's student Chaim Wirszubski. Wirszubski described in great detail the penetration of kabbalistic texts and concepts into the milieu of Christian Florentine intellectuals. He traced the precise Hebrew sources of most of Pico's kabbalistic discussions and showed what happened to the original texts when they were transferred into a Christian milieu. By meticulously studying the translations into Latin of a long series of Hebrew kabbalistic texts, Wirszubski was able to locate precisely most of Pico's kabbalistic sources and to delineate the boundaries of his knowledge of Kabbalah.<sup>12</sup> Wirszubski's premature death prevented him from addressing the phenomenological differences between Jewish and the Christian Kabbalah. As we saw in chapter 14, we may discover linkages in the unedited writings of a Jewish companion of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the erudite R. Yohanan Alemanno, who lived for many years in Florence. Recently Giulio Busi has edited one of the Hebrew treatises translated into Latin by Mithridates,<sup>13</sup> and Franco Bacchelli has identified new translations into Latin in Pico's circle.<sup>14</sup> And over several decades scholars have illumined the roles of Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio and others who flourished in northern Italy at the end of the fifteenth century and who resorted in a significant manner to Jewish esoterica.<sup>15</sup>

So in many ways we remain in the preliminary stages of scholarship with regard to Christian Kabbalah. In the next few pages I shall first point out several characteristics that appear to be either unique to Christian Kabbalah or, at least, dominant in this literature but marginal in the Jewish one; then I shall try to explain what happened when the translation took place.

## 2. CHRISTIAN KABBALAH, CHRISTOLOGY, AND CONVERSION

The most obvious changes introduced by Christian Kabbalists are Christological interpretations of some elements in the Jewish Kabbalah. To achieve this effect, Christian scholars used several modes of Jewish, especially kabbalistic, exegetical devices, especially combinations of letters and symbolic exegesis. Their main intention was to show that Kabbalah was less a Jewish lore than a veiled Christian theology. Since Kabbalah was regarded by both Jews and Christians as an ancient tradition originating long before the emergence of Christianity, it became polemically important to demonstrate that Christological hints could be found even in the esoteric Jewish traditions. This was one of the major theological points made by the first Christian Kabbalists.

There were two main ways of introducing Christological topics into Jewish material. One was to use the concept of the Christ to interpret the realm of the ten sefirot—which is intermediary between the hidden deity and the created world. This realm had already been described by the earliest Jewish Kabbalists as having an anthropomorphic structure, better known as 'Adam Qadmon, the Primordial Man, or 'Adam 'Elyon, the Supernal Man. The anthropomorphic imagery was part and parcel of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah; it was apparent in the theosophical doctrines of the *Bahir*, and it became even more conspicuous in the *Zohar*. The Christian Kabbalists translated this anthropomorphic schema into a graphic Christological structure. None of the Jewish Kabbalists before the Renaissance had presented the configuration of the ten sefirot in such a way. But now the Christian Kabbalists presented the whole system of sefirot (or in other cases only one of the sefirot) as *deus revelatus*, namely as Christ.

The other major strategy used by Christian Kabbalists was to decode a major secret of Jewish esotericism, namely the nature of the Tetragrammaton, in Christian terms. In Jewish mysticism, both before medieval Kabbalah and afterward, the secret of the Tetragrammaton lay in the peculiar, and allegedly unknown, vocalization of the four known consonants of the divine name. The pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton was part of the ancient ritual of the high priest in the Temple on the Day of Atonement. One of the first Christian Kabbalists, Johann Reuchlin, in his early kabbalistic book about the power of the divine name, *De Verbo Mirifico*, introduced a change in the Hebrew spelling of the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, so that it

would point to the name of Jesus. This strategy involved dividing the four letters into two units by introducing between them the Hebrew letter shin, so that the Hebrew Tetragrammaton became a Pentagrammaton: YHShVH. Thus one of the most important topics of Jewish esotericism was construed as pointing to Christianity.

These changes in the understanding the secrets of Kabbalah were not mere expressions of the faith of Christian intellectuals. In many cases they served as a tool in the mission of converting Jews to Christianity. This development is already evident in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. In his commentary on the seven days of creation, *Heptaplus*, composed in 1487, he wrote:

But because what is said by the Hebrews is new to the Latins,<sup>16</sup> it could not be easily understood by our people unless, hatched from a twin egg, as they say, I explained a great part or almost the totality of the ancient teachings of the Hebrew dogmas. I decided to postpone this until elsewhere I had written about Hebrew dogmas in greater detail and had made known to my contemporaries these ideas, showing how much these ideas agree with Egyptian wisdom, how much with Platonic philosophy, and how much with Catholic truth. And, therefore, if I find the Hebrews to agree with us in something, I shall order them to stand by the ancient traditions of their fathers; if I find a place where they disagree, then, drawn up in Catholic legions, I shall make an attack against them. Finally, whatever I find foreign to the evangelic truth, I shall refute in keeping with my power; while any principle that is sacred and true, as from a wrongful possessor, I shall transfer from the Synagogue to us, the legitimate Israelites.<sup>17</sup>

I assume that the dogmas of the ancient Jews that were new to the “Latins” were kabbalistic teachings, which indeed preoccupied Pico in other, earlier writings. In this passage Pico asserts that Kabbalah has affinities with a variety of speculative literatures: Platonism, Egyptian lore, and Christianity. There is no yoking here of Kabbalah and magic.

Pico’s fifth kabbalistic thesis, written before the *Heptaplus*, illumines the missionary aspect of his intellectual enterprise: “Every Hebrew Kabbalist following the principles and sayings of the science of Kabbalah is inevitably forced to concede, without addition, omission, or variation, precisely what the Catholic faith of Christians maintains concerning the Trinity and every divine Person: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>18</sup> Kabbalah is thus the best tool to convince Jews of the correctness of Christian theology.

### 3. CHRISTIAN KABBALAH AND HERMENEUTICS

We have noted the Christological interpretations of Jewish Kabbalah as essential for the emergence of the Christian one. The second major metamorphosis of

Jewish Kabbalah is related to the appearance of an emphasis, actually an overemphasis, on the importance of the Jewish exegetical devices found already in Jewish kabbalistic texts. Since the late thirteenth century, Jewish Kabbalah employed a great variety of exegetical devices as part of a greater hermeneutical enterprise: the mystical reinterpretation of the Jewish canonical writings and rituals. Only by mastering the exegetical methods of the Jewish Kabbalists could the Christians convince Jews of the verity of the Christian theological claims.

In Jewish kabbalistic sources before and after the Renaissance, one finds no Christian concepts extracted by the use of kabbalistic exegetical devices. But when kabbalistic hermeneutics were introduced into Christian circles, a plethora of Christian themes were propelled into the Hebrew Bible—and into kabbalistic texts like the *Zohar*. This transformation of hermeneutics into a major concern—rather than of secondary interest, as in most of the Jewish sources—is central to Christian Kabbalah, and indeed, the most important treatise on kabbalistic hermeneutics was written by Nicolas le Fèvre de la Boderie, a Christian Kabbalist in France in the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>19</sup> The early centrality of hermeneutics in Christian Kabbalah influenced not only a few forms of Christian theology but also European culture in general. Even as Renaissance humanists were embracing a more critical, historical-philological approach to texts, Christian Kabbalists were subscribing to interpretation as an open process in which readers should use their exegetical abilities to reveal different levels of understanding.

#### 4. CHRISTIAN KABBALAH, PHILOSOPHY, AND THE STATUS OF KABBALISTIC THEURGY

Like Renaissance thought in general, Christian Renaissance Kabbalah was eclectic, in this case combining kabbalistic ideas with Neoplatonic, Hermetic, and Pythagorean concepts. In contrast, although philosophical elements infiltrated Kabbalah very early, only rarely did Jewish Kabbalists acknowledge their alien sources, and until the late fifteenth century, large-scale combinations of Kabbalah with philosophy remained marginal in the vast Jewish kabbalistic literature. Several aspects of Jewish Kabbalah were radically changed by its integration into more comprehensive intellectual systems.<sup>20</sup> Such integration obliterated, for example, the dynamic nature of Jewish Kabbalah.<sup>21</sup> As we have seen, the theosophical system of the Jewish Kabbalists was based upon the assumption that there are ongoing processes in the divine world. The sefirot were understood in most Jewish texts not as static but rather as constantly changing in their relationship. Most Jewish Kabbalists before and after the emergence of Christian Kabbalah assumed that it was possible to influence these supernal processes by intentional, namely kabbalistic, performance of Jewish ritual. The introduction of other philosophical

ideas in Christian treatises on Kabbalah obliterated concepts of the dynamic nature of the sefirot. Such a static understanding of the sefirot is obvious in Pico della Mirandola and most of his immediate followers, who instead identified them with the Platonic Ideas.<sup>22</sup>

An even more profound change effected in theosophical Kabbalah was the obliteration of the theurgic nature of this mystical lore. One of the core characteristics of Jewish Kabbalah was the affinity between human activity—the performance of the *mitzwot*—and the state of the divine world: any important human act below had an impact on high. The Christian Kabbalists' rejection of the Jewish commandments resulted in a drastic separation between human activity—represented in Jewish sources mainly by the biblical and rabbinic commandments—and the theosophical systems. The Christian version of Kabbalah was concerned with concepts providing a map of the divine world rather than a guide to experience. In this approach they resembled the earlier Christian Gnostics.

## 5. THE WIDER DISSEMINATION OF KABBALAH

Among the Jews, Kabbalah was an esoteric lore, to be studied by a tiny elite. In contrast, the Christians published treatises on Kabbalah as soon as they were written: Pico published his kabbalistic theses in 1486; a short time afterward Reuchlin published his two books on Kabbalah; and yet other Christian kabbalistic texts appeared before the mid-sixteenth century. This trend, I believe, was among the factors that prompted some Jews in the mid-sixteenth century to begin publishing what they considered to be the authentic Kabbalah. Thus the shift from esoteric to exoteric, which was such a major factor in the dissemination of Christian Kabbalah, ultimately also affected the Jewish lore.<sup>23</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that the Jewish Kabbalists became more open to the idea of an exoteric Kabbalah as a result of contacts with their Christian contemporaries even as they printed their original texts to counteract Christological interpretations of the Jewish lore.

No major document written in the first stage of Spanish Kabbalah seems to have been translated into any European language before the Renaissance. *Sefer Raziel*, discussed in chapter 16, is, so far as we know, the only exception. However, as Scholem noted, Reuchlin was clearly acquainted with some concepts of R. Azriel of Gerona, whom he quoted twice in *De Arte Cabalistica*.<sup>24</sup> From the same Hebrew manuscript from which he quoted R. Azriel's views, Reuchlin drew upon kabbalistic material connected to the thirteenth-century Spanish kabbalistic works identified by Scholem as forming the literature around the *Sefer ha-'Iyyun*, or Book of Contemplation. But interesting as these short quotations may be, they did not substantially affect Reuchlin's conception of Kabbalah. Nor was Pico della Mirandola acquainted with the sources of this first stage of Spanish Kabbalah.



This situation changed substantially during the second stage of Spanish Kabbalah, when translations of several important treatises by Flavius Mithridates, Paulus Riccius, and Felix Pratensis directly influenced Pico's kabbalistic theses, the works of Johann Reuchlin, and Francesco Zorzi Veneto's influential *De Harmonia Mundi*.<sup>25</sup> This phase of Kabbalah was the basis of most developments in Christian Kabbalah. Two major elements characteristic of these kabbalistic works attracted the attention of the Christian thinkers: the sefirotic hierarchy, commonly conceived of by Jewish Kabbalists as forming the supernal man, was easily related to a cosmic conception of Christ; and the flexible exegetical techniques elaborated in the last quarter of the thirteenth century (partially under the influence of the fourfold Christian exegetical methods) was appropriated by many Christian Kabbalists. These two issues, important also in the Hebrew texts, came to the fore in the Christian works on Kabbalah, though in very peculiar ways.

The increased dissemination of kabbalistic ideas, beginning at the end of the fifteenth century, must be understood in two wider contexts, that of the intellectual ambiance in Florence and, even more generally, that of the development of printing. The latter factor contributed substantially to the propagation of cultural developments in northern Italy beyond the small circle around the Medicis. Printing also ensured continuity. However, the more interesting question still remains: How and why did Christian intellectuals there adopt Jewish esoterics as a domain of interest and even of creativity? An answer to such a question is never simple, and we should allow for a coalescence of several factors.

First and foremost, Kabbalah was studied, translated, and amalgamated into Christian speculation in a very specific intellectual circle, which emerged two decades earlier as part of the efforts of Marsilio Ficino. Ficino was not only instrumental in rendering into Latin the huge Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Hermetic corpora; he was also a thinker who offered a synthesis between the various forms of thought he translated and Christian theology.<sup>26</sup> The openness of this circle to some aspects of ancient pagan traditions provided a crucial background to the next stage of translations, from Hebrew. Without the open attitude that influenced acceptance of the relevance of the pagan corpus, it seems unlikely that the Hebrew mystical writings would have been embraced so warmly in this circle. In any case, the circle that produced the Florentine Renaissance, under the aegis of the Medici family, is very relevant to both the emergence and the content of Reuchlin's kabbalistic project; he was incited by a conversation with Giovanni Pico to embark on the study of Kabbalah, and he was also inspired by Pico's Christian and magical understandings of Kabbalah. In dedicating his *De Arte Cabalistica* to Leo X, a pope from the Medici family, Reuchlin consciously supported a Florentine cultural phenomenon.

These two factors—a substantial acquaintance with kabbalistic material and a new means of assuring continuity—seem to underpin the late-fifteenth-century Florentine interest in Jewish mysticism as the founding moment of Christian Kabbalah. This perspective is based more upon cultural intellectual assumptions than upon conceptual ones. By these two criteria, Reuchlin can be seen as one of the founders of this branch of Christian thought.

Whereas Christian Kabbalah spread from Italy into Germany, France, and England, Spain and Portugal remained closed to its ideas,<sup>27</sup> chiefly as a result of the presence of the Inquisition, which deterred Spanish thinkers from studying and even less exploiting the theological possibilities inherent in the variety of autochthonous forms of Jewish mysticism. The diverging attitudes toward Kabbalah in Spain and Italy are emblematic of the relative resistance and openness of those cultures to other bodies of knowledge in general. Leone Ebreo, who had been expelled from Portugal, would never write a bestseller in his motherland. It was the more receptive ambiance of Italy that allowed him to flower, as was the case for Christian Kabbalah.

## ANTHROPOIDS FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO RENAISSANCE ITALY

### 1. ANTHROPOIDS IN MEDIEVAL JEWISH LITERATURE

In this chapter and the next I deal with two different forms of the artificial anthropoids discussed in medieval and Renaissance literature. This topic is crucial for an understanding of Jewish esotericism in general, as well as its metamorphoses in Jewish folklore and literature both inside and outside Judaism. As Yehuda Liebes put it, this topic is the acme of kabbalistic literature.<sup>1</sup> Its presence in Italian Jewish and Christian authors and its transformations in the different models of Kabbalah (the magical, the ecstatic, and the theosophical-theurgical) illustrate the vitality of the topic of artificial anthropoids in Italy and the methodological importance of the three models. The discussions that arrived in the Italian peninsula from

Germany and Spain were interpreted, transmitted, and translated into Latin there. The increasing prominence of the topic during the Renaissance demonstrates the growing emphasis on activity at the expense of contemplation that, according to Dame Frances A. Yates, is characteristic of this period. Although I have already dealt in other studies with the constellation of ideas known as the Golem, it is pertinent to return to the topic because of the important role this matter played in kabbalistic traditions found in Italy.

Since its inception in the Middle Ages, kabbalistic literature was preoccupied with the topic of man and his role in creating another man. This topic involved not just natural procreation, the most important commandment in rabbinic Judaism and in Kabbalah,<sup>2</sup> but also other forms of activity related to the isomorphic structure of man. One of the most important of them was known as the Golem, in fact a much later designation for an artificial man created from dust and water, over which combinations of letters and divine names were recited. There were many recipes describing the process in detail, most of them stemming from either Ashkenazi Hasidic traditions or from northern France.<sup>3</sup> Their common denominator was the centrality of the linguistic facets of the ceremony, namely recitations of combinations of letters, and the divergences among the various recipes demonstrate that they reflected earlier traditions, some of which can be dated to before the twelfth century.<sup>4</sup> This form of creation was reminiscent, according to some texts, of the creation of Adam by God.<sup>5</sup> Abraham Abulafia knew some of these recipes, as we shall see below, and we may assume that Spanish Kabbalists knew them also but that, unlike Abulafia, they were indifferent to this type of activity. The single exception is a discussion found in the so-called circle of the Book of Contemplation.

Another form of anthropoid, produced while using a variety of materials, especially metals, though not linguistic operations, was connected to the Hermetic production of the statues in which the gods were induced in order to foretell the future. Evidence of this phenomenon is found in early-fourteenth-century Castilian texts written by Jewish philosophers close to the thought of R. Abraham ibn Ezra, and in an anonymous manuscript to which we shall devote the next chapter. Theosophical Kabbalists in Spain, as well as ecstatic ones in Italy, were not inclined to this way of thought.

The main line of Kabbalah as it developed in the Iberian peninsula was the theosophical-theurgical one. It regarded the Supernal Man, 'Adam 'Elyon, as the comprehensive symbol for the structure of the ten sefirot and envisioned the main purpose of kabbalistic activity as the restoration of the harmonious relationship within this dynamic structure, especially the union between the ninth and the tenth sefirot, envisioned as male and female respectively. The effect of human

religious activity on high, what I describe as theurgy, was understood as related to the isomorphic structure of the human, basically the male, body and the supernal one. Commandments performed by the human body affected the corresponding divine manifestations on high. According to some early kabbalistic views, religious activity kept the divine structure stable by drawing down from the highest realm the influx that counteracted the natural drive of the sefirot to return to their pristine place, before the beginning of the process of emanation. As such, the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalist envisioned his activity as keeping the anthropomorphic structure on high in its integral display, which was also the ideal situation for the mundane world. According to a doctrine found in a theosophical school related to R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid, an anthropomorphic structure was found not only in the sefirotic realm but also in an even higher structure, called the supernal or inner sefirot, or *tzahtzahot*, which was part of the Infinite, the 'Ein Sof.<sup>6</sup> This higher, static, and pure divine structure was thought to be referred to in the most anthropomorphic expressions in the Bible and as the hidden meaning of the book *Shi'ur Qomah*. This development continued for some generations of Kabbalists in Spain and then in Safed, and testifies to the will of some Kabbalists to describe the highest level in the divine sphere by using anthropomorphic terminology. This is the case even in discussions by important Kabbalists such as the sixteenth-century Safedian paragon of Kabbalah, R. Moshe Cordovero. In Lurianic Kabbalah, anthropomorphic structures became even more important, but now the task of the Kabbalist was understood as uplifting the divine sparks that fell from the Primordial Man, 'Adam Qadmon. Because of the primal catastrophe, the shattered anthropomorphic structure should be repaired by performance of the commandments.

Despite differences about the role of the supernal anthropomorphic structures, the various theosophical-theurgical schools of Kabbalah agreed that a divine, spiritual, and external *anthropos* provided the clue to understanding the real aim of Judaism. Adherents to the theosophical-theurgical model in Italy included R. Menahem Recanati, R. Elijah Hayyim of Genazzano, R. Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim, and R. Yehudah Hayyat. In their writings, as in those of many like-minded Kabbalists outside Italy, ecstatic experiences related to the Golem or constructions of material *anthropoi*—whether of dust or of metals—are either absent or are presented as inferior modes of religious activity. This distribution of topics among the various kabbalistic literatures reflects the deep phenomenological divide among the various kabbalistic schools and models, and in some cases among geographical centers. In this chapter I want to survey the views found in ecstatic Kabbalah, and their reverberations in the Renaissance; in the next I shall trace the metallic astromagical anthropoid's journey from Spain to Italy.

## 2. ABRAHAM ABULAFIA AND THE SPIRITUALIZED GOLEM

Among Kabbalists born in Spain, Abraham Abulafia paid unique attention to the topic of the creation of an artificial man. Although the topic was widely written about in northern Europe, where it took a variety of forms, the few Kabbalists who addressed it in Spain regarded both the created man and the human creator as symbols of divine creation.<sup>7</sup> Detailed techniques for creating the Golem reached Abulafia from Ashkenazi sources, as we may infer from a manuscript found now in the library in Parma.<sup>8</sup> Abulafia adapted these techniques by formulating a way for reaching an experience of ecstasy via an anthropomorphic vision.<sup>9</sup> He conceived the preparation and proper formation of the inner man, the psyche, as the main purpose of those techniques. Seeing these techniques as aids to self-regeneration, a new birth into an intellectual world, Abulafia and his students expressed reservations about the importance, or in some cases the possibility, of a material creation, whereas the Ashkenazi masters assumed the possibility of such a creation. Nevertheless the ecstatic Kabbalists took the techniques for creating the Golem from Ashkenazi sources and applied them for reaching ecstasy.

Some of the earliest dated Ashkenazi recipes are extant in manuscripts copied in the 1280s in Rome, and described in chapter 7 above. If my assumptions about the transmission of these manuscripts are correct, Abulafia brought the originals from Barcelona, together with two Ashkenazi commentaries on *Sefer Yetzirah*. The creation of the Golem was often related in the Ashkenazi sources to this late-antique book. Although we may assume that these recipes first arrived in Catalonia from the Rhineland together with other pieces of Ashkenazi esoterica, and influenced the nascent ecstatic Kabbalah there, this was not the only route by which Ashkenazi recipes reached Kabbalists active in Italy. In a codex now housed at the University of Cambridge, containing three different recipes for creating Golems, we read: "All these matters were found in codexes [quntresim] that were brought by the sage R. Reuven, when he came from the land of Ashkenaz. And this [recipe] he found in another codex."<sup>10</sup> Immediately afterward the copyist mentions another book, lent to him by "the Ashkenazi [living] in Venice."<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, it is hard to date these short notes or to identify R. Reuven. I wonder if we may identify him with R. Reuven Tzarfati, discussed later in this chapter. However, it is evident that the material on the Golem brought from Ashkenaz should be added to what was already found in other codexes that may antedate the arrival of his material. In any case, it seems that in Italy, esoteric Ashkenazi material arrived both from Spanish sources, presumably Barcelona as brought by Abulafia, and from Ashkenaz directly. In this context I would like to mention also the existence of a short discussion of combinations of letters and an artificial figure in a late-thirteenth-century

manuscript that reflects some ideas close to R. Moshe Azriel ben Yehudah ha-Darshan, extant in the Angelica Library in Rome.<sup>12</sup>

In an anonymous fragment found in the Parma manuscript, whose affinity to Abulafia's major mystical handbook, *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, is undeniable, we find the following statements:

And the fourth way is built up in a solid manner, as it is designed beforehand in the twenty-four circles and in its proper vocalization, in order to receive the influx of wisdom and [the act of] formation [yetzirah] too. . . . The end of the end<sup>13</sup> aims to create a creature [livro' beriyah]<sup>14</sup> and to recite over each and every thing. And the essential thing is to be acquainted with the pronunciation of its recitation, since each and every letter is to be recited in one breath, as the spirit of man is going out from the person who recites, loudly. And he shall recite in a remote and pure place, where there is no one [else],<sup>15</sup> and he will succeed.<sup>16</sup>

The twenty-four circles are an essential part of the mystical technique in Abulafia's *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*. They are related to recitations of combinations of three units of three letters found in these circles. This recitation is described as loud and emphatic, as if the soul of the reciter is going out. I assume that this detail is related to the view found in Ashkenazi sources, according to which the acts of recitation represent the externalization of human vitality, and its insertion within the brute matter that is vivified by this vitality.<sup>17</sup> In a departure from the earlier recipes, Abulafia seems to be the first to emphasize the importance of solitude for the success of the ceremony.

There are two cardinal themes in the passage above: the reception of wisdom, expressed in philosophical terminology, "the influx of wisdom"; and the making of a creature. Although the nature of the linkage between the reception of the influx and the creative act is not specified, the order of their mention may indicate that wisdom must exist before someone attains to the stage of creating a creature. This sequence occurs also in another description of creating a creature, and the author is Abraham Abulafia himself: in his *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'* Abulafia formulates one of the most innovative interpretations of the meaning of the anthropoid in Jewish mysticism, which will reverberate in other authors:

The deed that is greatest of all deeds is to make souls, [this being] the secret: "And the souls they made in Haran" [Genesis 12:5].<sup>18</sup> God has made man, literally, "in the likeness [bi-demut] of God He made him" [Genesis 5:1]. And this deed is, according to our opinion, the culmination of all good deeds. Therefore, every wise person ought to make souls much more than he ought

to make bodies, since the duty of making bodies is [solely] intended to make souls, and thereby man will imitate his maker, since the prophet said on the issue of the deed of God: “But the spirit and the soul which I have made should faint before me” [Isaiah 57:16]. This is the reason why the wise person, who comprehends something from the intelligibilia, must hand down as a true tradition what he has comprehended in accordance with his strength.<sup>19</sup>

Like his Ashkenazi predecessors, Abulafia exploits the classical interpretation of the verse on Abraham and Sarah’s activity in Haran as a spiritual illumination of the gentiles, understood as creation of their souls. In the biblical and rabbinic texts, the soul, *nefesh*, means a person, thus implying that the two forefathers did not create those persons for the first time but only instructed them. This understanding seems to be present also in the recipe of R. Eleazar of Worms, which was probably known to Abulafia.<sup>20</sup> However, in many other medieval texts the term “soul” stood for the spiritual aspect of man, and this misreading was very helpful for Abulafia: the body of the gentiles was understood as vivified by “creating souls” and instilling them in the body. However, the real meaning of this term in Abulafia’s thought needs elaboration. Subscribing to Aristotelian psychology as formulated by Maimonides, Abulafia assumes that the soul is just the vital and motoric functions of the body, which are congenital and cannot be introduced from outside; the soul is part and parcel of the bodily faculties. For this Kabbalist, as for Maimonides, it is the intellectual dimension of man that matters, and the intellectual forms come from outside, from the Agent Intellect. Either from the emanation of this cosmic Intellect, or from the teaching of a master or from reading a book, the intellectual forms accumulate in the human potential faculty that will become the intellect in *actu*. According to the Maimonidean theory, this intellect is the real man. For Abulafia, as for Maimonides, creating the soul amounts to informing someone with correct thoughts; hence the mention of the influx of wisdom in the quotation above. It is the teacher, not the magician, who creates the real Golem. The teacher induces the highest spiritual faculty in man and thus creates him in a profound sense. In a way, the ancient Abraham, who, according to rabbinic interpretations, converted gentiles to monotheism, becomes a prototype for the medieval Abraham Abulafia: both become propagandists for a spiritual message, which in Abulafia’s thought has also a redemptive dimension. I assume that his instruction of his students amounted, in his opinion, to creating them intellectually. In doing so he resorted to Aristotelian psychology. Abulafia’s dissemination of Kabbalah, discussed in chapter 3, may also be understood from this perspective.



Nevertheless there is an exception to this Aristotelian psychological scenario of inseminating the student with mystical techniques and ideas in order to create his intellect. In his *Sitrei Torah* Abulafia writes, in a rather Neoplatonic tenor: “The soul is a portion of the Divinity, and within it there are 231 gates [Yesh R’al], and it is called the ‘congregation of Israel,’ which collects and gathers into herself the entire community, under its power of intellect, which is called the ‘supernal congregation of Israel,’ the mother of providence, being the cause of the providence, the intermediary between us and God. This is the Torah, the result of the effluence of the twenty-two letters. Know that all the limbs of your body are combined by the combination of the forms of the letters with each other.”<sup>21</sup>

The “congregation of Israel” stands, as in Abulafia’s allegorical understanding of many other Jewish traditional terms, not for concrete entities but for the Agent Intellect, namely the cosmic spiritual power that governs the major processes in the sublunar world, in which all the forms are found.<sup>22</sup> The attainment of an experience of belonging or adhering to that comprehensive entity depends upon combinations of letters, the 231 gates. This is conceived to be the ultimate message of the Torah: the transformation of the human potential intellect into an actual one by combining and reciting letters. This is but another form of defining Jewish particularist terminology in more universal terms; in chapter 6 we saw another example of a sharp redefinition of Judaism in this Kabbalist, when he used the term “Jew” in referring to someone who confesses the divine name.

This is the real “good deed” mentioned in the recipe above: it is true for the individual who does it, and for those who are taught to do it. The combination of letters is conceived also as explaining the emergence of the body, thus creating the thesis that both body and mind, or soul, emerge as the result of combinations of letters. It seems to me that we have here a certain elaboration on the theories related to the creation of the anthropoid by recitations of combinations of letters.

Abulafia does not oppose the creation of an artificial man, as we learn from an anonymous text found in the Parma manuscript mentioned earlier, which I attribute to this Kabbalist. There some form of material creation occurs, although what is important is the apparition of a form, *demut*, rather than the construction of a body.<sup>23</sup> However, he prefers a more spiritualistic understanding of the topic, which he considers to be creative *par excellence*. In the passage quoted above, corporeal procreation is compared to the intellectual one. However, we may infer from his formulation in the passage from *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’* that the creation of an anthropoid that is a moving body, which is soulless, is—spiritually speaking—a meaningless activity; and in any case it is evidently inferior to the creation of the intellect of the mystic himself, by his reception of the intellectual influx as the result of the combination of the letters or the spiritual direction of his

masters. If, nevertheless, the creation of the creature and the appearance of the image are posited at a higher level than the perception of the influx, which is a spiritual creation, it seems that we must understand the vision of the creature and image as basically a spiritual experience.

This reading of Abulafia is fostered by the occurrence of the term *demut* also in the passage from *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, where its meaning is explicitly a spiritual one, since it functions as a synonym to the souls made by Abraham and Sarah. Moreover, Abulafia repeatedly uses this term in order to refer to the imaginative faculty, which is active in the ecstatic experience. Indeed, in his *Sefer ha-'Ot* he presents *demut* not only as an inner force, but also as one connected to the divine name, which is inscribed in the inner constitution of man: "And I looked and I saw there [in the heart] my image [*tzalmi*] and my likeness [*demuti*] moving in two paths, in a vision in the form [*bi-temunat*] of two Tetragrammata [*Terei KW*]." <sup>24</sup> Here the image is conspicuously presented as an object of a vision, whose affinity to the divine name is obvious. In fact, the two Tetragrammata amount to 52, an important figure in Abulafia—following R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo—who interpreted this figure as pointing to *ben*, "son."<sup>25</sup> According to Abulafia, one's real son is the intellectual development that transforms his potential or hylic intellect into an actuated one.<sup>26</sup> According to Abulafia's terminology, the image, *tzelem*, stands for the intellect, while the likeness, *demut*, stands for the imagination, *dimyon*. With this clue in mind, let us consider a passage from Abulafia's *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*:

Whoever pursues the lore handed down to us in accordance with the [divine] Name, in order to use it in operations of every kind for the glory of God, he is sanctifying the Name [of God]. But if he pursues the lore of the name in order to exert influence upon corporeal matters, useful for richness or length of life, or for [birth of] sons and daughters, or for love and hate, or in order to kill an enemy, and if he aims, while doing this, at his own glory or the glory of men or his benefit or theirs, without any true reason and not for the glory of God, and he does it before he has received from God an influx or [divine] spirit by the Tetragrammaton, even if he expresses by his mouth or things in his heart that he recites the name for the glory of God, it is not so, and even if the operation is performed by the recitation of the awesome name, this man is wicked and a sinner, who defiles the name of God.<sup>27</sup>

First and foremost we may discern also here the hierarchy between the possible corporeal attainments and the spiritual ones, presented as superior. The focus here is not the Golem, but the magical art that someone may perform by means of the divine names. Abulafia rejects the magic use of the divine names in favor of using them for a spiritual purpose, as part of the recitation that is a component

of the technique. As in many other cases, Abulafia disagrees here with the Hasidei Ashkenaz masters, from whom he inherited substantial parts of his techniques, integrating them into a larger structure or technique intended to induce an experience and not to benefit anything material. In any case, the sequence of wisdom first and then action is also evident in this passage.

It should be mentioned that recipes concerning the creation of the Golem are extant in the manuscripts that were copied by Menahem ben Benjamin in the 1280s, whose content reflects the involvement of Abulafia in bringing some of the treatises to Italy.<sup>28</sup>

### 3. THE ANONYMOUS *SEFER NER 'ELOHIM*

Let me now discuss the views on the creation of the artificial man in the writings of some authors who were especially close to the theories of Abulafia, and who can be considered as belonging to ecstatic Kabbalah.

An outstanding attempt to counter the magical implications of the discussions in Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin*, where a rabbinic figure, Rava, created a Golem and sent it to his colleague R. Zeira, is to be found in the anonymous treatise *Ner 'Elohim*, written in the circle of Abraham Abulafia. The anonymous Kabbalist envisions the essential activity described by *Sefer Yetzirah* as the combination of letters that culminates in the attainment of prophecy, namely an ecstatic experience. Immediately afterward he writes:

Do not believe the craziness of those who study *Sefer Yetzirah* in order to create a three-year-old calf, since those who strive to do it are themselves calves. And if Rava created a man and he returned to his dust, there is therein a secret, and it is not the plain meaning of the issue. And he who did so on the eve of the day of Sabbath did it for a great secret reason, and the wise shall not be like a simpleton, who does not possess the scales of reason to weigh the truth by them, and the stupid man will believe everything . . . and if the sages said it, he shall know the secret of their saying so, [since] they spoke in parables and enigmas. See those stupid persons who believed the issue of creation on its plain sense, but did not want to believe that if a man creates many souls, lasting forever, it [this spiritual creation] is more elevated than the creation of bodies, generated for an hour and corrupted immediately.<sup>29</sup>

This is one of the most outspoken critiques of the customary understanding of the classical Jewish texts. Material creation, of the world or of a man, is just a cover whose meaning escapes the vulgus. The assumption that the ancient Jewish sages spoke in parables is part of the Maimonidean view accepted by the Abulafian school, which followed an allegorical approach, as we saw in chapter 5. The view that there

were secrets in the legends of the sages was common in medieval Jewish philosophy as well as in theosophical Kabbalah. However, the view that the plain meaning of the ancient texts was problematic was uncommon among the theosophical Kabbalists, whereas the theology of some of the ecstatic Kabbalists, influenced as they were by Maimonides, was more sensitive to the discrepancy between the ancient Jewish magical-mythical theologoumena and medieval philosophical theology.

The anonymous Kabbalist presents corporeal creation as a story that only fools will understand literally, whereas the illuminati are able to penetrate beyond the plain sense of the text to its inner meaning. Presumably this meaning is that the corporeal creation is temporal, this being the intention of the command given to man to return to his dust after he reached R. Zeira, in the *Sanhedrin*. We may assume that this ecstatic Kabbalist interpreted the absence of the power of speech as a symptom of the insignificance of this creature. For him, as for Abulafia in the passage quoted above from *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, only the mental creation is religiously meaningful and everlasting. Therefore, the talmudic legend does not refer, according to this anonymous Kabbalist, to a mystical process<sup>39</sup> but to the inferiority of material activity by comparison with the activity of Abraham, who created "souls." We must separate the anonymous Kabbalist's positive attitude toward the activity described in *Sefer Yetzirah* from his apparently negative attitude toward the plain meaning of the talmudic passage. This passage in *Ner 'Elohim* seems to be the only place in the literature of ecstatic Kabbalah where the corporeal creation of the artificial man is explicitly presented in a stringently disparaging way. However, we can infer from this passage that at the end of the thirteenth century there were persons in Italy or Sicily who believed that the study of *Sefer Yetzirah* was intended to achieve merely corporeal goals. Since this evidence occurs in a polemical context, we must be cautious before accepting it as a clear-cut proof of the purely magical attitude and practice of *Sefer Yetzirah* by the author's contemporaries; however, the existence of other evidence concurring with this text allows an acceptance of this evidence as reliable. Both in Abulafia and in most of his followers, the clash between the talmudic magical attainment and the Maimonidean critique of magic is clear. This clash, to be sure, was evident in many centers of Jewish culture, but it was never so strong as in the writings of those Kabbalists who were close to the techniques used to create the Golem by the Ashkenazi masters, though they took those techniques in a spiritual, esoteric direction. However, I would like to emphasize that language remained a major technique, and this devotion to language is part and parcel of kabbalistic views. Either as part of a magical recipe or of a mystical technique, the prominent presence of linguistic elements should be highlighted as an attempt to maintain the centrality of some earlier traditions in intellectual milieus in which other, more mentally oriented ideals became influential.

## 4. R. NATHAN BEN SA'ADYAH HARAR'S VIEW OF THE GOLEM

In other writings, apparently later ones, Abulafia and some of his followers subscribed to an understanding of a spiritual Golem as the creation of an alter ego that reveals itself to the operator. This experience was induced by the use of techniques identical with those employed in creating the Golem. Thus, a spiritualization of this magical topic as if dealing with a mystical experience took place. While some theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists regarded the *anthropos* as a divinity, and conceived the performance of commandments as a way of repairing the supernal realm, the ecstatic Kabbalists intellectualized the Golem by transforming it into an imaginary appearance that revealed an intellectual content to the mystic, some form of the perfect nature of someone.

In the ecstatic kabbalistic literature there is also another important treatment of the Golem theme. It takes as its starting point a medieval story in which two other figures, ben Sira and Jeremiah, are involved in creating a Golem. This twelfth-century treatment, to which we shall return in section 9 below, was discussed in a long passage by R. Yitzhaq of Acre, which we shall examine in the next section. But first, in order to understand better the claim of R. Yitzhaq, let us consider a passage on the Golem found in the writings of a Kabbalist who certainly influenced R. Yitzhaq. This was R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah Harar, a Kabbalist who flourished in the 1280s in Messina, Sicily, where he studied for some years with Abraham Abulafia before reportedly visiting the land of Israel. R. Yitzhaq of Acre, who in my opinion was his student, quoted him as follows: "And if she [the soul] deserves to cleave to the Divine Intellect, happy is she, since she has returned to her source and root, and she is called, literally, Divine Intellect. And that person is called the Man of God, that is to say, a divine man, creating worlds.<sup>31</sup> Behold, Rava created a man, but did not yet [*ada'ayn*] see fit to give him a speaking soul. And you have to understand that since the soul of man has reached a degree of the supernal degrees, his soul governs everything below this degree, and there is no need to elaborate upon this issue, which is an axiom for every learned person."<sup>32</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that the case of Rava's creation of a man offers an example of a degree that can be transcended by certain persons, the divine men, who are able to rule over everything inferior to this degree, by cleaving to the highest degree. This reading is corroborated by the word "yet," *ada'ayn*, which implies the possibility of surpassing the achievement of the talmudic master. If so, the man of God or the divine man can, at least implicitly, according to this passage, induce a speaking soul in the Golem, provided he has achieved a prior union with the Divine Intellect. A perfect Golem may, therefore, be created by a perfect man who is in a state of perfect mystical union, namely in a state of union with the

Divine Intellect. According to this passage, and following the talmudic discussion in the *Sanhedrin*, the perfect man, like the rabbinic *Tzaddiqim*, is capable of creating not only an anthropoid but also worlds. R. Nathan himself was not interested in magical performance, although he was aware of this aspect of Kabbalah.<sup>33</sup> The paramount importance of the contact between the mystic and the divine intellect is reminiscent of a view of Abraham Abulafia discussed above, that the process of creating a creature is preceded by the reception of the influx of wisdom. In both cases, intellectual perfection is considered a prerequisite to the creative process.

Let me discuss another instance that requires union with the divine as preceding the creation of an artificial man. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, an anonymous commentator on the *Bahir* passage on Rava's creation of the anthropoid in the Talmud wrote: "‘They [the righteous] created the world’: the explanation is that they were creating worlds since [or after] they cleaved to God, namely to the [attribute of] Righteousness, [which is] the foundation of the world."<sup>34</sup> I assume that the Kabbalist understands the powers that the operators achieve as the result of the cleaving of the human righteous to the supernal righteous, the *sefirah* Yesod. This supernal hypostasis, the divine power Yesod, is related to the world, either as its foundation or by dint of its governance.

#### 5. R. YITZHAQ BEN SAMUEL OF ACRE'S PERFECT GOLEM

Let us now examine a vitally important text written by R. Yitzhaq ben Samuel of Acre, one of the most interesting Kabbalists at the turn of the thirteenth century. The following passage reports a discussion that took place in a circle of Kabbalists close to or identical with the ecstatic Kabbalah of Abulafia. R. Yitzhaq of Acre was presumably part, at least for a time, of a group related to this Kabbalah, perhaps in Sicily, and was influenced by some of its views.<sup>35</sup> In this school a greater interest in the tradition of the Golem is discernible than in any other kabbalistic school in the thirteenth century. One of the members of this group was R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah Harar, mentioned above. In what seems to me to be one of the most interesting passages dealing with the creation of the Golem in the entire kabbalistic literature, R. Yitzhaq follows the affinity between human perfection of an intellectual brand, and the creation of a perfect Golem:

Once . . . I, the youngster,<sup>36</sup> was sitting in the company of advanced students, lovers of wisdom. One of them opened his mouth and asked me as follows: "What is the difference between Creation [*Beriy'ah*] and Formation [*Yetzirah*]" I told him: "Why don't you ask also why our ancestor Abraham called his book [by the name] *Yetzirah*, which consists of wondrous deeds, by means of which Rava created a man, and sent it to R. Hiyya<sup>37</sup> and

R. Hosha'yiah. A three-year-old calf was created each time before the beginning of the Sabbath, and they ate it during the day of Sabbath, and Jeremiah and ben Sira created from it a speaking, wise, and intelligent man, as I have explained above,<sup>38</sup> and why did he [Abraham] not call it the *Book of Beri'y'ah*?" And he [the student] was not able [to answer me], and none of them answered me, since they did not know what it [the answer?] was. But I, the young, while I was speaking, saw the correct rationale for it, which is as follows: You already know the secret of the [letter] Yod<sup>39</sup> of the 'ABYA', and the secret of the [letter] Bet.<sup>40</sup> Since the majority of sons of man have no power to endow a speaking soul, a *fortiori* an intellective soul, on the matter shaped in the form of an animal or a beast or a bird or a fish or a reptile, not even in the form of man, [using the capacity of] the *Book of Yetzirah*, but only the animal and appetitive soul, as our sages said: "Rava created a man, and he sent it to R. Zeira, etc.," the book was called *Sefer Yetzirah* but not the *Book of Beri'y'ah*. The reason is that the animal and appetitive soul, which perishes with the death of the body, when the combination of the four elements is undone, stems from the intermediary world, which is the Yod of 'ABYA'. But the secret of the speaking [and] intellective soul is from the supernal world, which is the [letter] Bet of 'ABYA'. By saying the majority [of men] and not all [men] I intended to exclude Jeremiah the prophet, the disciple of Moses our master, peace on him, and ben Sira<sup>41</sup> and all those similar to them, who are very few, who attained a divine perfection, [so as] to create an animal, speaking as an intellective [being]. And if you shall argue that all the prophets . . . were the disciples of Moses, our master, peace on him, so why did you mention Jeremiah in particular as a disciple of Moses? The answer is that you must pursue the Kabbalists so that they may explain to you the secret of the verse "The Lord thy God will raise up to thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like me, to him you shall hearken" [Deuteronomy 18:15], and then you will surely understand my intention. However, concerning Jeremiah and ben Sira alone I have received [a tradition] that they drew downward a speaking soul from the root of Bet of 'ABYA', that is, the 'Alef of 'ABYA', by dint of their great degree and the perfection of their souls being able to [perform] this wondrous deed. The reason is that their degree reached that of Metatron, the Prince of the Face, and San[dalfon].<sup>42</sup>

R. Yitzhaq of Acre presents the act of creation of the Golem in the framework of his peculiar kabbalistic *Weltanschauung*, which consists of the view that there are four worlds. The highest one, that of 'Atzilut, is the world of emanation, referred to by R. Yitzhaq in the first 'A of the 'ABYA' acronym. The next one is the world of



Beriy'ah, namely Creation, which is the world of the Divine Chariot, hinted at by the letter Bet. The third, the world of Yetzirah, meaning Formation, is the world of the angels, and corresponds to the letter Yod. Finally, the world of 'Asiyah, the lower world, is to be understood as the world of making.<sup>43</sup> The discussion of the Golem is focused upon the capacity of some mystics to induce the animal and appetitive soul into matter. This low soul stems from the world of Yetzirah, this being the reason, according to R. Yitzhaq, that Abraham gave his book the name Yetzirah. This possibility of conferring the lower soul is conceived of as undisputable for a fair range of persons, including the talmudic figures. However, we learn from the passage above that a higher spiritual faculty can be induced by the very few, specifically Jeremiah the prophet, ben Sira, and "those similar to them." Consequently, a small elite has access to the higher world, that of Beriy'ah, Creation, being able to draw down the speaking and rational soul. However, the Kabbalist assumes that those few may be able to reach even the world of 'Atzilut, as the words "Bet of 'ABYA", which is the 'Aleph of 'ABYA" imply. If this is so, R. Yitzhaq asserts, then it is possible to create a Golem that includes elements from all of the three highest worlds, and so it also seems reasonable to assume that even elements from the lowest world, 'Asiyah, can supply the matter of the Golem. This passage illustrates the transformation of the magical practice by its reinterpretation within a theosophical structure, which includes also the ten sefirot and their reverberations in the four worlds.

The assumption that man can create by using elements from all four cosmic worlds is tantamount to the divine act of the creation of Adam. In other words, the passage above is an interesting replica of the Genesis discussion of the creation of man, as R. Yitzhaq of Acre understood it. So, for example, we read in his commentary on the kabbalistic secrets included in the Pentateuch, *Mei'rat 'Einayyim*: "The secret of the creation of man [refers to] the speculative soul [*ha-neshamah ha-hakhamah*], which stands forever. And the secret of his formation [refers to] the animal soul, which does not stand forever. . . . And emanation and creation are more spiritual than formation."<sup>44</sup>

This quotation aptly encapsulates important elements from the ecstatic kabbalistic doctrine of the creation of the Golem. Emanation stands for the highest of the worlds; then comes creation, and only then formation: we have here the three higher worlds of the four mentioned in the longer passage from this Kabbalist. The implication of R. Yitzhaq's view is, however, more radical than it appears from a *prima facie* reading. The assumption that the two masters were able to induce the spiritual element from the world of emanation implies that the magically created man has the highest spiritual capacity, which is not to be found, automatically, even in a normally created man. According to some Kabbalists, the



highest soul was an achievement obtainable by a mystical *regimen vitae*, while the conclusion that the man created by Jeremiah and ben Sira was endowed with the highest spiritual soul, characteristic of a mystic, would be too far-reaching. The sublime status of their creation was undeniable in comparison to the views of other authors who rejected the possibility that the Golem could even speak.

What seems to be implicit here is a historiosophy of the creation of the anthropoid: the earlier masters, Jeremiah and his alleged son Sira, created a perfect man, speaking and intelligent, while the later masters created entities that were closer to animals. This decline of generations is part of a wider historiosophy of this Kabbalist, who envisioned the period between late antiquity and the late twelfth century as one during which the Jews did not possess knowledge of the true God. This claim is not original; it is found already in a passage by the early-thirteenth-century Kabbalist R. Ezra of Gerona. In both cases, the emergence of a new theology or theosophy among the Kabbalists invited the observation that before their time, Jewish thinkers ignored the precise details of the true theosophical doctrine.<sup>45</sup> This assertion does not imply that the respective Kabbalists innovated the theosophies they backed. This is certainly the case with the theosophy of ten sefirot as found in the writings of R. Ezra of Gerona, who was preceded by his master R. Yitzhaq the Blind. In my opinion, the situation with R. Yitzhaq of Acre is similar, although the evidence is less explicit. He, too, inherited a theosophical theory that was previously unknown: that of the four cosmic worlds. I assume that he adopted, and perhaps adapted, this theory from sources with which R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah Harar was acquainted. It is in the collection of the kabbalistic traditions compiled by R. Yitzhaq of Acre that the term 'ABYA' occurs for the first time. Since R. Yitzhaq states clearly in the long passage above that he received a tradition related to causing the descent of the sublime soul, I assume that he conceived his discussion as retrieving the understanding of the creation of the Golem as found in the most accomplished Kabbalists: ben Sira and Jeremiah. Indeed, in an interesting discussion dealing with Plato and Jeremiah, R. Yitzhaq uses the expression *Qabbalat Yermiyahu*, the Kabbalah of Jeremiah.<sup>46</sup> Thus we may describe R. Yitzhaq of Acre's approach as combining the views of R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah, who emphasizes the importance of the basically intellectual transformation of the operator as a requirement for magical activity, with the Jeremiah–Ben Sira tradition as found in the *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton*, which we shall deal with in more detail in section 9 below.

This adoption and adaptation opens up new possibilities for reaching the highest realm of the divine through both the mystical and the magical attainments of the Jewish masters: they are capable not only of cleaving to the 'Ein Sof, but also of operating on the intradivine structure by drawing down power from the world of emanation to the lower worlds.

Elsewhere R. Yitzhaq compares the ways in which the anthropoid was created: Rava created it without any utterance, whereas Jeremiah and Ben Sira did it by resorting to an utterance, *Ma'amar*.<sup>47</sup> Here the influence of the anonymous kabbalistic passage discussed above is conspicuous: the interdiction on creating the Golem has been obliterated. The early anonymous discussions about the creation of the Golem, followed by the interdiction on creating it in later discussions, are transformed in Kabbalah into an unambiguously positive attitude toward the operations related to the Golem. R. Yitzhaq's very assumption that a perfect anthropoid can be created implicitly produces the assumption that it is licit to do so. Thus in *'Otzar Hayyim* he writes: "You should know that a certain matter does not lose its plain sense. Indeed, because the true Kabbalist, [acquainted with] matters of the names of the Holy One blessed be He, and their permutations, is able to permute and to revolve in order to invoke so as to [obtain] his will, and is able to combine a name within another name [*Shem ba-Shem*],<sup>48</sup> letter with letter, word with word, he is able to create heaven and earth and their hosts."<sup>49</sup>

I see here a polemic against the negative attitude of the ecstatic Kabbalists, especially the formulation found in the anonymous *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*. In contrast to Abraham Abulafia, whose allegorical thought gravitated to the centrality of the mental experience, R. Yitzhaq rejected the substitution of the plain sense of creating the Golem in favor of another, more sublime approach and offered the most complex theory of creating the Golem in kabbalistic literature.<sup>50</sup> It is plausible that his appropriation of ecstatic Kabbalah, and his reaction against it, has something to do with his possible presence in Sicily.

## 6. R. REUVEN TZARFATI'S GOLEM

The other pertinent discussion of the Golem comes from the fourteenth-century Kabbalist R. Reuven Tzarfati, whose affinities to Abulafia we examined in chapter II. Apparently drawing upon Abulafia's commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, he wrote: "The power of the Ineffable Name [of seventy-two letters] stems from the three verses [Exodus 14:19–21] that originate with [the sefirah] Hesed, [since] out of Hesed the world was created.<sup>51</sup> And whoever is acquainted with them in a complete way has the capability to make a creature and to link the composed [entities]<sup>52</sup> and will comprehend what is worthwhile to be comprehended in *potentia*, and it will turn to be in *actu*, and this is the ultimate perfection of man, who has to be acquainted with this knowledge, like Rava, who created a man. And the other sages of our generation comprehended this divine wisdom."<sup>53</sup>

This passage presents a strong case for regarding the act of creation, rather than contemplation, as the ultimate perfection, although it also implies the importance of actualization of the human mind. In this respect it is reminiscent of

Abulafia's discussion, quoted above, of the best of the deeds in the context of creating souls. Like his predecessor, Tzarfati refers to the divine name of seventy-two letters, extracted from the letters of Exodus 14:19–21, as the instrument of both comprehension and creation.<sup>54</sup> Especially significant for our purposes is the assumption that unknown medieval sages, contemporaries of Tzarfati, possessed the technique of creating a creature. This observation may have something to do with Tzarfati's French background, indicated by his very name (in Hebrew, "France" is *Tzarfat*), or perhaps with the interest in the concept of the Golem in Italy. It may also have to do with the fact that Italian manuscripts are the most important sources of Golem recipes.

## 7. YOHANAN ALEMANNI'S GOLEMS: ECLECTICISM AND SYNTHESIS

Although the early medieval material dealing with the Golem was committed to writing and composed at least in part in Germany and France, Jews in Italy played a crucial role in preserving and disseminating it in Renaissance Florentine circles. Among them Yohanan Alemanno played an important role. He was well acquainted with a variety of discussions and recipes dealing with artificial anthropoids. He drew on the ecstatic kabbalistic texts, on the Hasidei Ashkenaz recipes, on R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi's commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*,<sup>55</sup> and presumably was also acquainted with the metallic anthropoid, or at least the book that preserved it, as we shall see in the next chapter. His approach to these materials was creative, involving interpretation of one form of thought by means of another. This combining of traditions, unparalleled in any other known author, betrays a deep interest in the question of creation of man in the Renaissance period.

Let me start with a passage that portrays the forefather Abraham as an autodidact.<sup>56</sup> He initially learned for himself the details included in *Sefer Yetzirah*, and then achieved the power to create:

he combined [the letters] with one another, and it [the combination] succeeded [in creating] wondrous [things], and out of them [he created] wondrous [things], and he created new creatures [*beriy'ot hadashot*], which [possess] an animal soul, like the ancient sages, who created a calf and a likeness of a man [*demut 'Adam*], though he did not possess the power of speech, and he understood that by these letters all the beings were created.<sup>57</sup>

This is an important example of learning while doing. The emphasis on the term *demut* in this context is reminiscent of the occurrence of this term in some of Abulafia's related discussions, quoted above. It was only after this stage of creating "mute things" that Abraham advanced to an ecstatic experience when he contemplated the supernal world of the *sefirot*, which was revealed to him in a

“sudden vision,” *hashqafah pit’omit*.<sup>58</sup> However, this gradation of the creative moment as preceding the highest mystical experience seems to be a later development in Alemanno’s thought. Earlier, in his *Collectanea*, he wrote:

The Account of Creation is the knowledge of the essences of things, wherein he [the operator] knows the forms [themselves], not only their actions, since knowledge of the actions is the wisdom of nature, which is known by speculation, and knowledge of the essences is the wisdom of prophecy,<sup>59</sup> achieved by the sudden vision. And from it, the knowledge of the roots of the corruptible things is derived wherein he knows the intermingling of those roots<sup>60</sup> in the sphere of the intellect, also named the sphere of the letters [*galgal ha-’otiyot*],<sup>61</sup> and he will know how to combine them according to the lore of *Sefer Yetzirah*, so that from this knowledge he will know how to create a creature as Abbaei and Rava did,<sup>62</sup> that they created a three-year-old calf, as it is said that he<sup>63</sup> was acquainted with the combination of the letters by which the world was created.<sup>64</sup>

Here, knowledge is conceived of not as part of a natural rational development but as the result of revelation of the roots of the whole cosmos, a revelation that allows the practical application of this knowledge in the creation of beings. Alemanno attributes the creative possibilities inherent in the letters not only to their magical powers, the details of which are transmitted from one sage to another, but also to the ascent of the mystic to a prophetic vision that enables him to reach the archetypes appointed over the lower world and to use this knowledge.<sup>65</sup> Mysticism is now presented as the stage preceding the apex of human achievement, which is the magical act, in a way reminiscent of the passage by Tzarfati—an author with whom Alemanno was acquainted—discussed above. Such a conception is reminiscent of other descriptions of *devequt*, or adherence to the divine, as a stage before the creation of the Golem.<sup>66</sup> This vision of the creative application of the highest knowledge is entirely consonant with other statements by Alemanno, in which magic is envisioned as the peak of human development. Thus, when dealing with the moment of revelation, Alemanno combines elements found in ecstatic Kabbalah, especially the concept of a “science of prophecy” and the “sphere of letters,” with an Avicennan and Ibn Tufayl’s theory of “sudden vision,” a form of intuition that is sometimes also called prophecy, and with a concept of nature. In any case, the revolving of the cosmic sphere of letters, which are conceived of as creative, is reminiscent of Ibn Tufayl’s theory about the emergence of men out of the movements of the spheres, a view that also had an impact on Marsilio Ficino.<sup>67</sup>

The eclectic nature of this enterprise is clear: Alemanno brings together several different traditions dealing with spiritual attainments, while adding to them the

more magical aspect of creating something in external nature, the anthropoid. In his syntheses of the ecstatic and magical traditions, Alemanno is reminiscent of Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, his Florentine contemporaries.<sup>68</sup>

A third discussion of creation via a combination of letters elucidates the passages above as well as another important issue in Renaissance magic. In the same *Collectanea* Alemanno quotes the recipe for creating a Golem by R. Eleazar of Worms, with a few small variations. This text has been printed and compared with its various Ashkenazi sources in a recent article by Klaus Herrmann.<sup>69</sup> Here is the part of Alemanno's version that is pertinent to our discussion:

In [Eleazar's] Commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* I found: Whoever studies *Sefer Yetzirah* shall clothe himself with pure [clothes], "and you shall have white clothes always" [Ecclesiastes 9:8]. It is forbidden to study [*Sefer Yetzirah*] alone, but [it is necessary to study] together with two or three, as it is written: "And the souls they made in Haran" [Genesis 12:5]. He shall take virgin soil [*qarqa' betulah*]<sup>70</sup> from a place in the mountains where no one has plowed. And he shall knead<sup>71</sup> the dust with living water, and he shall make a body [Golem], and he shall begin to permute the alphabets of 221 gates or of 231 gates with each limb separately with the corresponding letter mentioned in the book [*Sefer Yetzirah*]. And the alphabets will be permuted at the beginning, and afterward he shall permute with the vowel A A A A A. And always, the letter of the [divine] name with them. . . . Afterward, he shall appoint B and likewise C and each limb with the letter appointed to it. And he shall do it when he is pure. These are the 221 gates. . . . You shall do so with all the four letters of the Tetragrammaton, and in the case of each and every letter you recite you shall combine it, and in the case of each of the letters that you shall combine with the letter of the divine name, you shall have 36 syllables, because each of the two letters has 36 syllables,<sup>72</sup> and in such a manner the form [*ha-tzurah*] will be created swiftly. And if you want to return it to its dust you shall invert the alphabet, and it [the form] will become dust, and you shall also return the divine name, and you shall combine each and every letter with it as I have shown.<sup>73</sup>

In this combination of R. Eleazar of Worms's recipe from his *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*, and the same author's discussion in *Sefer ha-Shem*, Alemanno preserves an unknown variant of an important Ashkenazi discussion. The presence of these texts in Florence affords one more example of Alemanno's concern with the recipes for creating a Golem. He does not comment upon the content of this passage. But immediately after it he copies an excerpt from a book attributed to Claudius Ptolemaeus, known as *Centiloquium*, translated variously in Hebrew as

*Sefer ha-Peri* (Book of the Fruit) or *Me'ah Dibburim* (the Hundred Dicta), along with the Arabic commentary of Ali ibn Ragel. The spurious quotation from “Ptolemaeus” runs as follows: “The forms in the world of composition obey the forms of the spheres. This is why the masters of the talismans draw the forms of the spheres in order to receive the emanation of the stars in the object they intend to operate with.”<sup>74</sup> The Arab commentator explains, in the text copied by Alemanno, that there is a close correspondence between the supernal and the terrestrial forms, and this is the reason why the “masters of the idols<sup>75</sup> brought [down] the efflux of the stars in those spherical forms and their ascent at the Orient, and at that time they ornamented their forms with stones, etc.”<sup>76</sup> In the margin of this Hermetic explanation of magic as connected to the efflux of the stars into idols, namely the statues prepared according to the special features of a certain star, Alemanno notes: “This is the secret of the world of the letters;<sup>77</sup> they are forms and seals [namely talismans] [made in order] to collect the supernal and spiritual emanation as the seals collect the emanations of the stars.”<sup>78</sup>

As against the astral type of magic, based upon material constructions of idols or statues that correspond to the upper spherical world or planets—a form of *magia naturalis*—Alemanno proposes here a Jewish version of magic based upon the assumption that there is a world higher than the celestial spheres and angels, consisting of the forms of the creatures and conceived as the “world of the letters,” or according to other parallels a “world of names,” while here below it is possible to collect the emanation expanding from that reified linguistic world by using Hebrew letters or names that function as seals and talismans. Since this view is transcribed immediately after the passage on the Golem by R. Eleazar of Worms, which deals with creation by combinations of letters, and since the term “world of the letters” is closely related to the “sphere of the letters” mentioned above in another text from Alemanno’s *Collectanea*, dealing with creation by means of *Sefer Yetzirah*, it is plausible to assume that Alemanno understood the text of the Ashkenazi author in terms of the astral magic described on the same page. Such a view was not completely new in Judaism; the Golem had already been interpreted in astral terms in the anonymous early-thirteenth-century *Sefer ha-Hayyim*,<sup>79</sup> and it occurs elsewhere in Alemanno, as we shall see in the next chapter. The medieval technique of creating a Golem is understood here as the Jewish counterpart of talismanic-astral magic and as being higher than it. In other words, Alemanno understood the linguistic techniques for creating the Golem as an instrument for collecting the supernal efflux, after it has been created by means of the letters conceived as talismanic entities. This positive attitude toward a combination of letters and astromagic is also apparent in Alemanno’s discussions of other matters. So, for example, in another passage in his *Collectanea*, quoted in chapter 14,

he describes the activity of Moses as fully consonant with the attraction of the astral efflux here below by means of linguistic techniques.<sup>80</sup> Immediately after this passage Alemanno asserts that Moses even “prepared the Golden Calf. The intention was only to cause the spiritual forces to descend by means of a form of a body.”<sup>81</sup> There can be little doubt that here there is a deliberate juxtaposition of the Golem, an anthropoid created by combinations of letters, and the astromagical passage by Pseudo-Ptolemaeus quoted immediately afterward, dealing with the use of combinations of letters as a means of capturing the higher emanation. If we are correct about the significance of the juxtaposition of the two discussions of the anthropoid—the first created as a regular linguistic Golem, but implicitly understood according to the astral magic of Pseudo-Ptolemaeus’s *Centiloquium*, and the explicit creation of the statue and the calf for similar reasons—then we may understand Alemanno as implicitly proposing a combination of the classical Ashkenazi technique with the Hermetic type of magic using astral concepts. We should also note that the anthropoid and the calf, created in the same manner, though discussed in different places in Alemanno’s *Collectanea*, are reminiscent of the creation of the man and the calf in the famous passage from the talmudic tract *Sanhedrin*.

However, the situation is much more complicated. On the same page of the *Collectanea*, Alemanno also quotes the passage from Abraham Abulafia’s *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*, discussed above, where he dealt with the good deeds as creating new souls. Thus, the Ashkenazi corporeal Golem and its astromagical interpretation are found on the very same page with a long quotation from a book presenting an ecstatic interpretation of the technique of creating a Golem. This collocation is a clear sign of a special interest in the topic relatively early in Alemanno’s career. That this interest persisted seems clear from the presence of another, more naturalistic interpretation in his late untitled treatise, a passage dealt with in the next chapter.

Let me now address another interesting discussion found in Alemanno’s commentary on the Song of Songs, *Hesheq Shlomo*:

“Wisdom, understanding and knowledge, and every operation [*melakh’ah*]<sup>82</sup> [were required] to combine the letters by means of which the world was created, as the dictum of our sages, blessed be their memory, says: “Bezalel was acquainted with the letters by the means of whom the world was created.”<sup>83</sup> This is a secret belonging to the secrets of prophecy<sup>84</sup> that has no equal, because by its means it is possible for the wise investigator to comprehend the quality of the material combination and the measures of the elements that enter this mixture and are blended in such a manner that it is possible to take from the four elements parts that are measured in the same



proportion as in the human semen. And he will provide to it a measured heat, similar to the heat provided by the womb of a woman, so that it is possible to give birth to a man without [the need of] the male semen and the blood of the female, and without the [intervention of] masculinity and femininity. If this were [achieved] it would be considered by the investigators a wondrous wisdom, just as it would be considered wondrous by physicians, who are experts in the combination of opposite medicines. . . . So is the thing according to the prophet who knows the plain meaning of the spiritual forces [*peshutei ha-kohot ha-ruhaniyyot*],<sup>85</sup> which correspond to the level of the elements in relationship to the forms that dwell upon matters; [the prophet] called them letters,<sup>86</sup> as it is explained in *Sefer Yetzirah*, and he knew afterward how to permute them and combine them with each other, in such a manner that an animal form or a human one would emerge in *actu*. This is a wondrous wisdom, unsurpassed, from which all the mighty wonders come. And in this [context] they said that Rava created a three-year-old calf, and he created a man when he studied *Sefer Yetzirah*,<sup>87</sup> and this is [the meaning of] the account of creation,<sup>88</sup> of which our sages said<sup>89</sup> that it is forbidden to discuss the account of creation with [fewer] than two [persons].<sup>90</sup>

The combinations of the letters as discussed in *Sefer Yetzirah* are presented here as the key to understanding three apparently diverse issues: the creation of the world by means of letters, the attainment of prophecy, and the creation of the form of an artificial calf or a man. In presenting the three issues alongside one another, Alemanno integrates Abulafia's ecstatic-prophetic Kabbalah into a more naturalistic scheme. All three issues share a common requirement for success: the precise knowledge of the science of combination, be it of letters or of elements.

Even more sublime than the quasi-alchemical process that uses material elements<sup>91</sup> is the prophetic creation of the form of man through knowledge of the combination of the spiritual, namely astral, forces. When properly combined, the astral powers that have been caused to descend serve as the material substratum for the emergence of the form of a calf or of a man. Here the creation of the anthropoid rests on the view that Hebrew letters function as talismanic signs that can be combined in such a way as to collect the supernal influx in a specific order that generates the emergence of a desired form. This account of the creation of the Golem does not mention dust; it seems that the substratum of the form is provided by the crystallization of the specific combination of the astral forces, upon which a form, apparently originating from the suprastral world, descends, an approach that I propose to call *magia supranaturalis*. Thus the influx coming from both the supernal letters, astral forces and suprastral ones—sefirotic, for



example—constitutes the anthropoid. Other passages in Alemanno make it clear that the suprastral plane is the realm of the sefirot, which are conceived of as the forms of the letters, which function as their matter, exactly as in the passage above.<sup>92</sup> Alemanno's sequence, starting with mental operations and ending with *mel'akhah*, "operation," makes clear that mental engagement precedes the concrete result.

Thus, interest in the Golem, visible in recipes and discussions in the first manuscripts in Rome, remained stable and alive until late-fifteenth-century Florence in Alemanno and other figures.

#### 8. LUDOVICO LAZZARELLI'S *CRATER HERMETIS*

One of Alemanno's contemporaries, Ludovico Lazzarelli, a minor figure active in northern Italy who was interested in Judaism and Kabbalah,<sup>93</sup> discusses one of the recipes concerning the Golem in a passage that has attracted the attention of many scholars. The passage appears in his epistle *Crater Hermetis*, written in the early 1490s and recently translated by Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Ruud M. Bouthoorn. The bracketed letters denote paragraphs in the Latin original.

[a] Likewise the wise men of the Hebrews say that Enoch in a book he wrote makes mention of the higher and the lower king. And the one who unites them both will daily harvest the gladness from above. [b] And in my opinion that is exactly the heart of this mystery. Abraham too in his book entitled *Sepher Izira*—that is to say, the Book of Formation—teaches that this is how new men are formed: one must go to a desolate mountain, where no beasts of burden graze, and from its midst one must dig up Adama, that is to say red and virginal earth; then a man must be formed from it, and letters must be ritually inscribed on his limbs. [c] In my interpretation this must be understood as follows: the desolate mountains are the godly sages who are desolate because they are despised by the multitude, according to the words of wisdom: "We fools have esteemed their lives insanity."<sup>94</sup>

As Gershom Scholem noticed, this passage reflects the influence on Lazzarelli of R. Eleazar of Worms's recipe in his *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, some of the details mentioned in paragraph [b] above are closer to the recipe of R. Eleazar than to any other recipes I know of: "Abraham, too, in his book titled *Sepher Izira*—that is to say, the Book of Formation—teaches that this is how new men are formed: one must go to a desolate mountain, where no beasts of burden graze, and from its midst one must dig up Adama, that is to say red<sup>96</sup> and virginal earth, then a man must be formed from it, and letters must be ritually inscribed on his limbs."<sup>97</sup> Mountains, white clothes, and virgin earth are found together only in

the two versions of R. Eleazar's recipe. However, there is also a possibility that another, yet unknown, probably Ashkenazi, version of this recipe generated Lazzarelli's text. Lazzarelli mistook a certain commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* for *Sefer Yetzirah* itself. This mistaking of the commentary for the original book has confused scholars who have attempted to locate the passage in the known versions of *Sefer Yetzirah*, naturally to no avail.

More interesting, however, are not the details of the recipe, but the allegorical interpretations offered by the Christian author in paragraph [c]. Lazzarelli interprets the cattle as the corporeal senses, and the red earth, identical with Adam, as the intellect of the sage, whom the vulgus avoids and despises. From the mind of the sages a new man is formed by recitations of words in a certain fashion. R. Eleazar's two versions have nothing to do with a mental creation as part of the process mentioned in his recipe. Even more interesting is the fact that this creation is compared to the divine creation, which generates by the mystic utterance of words, which are made up of letters understood as elements, again a view reminiscent of *Sefer Yetzirah*, where the phrase *'otiyot yesod* occurs.<sup>98</sup> Thus, the combinations of letters are conceived as the material substratum of the divine creation, whereas the material creation is vivified by the recitation of the sage. Amazingly, Lazzarelli presents the whole process as the new, spiritual birth of Ferdinand, the king of Aragon. This spiritualization of the understanding of the Golem creation seems to be influenced by Yohanan Alemanno's implicit interpretation of the recipe of R. Eleazar of Worms, using the magical astral magic on one hand, and of the spiritual understanding of the significance of the creation of the Golem as it appears in ecstatic Kabbalah. As mentioned above, on the folio preceding Alemanno's quotation of the Ashkenazi recipe, he copied another long passage from Abulafia's *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*.<sup>99</sup> As seen above, in this book of Abulafia's the Kabbalist understood the real creation as the generation of the intellect, just as Lazzarelli understood the regeneration of the king in spiritual rather than material terms. Moreover, it seems that the inducing of the spiritual elements into the king has some affinity to the attraction of the spiritual elements by astral magic in Alemanno's understanding of the Golem as presented above.

Last but not least: in paragraph [a], as an introduction to the creation rite, Lazzarelli mentions Enoch as dealing with the union between the supernal and the inferior worlds. Thus he attributes the process explicitly to Jewish masters. Such a view is found in several medieval sources connected to astromagic, some of them known by Alemanno.<sup>100</sup> Especially important is a quotation from the *Book of the Religions of the Prophets*, a work already lost by Alemanno's time but with passages preserved in R. Samuel ibn Zarza's book *Meqor Hayyim*, which was certainly known by Alemanno.<sup>101</sup> Let me present one of them, which is related to ecstatic Kabbalah.

In a small *Collectanea* of kabbalistic traditions gathered together by R. Yitzhaq of Acre from material belonging to his teacher R. Nathan, quite plausibly R. Nathan ben Sa'adyah Harar, we find the following statement: "Out of his great love for Enoch the son of Jared, He [God] disclosed to him secrets of the supernal and the inferior [realms], and taught him the secret of the connection between them, which is the secret of sacrifices in all its details."<sup>102</sup>

The affinity between sacrifices and Enoch is shared also by the astromagical traditions mentioned above, and it may indicate that the Enoch/sacrifice connection was known in Sicily at the end of the thirteenth century before it became widespread and more explicit in texts written in Spain in the fourteenth century. The connection between the worlds, at least in the Spanish texts, is clearly astromagical. However, to my best knowledge, only in R. Nathan's passage do we have the motif of connecting supernal and inferior worlds, as in Lazzarelli's epistle. However, although the source of these traditions is Arabic, the idea of linking by means of the sacrifice may also have something to do with a kabbalistic etymology of *qorban*, "sacrifice," as stemming from QRB, "to bring close." There is an affinity between the ideal of bringing close the higher and the lower, and the Hermetic view according to which the temple gods are close to humans because the latter built the temples.<sup>103</sup>

This astromagical text reflects some themes related to Enoch as they appear later in Lazzarelli's text. However, what is even more interesting is that in his untitled treatise Alemanno refers to Enoch in the context of creating an artificial man, in a passage that contains astromagical elements, as we shall see in more detail in the next chapter. Therefore, the existence of an association in Alemanno's text between Enoch on the one hand and the creation of an artificial man on the other hand, which is extraordinarily rare, may point to a significant nexus between Lazzarelli and Alemanno.

This proposal, which emphasizes the Hermetic or astromagical dimension of Lazzarelli's passage against the background of some medieval Jewish-Arabic sources, may promote a better understanding of Lazzarelli's text. There can be no doubt that he was acquainted with R. Eleazar's recipe. Nor can there be a reasonable doubt that the ecstatic kabbalistic understanding of the Golem in the context of making souls refers to creating an intellect. Recently Hanegraaff accepted the plausibility of these two affinities, in line with my own suggestion some years ago.<sup>104</sup> However, he does not see an astromagical aspect in the discussion in *Crater Hermetis*. His analysis, which is predicated on the importance of Abulafia's passage from *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, does not engage the content of paragraph [a] or explain the role played by Enoch in the context in which he is mentioned. However, if we accept an astromagical aspect in Lazzarelli, we may understand the meaning

of the connection between the higher and lower worlds in Lazzarelli's passage: the creation of souls, which in fact is an intellectual matter, is part of bringing down the divine powers by means of reciting letters. In fact, Abulafia had already written—both in the quotation above from *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'* and in his later book *'Or ha-Sekhel*—that recitation might be related to bringing down supernal influx upon the reciter.<sup>105</sup> This view was also shared by other Kabbalists,<sup>106</sup> and there is no reason to assume that Alemanno did not understand Abulafia's more intellectualist vision of the "creation" and "good deed" in such a way. Last but not least: Abulafia's Kabbalah sometimes assumes that the supernal intellectual influx that descends upon or is attracted by the Kabbalist may possess him.<sup>107</sup> Although I cannot pass a final judgment about Lazzarelli's adoption of a view that was so widespread in Alemanno, an astromagical understanding of the recitations of letters in the Italian occultist seems to me plausible.

#### 9. A GOLEM LEGEND, ITS SOURCES, AND SOME OF ITS RENAISSANCE REPERCUSSIONS

Another important discussion of the creation of the Golem, perhaps the most influential one, is a late midrash copied in several early kabbalistic manuscripts.<sup>108</sup> It appears that Italian codexes preserve the earliest extant manuscripts.<sup>109</sup> The text had a wide influence on several discussions of the Golem. One of them is an anonymous kabbalistic *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton*, written sometime in the mid-thirteenth-century in Spain.<sup>110</sup> This is the longest discussion of the Golem in kabbalistic literature, and it attracted the attention of both Jewish Kabbalists and some early Christian ones. As we saw above, this book also influenced R. Yitzhaq of Acre.

This [divine] name is unknown and incomprehensible except by thought, and it is not comprehended except by five things, which are *Tiqqun* and *Tzeruf* and *Ma'amar* and *Mikhlol* and *Heshbon*. *Tiqqun* [namely proper order] is to know the name from its beginning to its end, as it is written. *Tzeruf* is when you combine it with the twenty-two alphabets of *Sefer Yetzirah*; and you shall know how to make from each and every combination [*Tzeruf*] a *Ma'amar* and afterward to combine [*Likhlol*] all of them together, which is the meaning of *Mikhlol*. Afterward [you] have to know the calculation [*Heshbon*] so as not to err when you join the letters and their vowels. All these things are comprised in *Sefer Yetzirah*, and this is the reason why the sages opened [*Sefer Yetzirah*] with LB,<sup>111</sup> and it is the essence of the written Torah, as we said B of *Bereshit*, L of *Israel*.<sup>112</sup> And on this issue the Torah said: "Man cannot know its order,"<sup>113</sup> nor is it found in the earth of living" [Job 28:13]. On this the sages, blessed be their memory,

said: "Would man know its order, he could create worlds like the Holy, blessed be He."<sup>114</sup> We found in *Sefer ha-Bittahon*, written by R. Yehudah [ben Bateirah],<sup>115</sup> that Jeremiah, blessed be his memory, was studying *Sefer Yetzirah* alone. A voice came out and said to him: "Take a companion." He went to Sira his son,<sup>116</sup> and they studied [together] for three years in order to accomplish what was written: "Then they that feared the Lord spoke one with the other" [Malachi 3:16]. At the end of the three years, when they wanted to combine the alphabets, according to the combination [Tzeruf], the Mikhlol, and the Ma'amar, a man was created, and on his forehead was written YHVH 'Elohim 'Emmet [Jeremiah 10:10: YHVH is the true God]. In the hand of that man there was a knife, and he erased the 'e of the word 'Emmet and left MeT. Jeremiah rent his garment and said to him: "Why did you erase the 'e of 'Emmet?" He answered him: "I will tell you a parable: An architect built many houses, cities, and squares, but no one was allowed to copy his art and compete with him in knowledge and skill until two men persuaded him. Then he taught them the secret of his art, and they knew how to do everything in the right way. When they learned his secret and his abilities, they began to anger him with words. Finally they broke with him and became architects like him, except that what he charged a thaler for, they did for six groats. When people noticed this, they ceased to honor the architect and came to them and honored them and gave them commissions when they needed something built. So God has made you in his image, likeness, and form. Now, when you have created a man like Him, the people will say that there is no God in the world but you." Jeremiah told him: "If [this is] so, how can we make it right?" He answered them: "Write the letters backward on the dust that was thrown, by the intention of your heart, and do not think about the way of [its] honor or of its order [Tiqquno], but do all this backward." And they also did so, and that man came into being before their eyes, dust and ashes. Then Jeremiah said: "Indeed it is worthwhile to study these matters for the sake of knowing the power and the dynamis of the creator of the world, but not in order to [actually] do [them], but you shall study them in order to comprehend and teach."<sup>117</sup>

There is a clear discrepancy between Abulafia's approach as described above and the one described in this kabbalistic treatise written in Spain. Following other rabbinic trends, including the late midrashic source, this passage emphasizes the importance of joint study and practice, whereas Abulafia emphasized the importance of solitude. Many of the few manuscripts that contain this passage are of Italian origin; one of them belonged to a certain Nissim al-Faraj, presumably a mid-Quattrocento figure active in Sicily, who was the father of Flavius Mithridates.<sup>118</sup>

This is one of the Hebrew texts identified recently by Franco Bacchelli as having been translated into Italian in the circle of Pico della Mirandola; Bacchelli has also printed specimens from the translation.<sup>119</sup> Scholem pointed out that Johann Reuchlin transmitted part of it in his *De Arte Cabalistica*,<sup>120</sup> most probably from a manuscript whose content is very similar to that of the New York codex that serves as our source.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, though presumably written in Spain, the *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton* was preserved, translated, and quoted in Italy. Where R. Yitzhaq of Acre studied this text it is impossible to decide.

This tradition as transmitted in the *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton* not only differs from the Ashkenazi techniques described elsewhere in its account, which use ancient figures; it also does not address either the topic of creating a figure out of dust or the need for purity. There are two major sources for these differences. One is a Jewish tradition that encouraged the study of *Sefer Yetzirah*; the second is probably a tradition found in one of the most famous and voluminous Arabic treatises on magic, Abu Bakhr ibn 'Ali al-Wahshiyya's *Nabbatean Agriculture*, in the form in which it was preserved in a thirteenth-century Hebrew translation of a ninth- or tenth-century source:

Shem Tov ibn Falaquera wrote that he found, written in the *Book of Agriculture*, that [a] in very ancient times one of the sorcerers made a man; he mentioned in his book how he made it and what he did so that his generation was complete. However, he acknowledged that the man he had made was not of the human species and could not talk<sup>122</sup> or think.<sup>123</sup> However, his limbs did come out perfect in their form. [The sorcerer] was astonished that [the man he had made] could not talk or think and that he took no nutrition, and [yet] survived for a year. They said that the king prevented [the sorcerer] from engaging in making [another] man or animal, in order not to corrupt the faith of the masses; rather, he should strive to perform some actions that would benefit the masses. He also mentioned that the man he had made would open and close his eyes; according to them it is possible to do this. . . . [b] They said that we see that a rat was born from the mud, which decayed until it became black from the sun's shining on it; [the rat] became an animal capable of motion. They said that just as it was possible with animals, so is it possible with humans. It is also written there that there is a mountain in China<sup>124</sup> on which is generated the form of a man with all of his limbs, and that people from those countries take the dust of that mountain and soak it in a hidden place until it becomes moist, [so that] the form of a living man, capable of motion, is generated from it. However, thereafter he survives for only a day or even less.<sup>125</sup>

This passage was preserved in a Hebrew translation by the mid-fourteenth-century Castilian thinker R. Shmuel ibn Zarza, who quoted a now lost *Commentary on the Bible* by a mid-thirteenth-century Jewish philosopher active in Castile, R. Shem Tov ben Joseph ibn Falaquera. The latter, an expert in Arabic philosophy, both Neo-Aristotelian and Neoplatonic, preserved much material that was written originally in Arabic, and because of his translations into Hebrew some of them survived.<sup>126</sup> More notable is his translation of lengthy excerpts from the Arabic original of R. Solomon ibn Gabirol's important Neoplatonic book *The Fountain of Life*, and some excerpts from the *Theology of Aristotle*, a compendium of Plotinian passages extant in Arabic. The fact that this philosopher preserved the passage above is in itself interesting, since this topic did not draw the attention of Spanish Kabbalists and even less of Jewish philosophers. In any case, Falaquera's broad range of intellectual interests is reminiscent of Alemanno's, one of his great admirers in the late fifteenth century. His writing one of the first commentaries on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* did not preclude his quotation of this magical passage.

Ibn Zarza, as we shall see in the next chapter, was acquainted also with another text stemming from an Arabic source, as preserved by the Portuguese Jewish writer R. David Yom Tov ibn Billya, dealing with a metallic anthropoid. However, Ibn Wahshiyya's *Nabbatean Agriculture*, from which Falaquera, as cited by Ibn Zarza, quoted, is extant and available in print and demonstrates that Falaquera's summary is reliable.<sup>127</sup> In the tenth century Ibn Wahshiyyah made an Arabic translation of presumably a much earlier book on magic, perhaps written originally in Greek. The Arabic work was available to at least two medieval writers: Maimonides in Egypt<sup>128</sup> and Pseudo-Ibn Ezra in Spain, about whose astromagical *Sefer ha-'Atzamim* little is yet known.<sup>129</sup> Thus, the story above reflects traditions that cannot be dated later than the ninth century. For the purpose of our discussion, a comparison between some of the details reflected in the passage above and some Golem traditions may be illuminating. Their similarities demonstrate that there is good reason to assume that at least some of the characteristics of the various Golem recipes antedate their formulations as found in European Jewish writers in the Middle Ages, and allow a much more complex description of the history of the Golem ideas.

Let me start with the fact that according to *Nabbatean Agriculture* the story about the creation of the artificial man is an ancient one. Although the precise identity and the location of the story are not given in the Arabic version, I see no reason to deny the notion that the story may indeed be related to an ancient tradition. Such traditions are attested by the story about the notorious late-antique Simon Magus<sup>130</sup> and the talmudic story about the creation of the anthropoid attributed to the



'Amora Rava. When we compare these two stories with Ibn Wahshiyya's passage, it is conspicuous that the Arabic book preserves a version closer to the talmudic than to the Gnostic type of anthropoid attributed to Simon Magus. One notable similarity is the mention of the creation of both an anthropoid and an animal. As I have pointed out elsewhere, there are also affinities between some Golem traditions and a story preserved in one of the ancient Roman fables of Phaedrus, especially in the occurrence of the term 'Emmet, namely Truth.<sup>131</sup>

The correspondence between the story of the builders in the late midrash and the *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton* on the one hand, and Ibn Wahshiyyah's passage on the other hand may be explained in two ways: either the Arabic text influenced the late midrash, in which case the event took place in the East, or both the late midrash and Ibn Wahshiyyah drew upon a common earlier source that must be dated not later than the ninth century in the East. It is difficult to decide which of the two explanations is more plausible, but if we accept the first one, it seems that R. Yehudah Barceloni and thus his town, Barcelona, may constitute the starting point, or at least a site that mediated material for all the versions that include the story about the architect and the builders.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, Barceloni's views were known in the Ashkenazi regions, and it may be that the late midrash in its fuller version reached Ashkenazi masters via him. Indeed, the thirteenth-century *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* attributed to R. Sa'adyah Gaon explicitly quotes part of the passage above as a "midrash."<sup>133</sup> Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that R. Abraham Abulafia brought the oldest dated manuscript that includes this treatise from Barcelona to Rome.<sup>134</sup>

In any case, any serious attempt to attribute to early-thirteenth-century Ashkenazi figures the invention of the techniques related to the Golem should take into consideration the traditions found in the late midrash.<sup>135</sup> Assuming as I do that the speech of the Golem is an addition in the late midrash and in the *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton*, since it is different from, indeed even contradicted by, the earlier part of these texts, we shall be more acutely aware that the voice of the Golem sharply differs in its content from that of God, as the latter explicitly permits the study of the book if it is done in a correct manner. Moreover, God's statement in the *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton* not only allows for study but also does not criticize magical attainments except with regard to the creation of the artificial man. God is not afraid of the creation of a Golem and its implications for the status of religion; the Golem, however, fears those negative implications. We may assume that these implications stem not from the talmudic sources or from an interpretation of *Sefer Yetzirah*, but from the Arabic discussion or its source, and were subsequently grafted onto the Jewish discussions, where there was much less resistance to this practice. R. Yitzhaq of Acre, in the long



passage analyzed above, circumvented the negative implications found in the *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton*, although he was obviously aware of the existence of the text, and returned to a more positive approach, and even amplified it beyond any of the earlier sources.

The most controversial part of the late midrashic text and of the *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton* is the quotation from Jeremiah 10:10: YHWH 'Elohim 'Emmet. What do those words mean in the Bible and in the medieval passage? In the biblical context all three words are to be read as divine names, which means that 'Emmet, namely Truth, is a third divine name.<sup>136</sup> Scholem interpreted the late midrashic and the kabbalistic play on 'Emmet/Met in a dramatic way, by translating the former as "God is truth" and the latter as "God is dead," thus transforming the kabbalistic and late midrashic sources into precursors of Nietzsche's famous formula. He assumed that on the forehead of the Golem a sentence was found with God as the subject and Met as a verbal form.<sup>137</sup> However, what is evident is that the Golem is dying, in some form of suicide, and thus the message has to do with the creature and not with its Creator. From the way in which the reaction of the two human operators is formulated, it is not the death of God that is transpiring; in my opinion, based upon the content of the parable, the first operator, which is a metonym for God, does not die when the artisans are substituting him or are imagined to substitute him; he is just neglected. The death is, quite explicitly, relevant just for the creature. In favor of the nominal reading of the two formulas let me adduce the insight of my friend Mr. Maurice Finkelson from Paris, who remarked in a conversation that the erasure of 'aleph from 'Emmet generates another word, namely "dead," in a manner reminiscent of the Greek word *aletheia*, which also means "truth," and which is constructed from two components: *letheia*, meaning "oblivion," and an alpha privative, which functions as a negation of the word to which it is attached. I wonder whether this affinity may point to a Greek background, in which case we may add a Greek or Hellenistic background to a topic that had an important place in Arabic magical literature, was adopted in the late midrash, integrated by Kabbalists, and then translated into Italian in the late-fifteenth-century Florentine milieu.<sup>138</sup> In any case it is quite plausible that some of the sources of the *Nabbatean Agriculture* are Hellenistic and close to Hermetic literature.

To return for a moment to a point we have already made above: we see in the late midrash and in the *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton* a conflation of two different approaches toward the permission to create an artificial anthropoid. One probably stems from early Jewish sources and deals with the combinations of letters over the form created out of dust and water, which is a ceremony to be performed by two or three persons and is recommendable in principle. The other expresses a negative attitude toward the artificial creation and is inspired by the

Arabic story or its sources: God favors the creation of the anthropoid; it is the Golem that is, paradoxically, against it. The early Ashkenazi sources do not reflect the Golem's fears, although these fears entered some later Ashkenazi or French Jewish sources and then Kabbalah. Lazzarelli's discussion is therefore indebted to a version that does not include reluctance toward creation of the artificial man, although the Italian translation by Pier Leone da Spoleto of the *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton* reflects a more complex synthesis between two diverging trends.

Let me comment briefly on when the complex of issues related to the story in the *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton* might have appeared. Although this work was written in the Middle Ages, the passage quoted from it has many early parallels, including the cult of the royal images in ancient Mesopotamia.<sup>139</sup> Those statues were conceived of as a living manifestation of the divinity, "empowered to act and speak on a ruler's behalf."<sup>140</sup> This context enables us to make better sense of the occurrence of the divine names on the Golem's forehead.<sup>141</sup> The Golem, like Adam, is in a certain way a representative of God, since both are created in His image.<sup>142</sup>

What is the main change that took place in the long journey that the Golem passages underwent from their inception until their arrival in Florence? In my opinion, it is the strong synthesis achieved between the linguistic magic based on Hebrew letters and divine names on the one hand, and natural magic on the other hand, sometimes coupled with astromagic, in which the linguistic elements are secondary to or absent from the process of fabrication. Such a development could hardly have taken place in Spain, where the ecstatic Kabbalah of Abulafia had been rejected. It is only in Italy, after the arrival of the Spanish discussions written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries on *generatio equivoca*, and of metallic astromagic, that the different traditions concerning the anthropoid could be grafted upon the Ashkenazi esoterica and upon discussions in ecstatic Kabbalah, resulting in reinterpretation as recitations of formulas that acted as talismanic entities. However, these syntheses are far from exhausting the complexity of the process of cultural transmission, since only in fifteenth-century Italy did the views arriving from abroad and integrated into broader schemes by a Jewish author meet also the Hermetic and Neoplatonic material translated by Ficino, thus producing a much greater synthesis, as in the case of the writings of Lazzarelli and others. The archeology of knowledge, as illustrated in the foregoing analysis of the Golem recipes, demonstrates that the cultural developments that arrived in Florence in the late fifteenth century represent much older layers of human thought that diversified themselves in different cultures and were reintegrated in more comprehensive syntheses generated by the concept of the *prisca theologia*. As we have seen in this

chapter, and shall see as well in the following discussions, the presence of a variety of cultures in the Florentine speculative Renaissance counteracts a unilateral, monolithic account of this phenomenon as a simple revival of ancient Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman cultures. The concerns of Jewish figures such as Alemanno, and of Christians such as Ficino, Giovanni Pico, Lazzarelli, and Reuchlin, with the concepts of creating an artificial man reflect the emphasis on the creative powers attributed to humans in this period. The real *homo faber* became the person who was capable of creating an anthropoid.

It should, however, be remembered that not only Jewish culture, transmitted in a specific non-European language, but also some aspects of Arabic culture contributed substantially to some aspects of the Florentine Renaissance, either through translations into Hebrew, Latin, and Italian, or indirectly, as in the case of the *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton*, which mediated the view of the Nabbatean Agriculture, or through oral communications of Jewish masters active in Florence.<sup>143</sup> All these forms of transmission are evident in the cases of authors mentioned above, although they have little to do with the “rise of humanism” in the earlier decades of the fifteenth century in Florence.

Let us turn now to another example of a magical theme, namely the creation of an astromagical anthropoid, as described in passages written in fourteenth-century Portugal and in Castile, which made their way to Florence and eventually into one of Ficino’s books.

# 2I

## ASTROMAGICAL PNEUMATIC ANTHROPOIDS FROM MEDIEVAL SPAIN TO RENAISSANCE ITALY

### 1. INTRODUCTION

As we have seen, magic was part of many forms of Judaism for centuries despite attempts to attenuate it, especially in the philosophically oriented circle leaning to Maimonides' thought. Jewish magic in the first stages of Jewish mysticism, the *Heikhalot* literature and its reverberations, including its repercussions in southern Italy from the tenth to twelfth centuries, and in Ashkenazi esoteric literatures emphasized mainly the linguistic aspects of magic, namely letters, names, seals, prayers, and incantations. These strategies were conceived of as extensions of the divine creative speech and of the divine names. Other forms of magic, which were based upon a certain type of order in reality and which used nonlinguistic aspects

of reality to operate, were less widely accepted in Judaism, although they, too, found a place in some medieval schools of Jewish thought. They were conceived of as being much more in conflict than in concert with what many Jewish thinkers regarded as “authentic” Judaism, which was much less concerned with nature and natural process and much more with Hebrew language and authoritative texts. As is well known since Yehezkel Kaufmann’s fascinating phenomenology of biblical thought, biblical Judaism introduced a concept of divinity that was radically divorced from any dependence upon nature and fate.<sup>1</sup> The divine will was conceived of as the dominant source of events in nature and history, and this will was expressed in the biblical account that combined divine history with an elaborate system of rites. Thus any recourse to the science of nature, in the form of astronomy, physics, or medicine, especially as they appeared in medieval Jewish texts, implied the existence of an independent kind of causality not explicated in the religious canon.

Although some elements of these sciences came ultimately from Babylonia, most of them stemmed from Greece. The latter, especially the philosophers, were fascinated by the sense of cosmos, or the ordered universe. Such a trend conflicted, at least implicitly, with the voluntarist image of God as the ruler of the universe. After the destruction of the second Temple, the mixture of Jewish and Greek elements became formative in the spiritual development of both Judaism and Europe. The biblical mind and the Greek one, in their different metamorphoses in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, encountered, confronted, but mostly fertilized each other in numerous ways over centuries. One of the less known of these encounters and syntheses is the vast domain of magic. In ancient Judaism, the status of magic was even more precarious than the status of the sciences; in the biblical form of Judaism, though less so in the postbiblical ones, magic was not only forbidden but also regarded as a potential danger to monotheism. The ambivalence to any kind of intermediaries, manifest in earliest Jewish writings, especially the canonical ones, was especially strong when it came to attributing an important role to demonic powers. However, even the use of nondemonic powers was regarded with suspicion: attempts to learn about the future, for example, assumed the existence of preordered processes, which would impinge upon the unrestrained sovereignty of the divine will. Magic, especially the astral form, might be instrumental in introducing the idea of fixed order or nature, which allowed for the existence of an order that had no explicit religious significance.

The secrets of nature were first mentioned in nonrabbinic Jewish sources, which also contained apocalyptic and mystical theologoumena.<sup>2</sup> The biblical form of religiosity centered on the divine will remained dominant in the two main bodies of early medieval Jewish literature, the Talmud and the midrash, and in

some versions of medieval Jewish mysticism.<sup>3</sup> Though acknowledging the efficacy of magic *de facto*, Jews, especially the elite, condemned it *de jure*. As a result, although there can be no doubt about the important role this lore and its practices played in popular circles, its function in most of the religious literatures produced before the twelfth century was relatively small.<sup>4</sup> Rarely do surviving Jewish magical treatises composed long before the twelfth century contain references to more-comprehensive schemes, theological or cosmological. However, we begin to discern the influence of Hermetic texts in the writings of two important Jewish thinkers of the twelfth century, R. Abraham ibn Ezra and R. Yehudah ha-Levi; both most likely drew upon Arabic sources. Ibn Ezra's introduction of astrology is vital for the understanding of the role of some components of Jewish ritual. For example, he interpreted the tabernacle as if it were a huge talisman<sup>5</sup> that served to attract the astral influx.<sup>6</sup> The theory of the descent of the pneumata of the astral bodies began to appear in the thirteenth century and even more in the fourteenth century in some Spanish writings, a fact that was fateful for the understanding of central issues in subsequent Jewish kinds of mysticism. However, the writings of Abraham ibn Ezra, and later those of the numerous commentators on his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*,<sup>7</sup> important as they were, were only one avenue of the penetration of Arabic-Hermetic magic into medieval Judaism. Beyond their interest in reinterpreting Judaism in a more comprehensive way, some Jewish thinkers also adopted views that were not strictly concerned with interpretation. Different from the common, popular magic, the Hermetic amalgam of astrology and magic functioned also as a systematic worldview for the elite. More than a century before Marsilio Ficino's adoption of Neoplatonic and Hermetic magic as an ideal,<sup>8</sup> some Spanish Jewish authors, especially those following Ibn Ezra's thought and, under their influence, also some Jewish figures in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, offered interesting syntheses between Jewish forms of monotheism and astral magic.<sup>9</sup>

This increasingly mechanized conception of the universe contributed to a novel understanding of Judaism, which became much more explicit and comprehensive with and after the resurgence of interest in magic among some members of the Spanish Jewish elite in the fourteenth century. This phenomenon has received little attention from modern scholars, with the exception of Dov Schwartz. Although some magical views absorbed in this period changed the course of Jewish mysticism<sup>10</sup> and also influenced Christian Renaissance magic,<sup>11</sup> we need more studies on the translations into Hebrew of Arabic magical texts, such as the famous *Picatrix*,<sup>12</sup> and on most of the magically oriented writings by Spanish Jews. Some decades after the renascence of the occult arts in Alfonso Sabio's Toledo, in which Jewish translators played a significant role, the impact of the Arabic occult

sciences became even more visible in Hebrew written literature.<sup>13</sup> Although it would be very difficult to detect any such influence on Hebrew sources concerned with “original” Jewish magic during the lifetime of Alfonso, focused as they were on a linguistic approach—for example, the use of divine names—by the middle of the fourteenth century the situation had changed substantially. In the various parts of the Zoharic literature, edited and perhaps even composed in its entirety in Castile in the last decades of the thirteenth century, Hermetic astromagic was not viewed in a positive light. Although some traces of astral magic can be detected in the *Zohar*, by and large the theosophical-theurgical scheme of this classic of Jewish mysticism was alien to Hermetic astral magic. Only after the temporary waning of the influence of this corpus of mystical writings, at the beginning of the second third of the fourteenth century, was the way opened to the penetration of different kinds of magic. This somewhat late reaction to, and perhaps even absorption of, the concern with the occult sciences that had been revived in Toledo in the thirteenth century is an issue that still requires close scrutiny. Given the preliminary state of research on medieval Jewish magic, we know only little about the reasons for the change of attitude in what I assume were only some elite circles. It seems plausible to assume that these circles in Castile were acquainted with Arabic literature and inclined, in some instances, to a philosophical interpretation of Kabbalah. These circles represent a modest, but still recognizable, contribution to the transmission of the magical lore from North Africa and the Orient to the Occident.<sup>14</sup> The odd fact is that although the Jews of Castile had been under Christian rule since the end of the thirteenth century, the reorientation to a philosophical-magical understanding of magical texts was influenced primarily by Islamic, and only marginally by Christian, sources. The two stages of development of elite magic in Spain, first in the circle of Alfonso, and then in Castile among Jews, should be seen as adumbrating and even having a certain impact on the Florentine syncretism during the late fifteenth century.

## 2. A PSEUDEPIGRAPHIC EPISTLE

The following translation and analysis of an epistle from an unknown person to an unknown recipient helps to illuminate the introduction of Arabic magic into some elite circles of Spanish Jews in the fourteenth century. Although Moritz Steinschneider, the dean of bibliographical studies, provided a learned description of one of the manuscripts preserving this document more than 150 years ago, it failed to attract the attention of most later scholars.<sup>15</sup> The epistle is extant in three Hebrew manuscripts.<sup>16</sup> The longest version, Ms. Budapest, Kaufmann 246, folios 1a–b, has not been previously identified by scholars; Ms. London, Montefiore 431, folios 7b–8a,<sup>17</sup> and Ms. Munich, Hebr. 214, folios 33a–b,<sup>18</sup> preserve shorter,

almost identical, versions. Because each of the three manuscripts contributes details that are missing in the other two, I offer a collated version, including elements from all the manuscripts, in the following translation:

This epistle was sent by the sage——<sup>19</sup> to an honest disciple of his, and this is its version. And I, Isaac the translator, have found it in an old book, a precise one and full of sciences. You, the distinguished disciple, should know that out of my abiding love [for you] and my will and intention to help you extensively, I shall let you know a wondrous thing, which I have extracted from the great book of [Claudius] Ptolemaeus,<sup>20</sup> and I have experimented with it. Calculate the hour of the conjunction of Saturn with Mercury.<sup>21</sup> The conjunction shall be in Aquarius, the domicile of Saturn, which is also one of the [watery] signs.<sup>22</sup> It has the form [tzurah]<sup>23</sup> of a man.<sup>24</sup> Gemini will be ascendant in the domicile of Mercury, and it is also an auspicious sign. It will be on a Wednesday, which is the day of Mercury, [in] the third hour, which is the hour of Saturn. Jupiter will be in aspect to them in trine or in sextile and so also the Moon, or the sixth aspect. Mars will be in the descendant<sup>25</sup> house, combusted by the Sun. It will be in aspect at the place of the conjunction, and Venus in one of the cardinal points to the west [of the Sun]; and the Sun will be together with them. And the Moon<sup>26</sup> will be in aspect to them in trine or in sextile. And if you will remember what you have studied with me concerning the science of astronomy,<sup>27</sup> you will know that the situation of this configuration [tzurah] will occur again only in ninety years, seven months, eleven days, five hours, forty-nine minutes, and twenty-two seconds. And in the hour of the conjunction, when the stars are in this configuration [tzurah],<sup>28</sup> you shall have ready whatever [kind of] metal you like, and the metal should be molten. And a mold [defus]<sup>29</sup> of a beautiful<sup>30</sup> man should be in front of you. You shall have an astrolabe [keli]<sup>31</sup> in your hand, or any [other] instrument that is constructed to determine the hour.<sup>32</sup> When you arrive at the part of the hour of the conjunction, you should pour the metal into the mold. And a form of a man will emerge [therefrom], full of a very subtle pneuma [ruhaniyyut],<sup>33</sup> made up of wisdom and prophecy<sup>34</sup> and a favorable zodiacal sign and grace and honor. It [the form] will possess the faculty of speech, [and] will foretell all the future [things], when you ask it about them. And if it stands in front of you in the moment of your concentration [hitbodedkha be-hokhmah]<sup>35</sup> on [a matter of] science [hokhmah]<sup>36</sup> and on any other issue, nothing will remain doubtful and unknown [to you]. And if you make it small so that you are able to hold it whenever you like, you will lack no honor, rank, and richness, and people and kings will respect



and honor you. And I shall disclose to you the reason of it. Mercury has power over wisdom, understanding, and prophecy. And Saturn [has] the power over the knowledge of secrets<sup>37</sup> and how to bear the burden<sup>38</sup> of study, and it is a powerful star. From their conjunction [of Saturn and Mercury] swiftness of understanding, great memory, much forbearance, and the power of prophecy are [all] strengthened in him [the operator]. And because of the fact that Jupiter is distinguished and noble, it has power over love of justice, [and] over wealth and property and honor, which should be enumerated with them in the trine [aspect], which is the aspect of love. So also the planet of Moon is helpful toward the good, but the sextile aspect will suffice for you, because its goodness is not like that of Jupiter. And because Mars is a nefarious planet, [causing] bloodshed, it is irascible; we have put it with them such that it is combusted so that no power will remain in it. And because the Sun has also some part in the sciences, and it leads the whole body, it will be with them [the limbs?] and in the front of them in the third or sixth aspect, which are favorable aspects. Also the Sun possesses the power of dominion and honor, rank, and glory. And because Venus is appointed upon delights, we have placed it in its great power. Also Gemini, which is in the ascendant, is the zodiacal sign of prophecy and the sages, and so also Aquarius, which is strong, too. Therefore, if you make the form when the position[s] of the planets [are] such [namely the configuration described above], all the favorable powers I have mentioned will emanate upon you. And let no one know it besides you, the distinguished disciple, and may God lead you on the path of good knowledge. And know that I have made such a one [a form] when I went out of the cave where I had hidden and concentrated [hitbodadeti].<sup>39</sup> This was the reason for my grandeur and my majesty and the greatness of my wisdom and the fear of the people toward me. I advise you to do it, and you will be successful. And always carry it, but discreetly. Amen Amen Sellah.

Before undertaking a conceptual analysis of this text, let me dwell upon its attributions to various persons. The name Isaac at the beginning of the epistle is hardly identifiable; even the term “translator” is not the single obvious translation of the Hebrew *ma’atiq*, which in medieval Hebrew may also stand for “copyist.” Steinschneider and Scholem dealt with the epistle in the context of pseudepigraphic texts attributed to Maimonides. However, not only is this explicit attribution wrong historically—it is clear that the text was not written by the historical Maimonides—but also there is no substantial reason to assume that the unknown author of the epistle ever intended to attribute it to the philosopher. In Ms. Munich,

the epistle starts with a sentence that indicates that this is an addition to material that has reached him earlier and that he is quoting it here because it deals with a wondrous issue. The epistle follows a spurious epistle on alchemy, attributed to Maimonides. It is plausible that the copyist of the Munich manuscript transcribed the epistle not because of its attribution to Maimonides, but because of the affinity of alchemy with the content of our epistle. However, the fact that the epistle was found as an appendix to an epistle attributed to Maimonides contributed to the attribution of the epistle to the philosopher in the London Ms. Montefiore, where the name of the sage mentioned in the opening sentence has been erased and a modern hand—perhaps Steinschneider’s or that of someone influenced by him—has added the name Maimonides. Influenced partly by Steinschneider’s description, partly by Hirschfeld’s catalogue, Scholem accepted this attribution.<sup>40</sup> However, it seems that there is no medieval evidence whatever that medieval authors intended to attribute it to Maimonides.

### 3. ANALYSIS OF THE EPISTLE AND PARALLELS IN IBN BILLYA AND IBN ZARZA

Although we have no direct information about the identity of the translator of the epistle into Hebrew or about the circle where this text was influential, we should at least attempt to locate the circle where views on astromagic are known to have been discussed. Some Jewish thinkers, such as Abraham ibn Ezra, were already acquainted with similar views in the twelfth century. However, no precise parallel to this text is known before the fourteenth century. Only in a quotation found in R. Samuel ibn Zarza’s *Meqor Hayyim*, written in 1368,<sup>41</sup> from a work by R. David ibn Billya, an early-fourteenth-century Portuguese intellectual who was interested in astral magic, in philosophy, and marginally also in Kabbalah, do we find what seems to me to be an almost identical description of the horoscope concerning the form. Ibn Billya, probably in his lost *Commentary on the Torah*,<sup>42</sup> is quoted as follows:

It is written in the *Book of Talismans* that when Zuhā<sup>43</sup> is conjoint with ‘Utarid<sup>44</sup> in the [house of] Aquarius, which has the form of a man, and the ascendant is Gemini, the domicile of Mercury; and it is a Wednesday, which is the day of Mercury, in their hour, which is the domicile of Saturn, and it [Saturn] aspects it in trine, which is the aspect of love, and likewise the Moon; and Mars is combusted by the Sun, and it aspects the place of conjunction; and Venus is in one of the cardinal points, to the west and in its great power; and the Sun is with them, ahead of them [in] sextile or trine aspect; when, at the time of conjunction, the stars have this configuration, pour whatever metal you wish into a mold of a handsome man. The form

that is composed of them [the stars of this configuration] shall succeed [in all that concern] rank and honor, and it will foretell the future.<sup>45</sup>

From the philological point of view, the similarity between this quotation and the text translated above is sufficient to conclude that the two texts are closely related, although it is also obvious that they are not identical. Indeed it would not be too far-fetched to advance the hypothesis that the *Book of Talismans* is identical with the great book by Ptolemaeus mentioned above. In any case there can be no doubt that the principle guiding the two texts is identical: the divinatory role of the metallic form, fabricated at a particular astrological moment, related to the special influences of the various planets.

Let me now attempt to describe the epistle above from a conceptual point of view. It obviously stems from an Arabic source, and the fact that a translator named Isaac is mentioned in the introductory remarks may be connected to the translations from Syriac to Arabic by the famous Isaac ibn Hunain. Although the ultimate source may indeed be Greek, as the mention of a book by Ptolemaeus indicates, the Spanish Jews had access to the Arabic forms of higher magic. From my own inspection of the various divinatory uses of anthropoid forms, it seems that the text is unique. It shares some elements with the Hermetic tradition on the creation of gods by attracting them into statues, especially the divinatory role of the statues and their metallic nature, but in the original Hermetic texts the statues are fabricated from a variety of materials and not from only one type of metal.<sup>46</sup> Also the astrological nature of the rite of fabrication is not so central in the Hermetic texts, whereas in our instance it seems to be a crucial issue. This text also differs from the focus on the revelatory nature of the encounter with the perfect nature in *Picatrix*, a work otherwise very similar to some elements in our text.<sup>47</sup> Here it is not his alter ego that someone encounters, but a pneumatic form that emerges from the metal poured into the mold. Moreover, the pagan incantations related to this astromagical praxis in *Picatrix* do not occur in our epistle. The idea of a pneumatic form standing in front of someone else in order to disclose secrets to him is found in thirteenth-century kabbalistic texts, but no astrological or alchemical factor is mentioned in those texts.<sup>48</sup> Though close also to the technique of creation of an anthropoid that has some prophetic powers in the writings of Jabir ibn Hayyan, our document does not indicate any acquaintance with the theory of balances, so characteristic of the theory of this famous alchemist.<sup>49</sup> Let me attempt therefore to focus upon the specific content of this document.

The indifference to the nature of the metal to be used points to a very limited alchemical concern in the underlying conception of the document; the dominant concern is obviously the astrological one. What is vital for the success of the enterprise is

not so much the material involved but its precise timing. The assumption of the text is that in the given moment the pneumata emanated by the seven planets are of such a nature that they will ensure the emergence of a perfect pneumatic entity, able to convey spiritual secrets to the magician. The metal is necessary only in order to serve as the substratum for the collection of the influxes, whereas the factor that enables the capture of the supernal forces is the shape, the beautiful form that is visited by the pneumatic being. In contrast to the Hermetic practice in *Asclepius*, the introduction of the pneumatic element does not activate the metallic body in order to vivify it; the text does not allude to the movement of the metallic body. Rather, the shape attracts the *pneuma* but then leaves the metallic construct in order to reveal itself to the magician. Perhaps the metal served as a kind of mirror, which reflected the pneumata generated by the planets. We can also ask: What is the reason for using the metal at all? I assume that it fulfills the function of creating an anthropoid body in a certain given moment. As we know from other astrological texts, the moment of birth or of the conception of the infant is closely related to his nature, since this moment is characterized by a specific constellation. Thus, in the moment when the above-mentioned configuration of planets is achieved, by pouring the metal someone creates the body, which is spiritually characterized by the relationship between the planets and stars in that moment. The author seems to distinguish between two forms: a greater one, concerned with spiritual achievements such as the revelation of sciences, solving doubtful issues, or revealing others; and a smaller one, which seems to be more related to external attainments, such as glory and honor. The former is implicitly conceived as a rare type of experience, apparently occurring only once in more than ninety years, while the latter is much more available.

From the astrological point of view, the form stands under the aegis of Saturn. Not only is this planet mentioned at the very beginning of the description of the horoscope, but also some of its particular proprieties become important as the description evolves. So, for example, the concepts of disclosing secrets and of prophecy are obviously central to the function of the form, especially the great form, and they are qualities related to Saturn, although, in the instance of prophecy, the form is also related to Mercury. This seems to be the reason for the basic configuration of planets: the conjunction of Mercury and Saturn. It seems plausible also to relate the saturnine nature of the whole enterprise to the fact that the author performed this magical ritual after he emerged from his cave: in medieval astrology, the cave, like prophecy, is considered to be under the aegis of Saturn.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4. THE METALLIC ANTHROPOID AND THE GOLEM

The epistle quoted above might be considered by someone who is superficially acquainted with medieval Jewish literature to be exceptional; given its strong

magical and astrological elements, the very fact of its translation and quotation in a supercommentary on the Bible may seem bizarre. However, we must take a different view when we take into account a broader development in the elite literature of Jews in the Middle Ages. The whole range of this development cannot be surveyed here, but we must note the presence of some very similar discussions in related Jewish texts.<sup>51</sup> Let me therefore compare the practice described in the epistle with what seem to be the closest Jewish phenomena, which constitute the context of the quotation from Ibn Billya and prompted the quotation of part of our text.

As we have seen, the building of an anthropoid figure, the famous Golem, was well known in Jewish magic since the early Middle Ages. The activation of one or more minerals was involved in the creation of an active entity in a human shape. However, most of the Golem recipes contain no astrological element, with the notable exception of the anonymous early-thirteenth-century *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, where the presence of some astrological terms demonstrates a synthesis of the earlier, nonastrological version of magic with an astrological one.<sup>52</sup> However, even in this case the creature is constructed out of dust, as in the classical forms of Jewish prescription to create a Golem, without any reference to metallurgical details. Moreover, the issue of foretelling future issues or disclosing secrets does not occur in *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, which implies, however, the existence and practice of some other types of magic. Although this type of anthropoid also seems to be related to the impact of Hermetic knowledge, at least partially influenced by Abraham ibn Ezra's thought, we should in no way attempt to explain the occurrence of the above practice in Spain as related to the northern French tract. They represent two independent cases of penetration of alien magical elements into Jewish European culture. Despite their interest in the magical implications of the metallic anthropoid, to be described below, the Sephardic authors did not even invoke the concept of the Golem, which was more consonant with the mystical theology of the Ashkenazi authors.<sup>53</sup> However, another discussion started by Abraham ibn Ezra warrants closer scrutiny. In his *Commentary on the Pentateuch* at Genesis 31:19 the exegete interprets the nature of the devices called teraphim, stolen by Rachel from Laban, as having human forms;<sup>54</sup> he does this in the context of his assumption, mentioned as the view of "others," that there is in "the power of the sages of the zodiacal signs [*hakhmei ha-mazalot*] to make a form [*tzurah*] in certain hours, [and] that form will speak."<sup>55</sup> Immediately following this statement is the proposal, which to Ibn Ezra seems a plausible one, that the form was prepared to "receive the power of the superior [beings]." An alternative explanation of the teraphim, offered in the same place by Ibn Ezra, is that they were "an instrument of copper [namely an astrolabe, intended to] know the divisions of the hours." Whereas one explanation indicates the astrological and divinatory aspects of the

teraphim without mentioning any metal, the other mentions a metal, but without any explicit divinatory implications. It seems that the two views are not necessarily presented as alternatives and that we may combine them so as to construe a metal-lurgical anthropoid prepared in order to collect the supernal influxes and to predict the future. This interpretation represents a drastic departure from the traditional magical interpretation of the teraphim, as made from the skull of a murdered person, which is prepared in a very meticulous way in order to foretell future things. This view, occurring in the midrash, was strongly condemned by the Jewish masters as implying idolatry.<sup>56</sup> However, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, another illustrious Provençal philosopher and exegete, R. Levi ben Gershon, known among Jews by the acronym Ralbag, and among Christians as Gersonides or Leo Hebraeus, introduced a concept of the teraphim that was even closer to the view of the “form” above. When commenting on the same passage in Genesis, he asserts that “the teraphim are a form [having the configuration] of a man, made out of metals, in certain specific hours known to them, by means of whom the imaginative power of the magician will be aroused, and he will imagine that this form speaks. In reality, however, this is [only] one of the acts of imagination.”<sup>57</sup>

According to a parallel discussion by the same author, the form tells the future because the thought of the magician is concentrated on the question of the future.<sup>58</sup> Although R. Levi ben Gershon’s view of the teraphim is much closer to the one in our epistle, it still misses an important element, which is already found in Ibn Ezra’s presentation of the topic: the crucial assumption that the metallic figure captures the supernal powers. Deeply influenced by Aristotelian epistemology, Ibn Ezra did not believe in the efficacy of this magical practice to obtain information from outside human consciousness, but he assumed that such a practice was sufficient to activate the human imagination so as to enhance or augment its activity.<sup>59</sup> A contemporary of Leo Hebraeus, R. Abraham ben Hananel of Esquira,<sup>60</sup> a rather neglected figure of the early-fourteenth-century Soria in Castile, who later left for the land of Israel, attests to the acquaintance of the Spanish Jews with Arabic magic. In his voluminous kabbalistic treatise *Yesod ‘Olam*, we learn that “just as there are places that are a source of gems or of various kinds of gold but they disappear when the elements have decayed, so also prophecy sometimes dwells upon the prophet and at other times disappears. And because the masters of the talismans knew this order, related to the demonic powers, they mixed two metals<sup>61</sup> or more at a certain [specific] time and in a certain place and [by] special persons, and they prepared a certain form [tzurah] and offered certain incenses until a pneumatic power dwelled within the form, and this is called by them *’intizal al-ruhaniyat*.”<sup>62</sup>

This is one of the earliest adoptions of the central terminology of astromagic in a full-fledged kabbalistic book. As in our epistle, a metallic-astral rite causes the

descent of the pneuma. Moreover, in both cases this process is related to the concept of prophecy. The Kabbalist considers this a possible, though forbidden, practice, similar to that employed by the biblical creators of the Golden Calf.<sup>63</sup> However, it is a natural event, similar to the creation of the gems and gold by the astral influence, wherever the elements are able to absorb such an influx.

However, it was apparently David ibn Billya who first connected a fragment of our text, probably based upon an Arabic original, to Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the teraphim. Ibn Zarza's quotation from Ibn Billya does not stop with the passage quoted above. In the final part, which follows immediately, we have: "This is the reason they were called teraphim, from the verse 'For the teraphim have spoken vanity' [Zechariah 10:2], because they are the cause of man's departure from true happiness and his deviation toward imaginary happiness. This is why any worship of anyone besides God was forbidden, because unless there is fear of this [namely idolatry], there is no reason to prevent someone from [experiencing] its goodness. The witnesses to this [fact] are the cherubim,<sup>64</sup> and the illuminated ones will contemplate it [the significance of the cherubim]."<sup>65</sup> Thus Ibn Billya hinted that the technique involving the teraphim was the one described in our text, but that it was interdicted because there was a danger of idolatry or astrolatry. Moreover, the Portuguese Ibn Billya alluded to the affinity between the teraphim and the cherubim, among the most sacrosanct figures in ancient Judaism, which dwelled in the Holy of Holies. Ibn Billya intended this bold, metallic interpretation of the cherubim to be understood in a positive way; though expressing the idea rather obliquely, he seemed to imply that the two cherubim that were part of the Holy of Holies, and the divine presence that dwelled between them and revealed herself therefrom, performed their role as a receptacle of the Shekhinah because of their anthropoid and metallic nature.<sup>66</sup> However, immediately after quoting this text Ibn Zarza protests, exhorting God to safeguard someone from such a view. Even a thinker like Ibn Zarza, who was audacious enough on other issues that he was considered almost a heretic,<sup>67</sup> would not express explicit agreement with such a far-reaching interpretation of some aspects of Judaism.

There is no doubt that at least since the age of Ibn Ezra, the idea of a metallic figure that could foretell the future was related to astrology; it was accepted as an accurate interpretation of the episode of the teraphim in Genesis 31, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively, but the concept beyond it continued to attract the curiosity of Jewish thinkers up to the Renaissance period. Ibn Ezra's audacity in introducing novel astrological concepts into biblical exegesis prepared the ground for the later use of even more explicit and bold concepts that may clarify the hints of the twelfth-century exegete. As part of the continuous expansion of Judaism, magical and astrological views—though not purely astrolatric ones—



rejected by the canonical texts in ancient period, were absorbed not only as part of an attempt to understand the Bible but also as part of the development of more comprehensive worldviews. Important segments of this process of expansion survive in manuscripts, as some of the texts presented above attest, and the reliance on printed material alone for a reconstruction of certain interpretations of Judaism may be misleading. In the discussion above we have seen one example of the fertilization of Jewish thought by alien sources. The Greek idea of divination as related to the pneumata reached medieval Judaism through Arabic intermediaries, and the Jewish authors used these to interpret the rather obscure practice of divination related to the teraphim.

It is relevant here to emphasize the similarity between medieval Jewish scholars' Greek-oriented interpretation of the ancient theologoumenon of the teraphim and the more widespread medieval Jewish interpretation of the ancient Jewish concept of prophecy by means of the Aristotelian epistemology as understood by medieval Muslim thinkers. In both cases, the absorption of Greek thought in its Muslim medieval metamorphoses fertilized various Jewish understandings of the scriptures, and in both cases the Greek material contributed to the transformation of a nonnaturalistic, nonsystematic religion into a much more naturalistic one. In the cases of the Maimonidean interpretation of prophecy and in Ibn Ezra's understanding of the teraphim, psychological or astrological types of order intruded into the ancient Jewish vision of religion, which was based upon the preponderance of the divine will as decisive for understanding the most important forms of religious events.

##### 5. YOHANAN ALEMANNO'S ASTROMAGIC

In some instances the acceptance of the Greek-Arabic view of pneumatic magic was connected with kabbalistic views. Ibn Zarza, however, was not a Kabbalist. This syncretistic phenomenon became much more evident in Yohanan Alemanno's writings, under the substantial influence of the fourteenth-century Jewish author from Castile, Ibn Zarza. Not only was the Italian Kabbalist aware of another technique for attracting the pneumata into an artificial form, similar to the practice adumbrated in the Hermetic treatise *Asclepius*, but also his view of the teraphim was a direct continuation of the views revealed in some of the discussions analyzed above.<sup>68</sup> So, for example, we learn about the special status of the teraphim in Alemanno's gradation of virtues: "The perfection of the moral virtues and the virtue of the intellect, the perfection of divine worship [which consists of] various divinatory powers, and the perfection of causing the descent of the spiritual powers by means of statues and preparations of mixtures of qualities. And these [perfections are referred to by] four names: Torah and Wisdom and the Ephod and the Teraphim."<sup>69</sup>



It seems that there are good reasons to interpret the last of the four virtues as the highest one, which is indeed an interesting repercussion of the medieval anthropoidic view of the teraphim.<sup>70</sup> This elevation of astromagic to such a high status is pertinent to Alemanno's more general understanding of the ideal structure of different forms of knowledge and accords with his hierarchical organization of a variety of medieval speculative corpora when he formulated in his *Collectanea* an ideal curriculum that culminated in magic.<sup>71</sup>

However, it seems to me that we may even find evidence of the influence of Ibn Zarza's text in Alemanno's discussion of another type of anthropoid. In his untitled treatise Alemanno describes the wisdom of the ancients as follows: "[It] was so vast that they boasted of it in their books, which they attributed to Enoch, whom the Lord has taken,<sup>72</sup> and to Solomon, who was wiser than any man, and to many perfect men who performed actions of intermingling various things and balancing [literally: comparing] qualities in order to create new forms [tzurot hadashot]<sup>73</sup> in gold, silver, vegetables, minerals, and animals that had never before existed, and to create divine forms that foretell the future, laws, *nomoi*, and spirits of angels, of stars, and of devils by the changes of their constitution, which is the reason for the differences among men, be these [differences] great or small."<sup>74</sup>

Unlike the other instances, in which Alemanno refers both to Ashkenazi linguistic recipes for creating Golems and to Abulafia's mystical technique, as seen in the previous chapter, here he refers to metal as a constituent of the anthropoid. Like Ibn Billya's and Ibn Zarza's texts discussed above, this anthropoid reveals the future. Alemanno's description of the anthropoid combines a variety of sources: ancient Jewish ones, Hermetic, and metallurgic. Since he was undoubtedly acquainted with Ibn Zarza's book,<sup>75</sup> we may assume as certain that he was influenced by one of the passages adduced above. The creation of new forms is described in Hermetic terms, as the combinations of the various reigns demonstrate. Since the aim of this creation is to build an entity that foretells the future, it is reasonable to assume that the forms are identical with the statues constructed by the Hermetic and Neoplatonic magicians and consequently have human form. If so, then the artificially created human form, like the calf, served to capture the emanation from above.

Clearly, this Renaissance Jewish author combined diverse Jewish esoteric sources with Hermetic and astrometallurgical theories in a manner reminiscent of what F. A. Yates called the "occult philosophy."<sup>76</sup> Thus, Yates's description of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola as the "instigator and the founder" of the Hermetic-kabbalistic synthesis is correct only if it is understood to refer to Christian thought alone.<sup>77</sup>

The famous Isaac Abravanel, who was not a Kabbalist, also testified to the existence of Islamic texts dealing with natural preparations of anthropoids that can be

understood as explaining a talmudic discussion of the anthropoid in the *Sanhedrin*. In a commentary on 1 Kings 3 he wrote: "All these things were known to him in the same way in which they are known to nature, so that he could create natural creatures by means of natural things for a certain moment, by the path of what is mentioned by the sages of the Talmud, concerning the man that was made by Rava. And according to his opinion it was the operation of the natural technique. . . . And it was already found among the Ishmailite nations, in books attributed, inter alia, to King Solomon, that deal with this sort [of topics]." <sup>78</sup>

The mention of Solomon in this context is reminiscent of Alemanno's mention of him in the passage quoted above from his untitled treatise. It is an interesting question whether Alemanno in fact influenced Abravanel or whether they drew upon common sources. However, even more interesting is the occurrence of this theme in two Jewish authors in northern Italy in the same period. Both are inclined to see the generation of the artificial anthropoid as a natural phenomenon, and both ignore the linguistic magic of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, as derived from some interpretation of *Sefer Yetzirah*, when dealing with this specific issue.

Ibn Zarza's *Meqor Hayyim* was printed in Mantua in 1559. <sup>79</sup> The very act of printing this commentary, as well as another commentary on Ibn Ezra, *Megillat Setarim*, by R. Shemuel ibn Motot, <sup>80</sup> seems to indicate renewed interest in astrology and magic among Renaissance Jews. Moreover, as Stéphane Toussaint has pointed out, the astromagic of Ibn Zarza also influenced Marsilio Ficino, who explicitly refers to the passage by Ibn Zarza quoting Ibn Billya quoted above. <sup>81</sup>

As we saw in chapter 20, the impact of some Jewish themes related to the artificial creation of men and souls is also evident in a famous discussion of this topic by Ludovico Lazzarelli, an acquaintance of Ficino's. <sup>82</sup> Although Giovanni Pico della Mirandola seems to ignore the issue of the Golem in his description of Kabbalah, it is clear that his nephew, Giovanni Francesco, was acquainted with the talmudic story. <sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, it may be assumed that the tenth of Pico's *Magical Conclusions* has to do with the artificial creation of a man: "What man the magus makes through art, nature made naturally in making man." <sup>84</sup> It seems that the magician is capable of doing artificially what nature does naturally. Given the fact that three of Pico's acquaintances, Alemanno, Lazzarelli and Ficino, were interested in the Golem and similar types of recipes, it would be strange if he had ignored such a topic. It is also clear from the works of Johann Reuchlin and Cornelius Agrippa of Netesheim that the next generations of Christian Kabbalists were interested in the concept of the Golem. <sup>85</sup> Pico, like Alemanno, was less interested in the linguistic technique of generating the Golem by combining letters, and much more inclined to a naturalistic approach, based on a combination of diverse components.

Thus we may assume a trajectory of astromagic and Hermeticism from Arabic sources in the Middle East and North Africa in early Middle Ages and from Jewish sources mainly in Spain in the late Middle Ages to some circles of Italian Jews in the Renaissance. The writings of Ibn Zarza played a significant role in this transmission of Arabic astromagic.<sup>86</sup>

## 6. KABBALAH AND MAGIC IN THE RENAISSANCE

The discussions above demonstrate that in Renaissance Florence, interest in magical aspects of Kabbalah increased among both Jewish and Christian thinkers. No less interesting is the fact that a nonmagical form of Kabbalah was interpreted astromagically by Alemanno. This is not an extraordinary case; it reflects developments in the thirteenth century (as we have seen in chapter 12) that became more visible and influential at the end of the fifteenth century, partly as a result of the arrival of Arabic traditions. Although Ficino's translations drew chiefly upon Greek sources in his discussions of astromagic, for both Jews and Christians Hermes/Enoch was a major legendary hero, and the two figures were sometimes conflated, as in the cases of Lazzarelli and his master, Giovanni da Correggio, who also called himself Enoch and Mercury, namely Hermes.

Another important phenomenon relevant to an understanding of the spiritual configuration of Christian Kabbalah is the emergence of Latin translations made by Flavius Mithridates for Pico della Mirandola. Chaim Wirszubski studied Mithridates' translations closely and identified the Christian and magical sources that the translator added in Latin to the original kabbalistic texts in Hebrew.<sup>87</sup> His analyses, based on careful comparisons of the translations with the Hebrew originals, contributed directly to a better understanding of specific details of Pico's thought, especially his association between Kabbalah and magic.<sup>88</sup> In a manner reminiscent of Alemanno's juxtaposition of the different ways of understanding the Golem, including Abulafia's passage, Mithridates translated, sometimes without pointing out that he had altered them, passages from ecstatic Kabbalah as though they represented the views of a magically oriented Kabbalist.<sup>89</sup>

What is interesting for the further development of Kabbalah is that astromagical understandings of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah moved increasingly to the center of thought of a major Kabbalist, R. Moshe Cordovero in mid-sixteenth-century Safed,<sup>90</sup> and that he and his followers contributed much to the dissemination of this emphasis among larger audiences and shaped some vital aspects of eighteenth-century Hasidism in Ukraine and Poland.<sup>91</sup> I am not sure that the Renaissance magical interpretations contributed much to Safedian developments in magic, since we have sufficient kabbalistic material from early-fifteenth-century Spain, especially the writings of R. Shem Tov ben Shem Tov, that

certainly inspired the Safedian Kabbalists R. Shlomo Alqabetz and Moshe Cordovero.<sup>92</sup> Even in early-sixteenth-century Jerusalem, a magical Kabbalist like R. Joseph ibn Tzayyah, who was, like Alemanno, a prolific writer, could offer a synthesis between theosophical-theurgical and ecstatic Kabbalah and some forms of magic.<sup>93</sup> Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah was interpreted in magical terms in the book of another kabbalistic author in early-sixteenth-century Jerusalem, R. Yehudah Albotini.<sup>94</sup> The halakhic background of these Jerusalem Kabbalists did not deter them from incorporating magical elements into their writings. This was also the case for Cordovero, who was preoccupied with rabbinic studies but nevertheless adopted an astromagical understanding of kabbalistic theosophy.

Thus, Alemanno's synthesis of these different trends, each of them found earlier in many texts in independent literary corpora, has parallel results in a Kabbalist writing in the Near East, and independent of the Renaissance ambiance in Florence. Whether Ibn Tzayyah or Albotini met Alemanno when the latter presumably traveled to Jerusalem in his old age cannot be ascertained with any confidence. Recent studies indicate that it is much more plausible that the Jerusalem Kabbalists had an impact on the Safedian Kabbalah.<sup>95</sup>

Last but not least: during Alemanno's youth a huge kabbalistic corpus was composed in Spain, probably in Castile, known by the title *Sefer ha-Meshiv*. In this literature, little of it in print, and rather neglected in modern scholarship, some astromagical themes are evident, and they also occur in kabbalistic contexts dominated by theosophical thought, as in the case of Ibn Tzayyah's voluminous books, also surviving only in manuscripts. However, unlike Alemanno's magical Kabbalah, the Spanish corpus was much more concerned with demonic powers and apocalyptic ruptures and expressed strongly anti-Christian attitudes.<sup>96</sup> When we consider together the three major kabbalistic corpora written in this period, namely Alemanno's writings, Ibn Tzayyah's works, and *Sefer ha-Meshiv* and its successors, we can discern a major reshaping of the older theosophical-theurgical and ecstatic writings through the incorporation of a variety of magical approaches, especially the astromagical one. Different as the syntheses between Kabbalah and magic in those literary corpora are, their occurrence in the very same period reflects a growing interest in magical thinking in Jewish elite groups as well as in the Florentine Christian elite. This concomitant ascent of magic in different regions and intellectual circles may not be a matter of pure coincidence, but part of a turn to a more performative approach that allowed a much greater role for human activity and sought some form of tangible results from ritual activities. The synthesis between magic and Kabbalah was not the achievement of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in Florence, as assumed by Dame Frances A. Yates,<sup>97</sup> or of his teacher and companion Yohanan Alemanno. It has a much longer history, and it

surfaces at the same time in all the major centers of Kabbalah and not only in Italy. This phenomenon reflects the complexity that is characteristic of many traditional forms of knowledge as they interact with, integrate, absorb, and organize more and more forms of relevant knowledge within their traditions. Sometimes those processes produce more cohesive results, and sometimes less. Eclecticism is a phenomenon that occasionally develops when major literatures that differ from each other interact with and interpret each other, what I call the intercorporate phenomenon.<sup>98</sup> Magical literature of both Arabic and Jewish extraction, linguistic, alchemical, and astromagical, entered into strong interactions that produced the Florentine Jewish and Christian synthetic systems in the late fifteenth century, with the eclectic mode becoming more and more pronounced in sixteenth-century occultist writings in Europe.

# 22

## THE TRAJECTORY OF EASTERN KABBALAH AND ITS REVERBERATIONS IN ITALY

### 1. JEWISH THINKERS FROM THE EAST AND ITALY

So far we have looked at material that arrived in Italy from the West: Spain, Provence, the rest of France, and different parts of Germany. Great parts of the structure of this esoteric knowledge were indebted to Greek, Hellenistic, and Jewish material that had arrived in those places still earlier from the Near East. However, there was also another trajectory of knowledge to Italy in this period, originating with Jews active in areas to the east. The main area pertinent to our discussion is Crete, where a Jewish community had flourished since the fourteenth century, and which maintained strong relations with Venice, which governed the island.

The earliest of the Jews to arrive in Italy from Crete and to play a significant role in Jewish culture there was R. Shemaryah Ikriti. He was a philosophically oriented thinker, active at the court of Robert of Anjou in Naples in the first part of the fourteenth century, and he perhaps had some prophetic and messianic leanings.<sup>1</sup> His father, R. Elijah Romanus, a leader of the Candian community in Crete, is described as having gone there from Rome.<sup>2</sup> Shemaryah was in contact with the Jewish community in Rome, as we learn from an epistle to it in which he describes his literary activity.<sup>3</sup> In the letter he portrays himself as the pen of the cosmic Agent Intellect, cleaving to which he asserts is possible.<sup>4</sup> Although he does not describe this experience as a mystical one, it nevertheless implies some form of prophetic stance, in a manner reminiscent of his older contemporary Dante Alighieri—who describes the prophets as scribes of the one dictator, God—and of R. Yehudah Romano.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Dante was well known in the circle of Jewish intellectuals related to R. Shemaryah, R. Yehudah Romano, and Immanuel of Rome.<sup>6</sup> However, there can be no doubt that Shemaryah's main contribution was in the domain of Jewish philosophy and not of Kabbalah.

In the 1470s or 1480s Elijah del Medigo, originally from Candia, arrived in northern Italy and translated Averroistic treatises into Latin, was in close contact with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and then returned, perhaps intellectually disappointed, to Candia. More important from the point of view of the history of Kabbalah, in Candia around 1470 there arose a controversy on the meaning and role of the kabbalistic concept of transmigration of the soul, and the various documents connected with it survive in manuscripts in the Vatican library.<sup>7</sup> The descendant of one of the participants in this controversy, R. Shaul ha-Kohen, a critic of the kabbalistic stand, arrived in Venice and had some discussions with Isaac Abravanel.<sup>8</sup>

Last but not least, we should take into account a Jew who never came to Italy but whose influence there was perhaps greater than that of all the previously mentioned persons, the mysterious Elisha of Constantinople. According to George Scholarios, a critic of the more famous Gemistos Plethon and hence perhaps not a reliable witness, it is possible that one of Plethon's teachers in Byzantium was a Jew named Elisha, who was acquainted with Averroistic philosophy and medicine and with Zoroastrian thought.<sup>9</sup> He was presumably the source of Plethon's conception of Zoroaster as an independent and reliable religious source. According to Scholarios, Elisha, though a Jew, flouted the Mosaic tradition and was burned alive as a heretic.<sup>10</sup> If we may believe Scholarios, Elisha made a modest contribution to the subsequent infiltration of pagan theurgy found in the *Chaldaean Oracles* (a book allegedly authored by Zoroaster) into the Renaissance via Plethon and Ficino.

Nevertheless, it is possible that this Elisha was not as much a pagan and a Hellene as Scholarios presented him. There was in existence also a Persian-Arab tradition to the effect that Zoroaster was a pupil of Jeremiah,<sup>11</sup> while according to other Jewish sources Zoroaster studied with Abraham.<sup>12</sup> Thus, using the name of Zoroaster in Hebrew sources would not automatically invite a multilinear vision of knowledge. Following the view of some scholars, it is plausible that Elisha was part of a school of mystics originating with the twelfth-century Muslim Sufi master Suhrawardi al-Maqtul, called Ishraqi (The Illuminated), an Oriental author, who regarded Zoroaster as an important religious thinker.<sup>13</sup> If this proposal is correct, we have another instance of Jewish mediation of an Arabic view to Renaissance Florence.

## 2. BYZANTINE KABBALAH: FROM ABULAFIA AND RECANATI TO YOHANAN ALEMANNO

The eastward movement of kabbalistic literatures and individuals from Spain did not stop at Italy. Since the late thirteenth century it had also included the Byzantine Empire. In fact, before arriving in Italy for the second time, when he was already a Kabbalist, Abulafia taught in the Peloponnese and had some students there. Although his estimation of these students was far from high, we cannot preclude the possibility that some of them were the first Byzantine Kabbalists. In any case, in 1279 Abulafia wrote in Patras the first of his many prophetic writings, *Sefer ha-Yashar*, which he brought to Italy, and in Messina he wrote a commentary on it.<sup>14</sup> *Sefer ha-Yashar* is therefore the first kabbalistic work written in Byzantium and also the first one imported to Italy from that region. In my opinion, Abulafia's sojourn in the Peloponnese is related to the continued preeminence in that area of his version of Kabbalah. I suspect, for example, that one of Abulafia's commentaries on the secrets found in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, was written between 1274 and 1279 in the Byzantine region, since a passage from the book was copied verbatim, albeit without attribution, in an important treatise on Kabbalah, *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*, written there.<sup>15</sup> In the same work the anonymous Kabbalist copied Abulafia's *Sefer Gan Na'ul* almost in its entirety, again without mentioning the author or the title.<sup>16</sup> In my opinion, several other pages of *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* reflect the strong influence of Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah and may contain other quotations from lost books belonging to ecstatic Kabbalah.<sup>17</sup>

*Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* also contains several quotations from R. Menahem Recanati's *Commentary on the Torah*, again without attribution.<sup>18</sup> Although this book also lifts passages from books written in Spain, and perhaps elsewhere, the Italian contribution to its contents is substantial. In fact, we may describe it as a conflation of Italian and Spanish forms of Kabbalah with kabbalistic material written in the Byzantine Empire in the mid-fourteenth century. Because of the manifest impact



of both Abulafia's and Recanati's forms of Italian Kabbalah, Aharon (Adolph) Jellinek was inclined to suggest that either the book was written in northern Italy or it was written in Greece sometime around 1450.<sup>19</sup> However, as Israel M. Ta-Shma and Michal Kushnir-Oron demonstrated, there are good reasons to situate the author of the book in the Byzantine Empire sometime at the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>20</sup>

Abulafia's and Recanati's Kabbalah were, however, not the only brands of this lore that arrived in the Byzantine Empire in the fourteenth century. It is now known that a Spanish Kabbalist, R. Shem Tov of Folia, arrived there sometime in the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>21</sup> The tenor of his Kabbalah differs from the varieties that we know about in Spain and Italy, especially with regard to the theory of the cosmic cycles, or *shemittot*. Unlike the most widespread views found in some groups of Spanish Kabbalists, subscribing to a general correspondence between the seven lower sefirot and the seven cosmic cycles,<sup>22</sup> Shem Tov articulated a view—found earlier in less developed form—that out of the seven cycles of thousands or seven thousand years, ours is related to the sefirah *Gevurah*, namely the sefirah of strict judgment, which means that we are in the worst cosmic period.<sup>23</sup>

A more extreme version of this theory appears in an anonymous treatise titled *Sefer ha-Temunah* or *Sefer ha-Temunot*, dealing mainly with the theosophical significance of the shapes of the Hebrew letters, which is part of a broader kabbalistic literature that still awaits scholarly analysis. In these writings the view that the present *shemittah* (cosmic cycle) is governed by the worst of the divine powers is reinforced by the assertion that the structure of the Torah has been determined by this pernicious power. There is here a strong affinity between an astrological understanding of reality on the one hand, and the nature of the Jewish religion, including the Torah and its commandments, on the other.<sup>24</sup> The deterministic picture of the world as stemming from the astrological order influenced the main structure of theosophy in this circle of Kabbalists, and created the conditions for the emergence of kabbalistic antinomianism. Gershom Scholem assumed that the book was written in Gerona either in the 1260s<sup>25</sup> or at the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Efraim Gottlieb voiced doubts to his students about both the dating and the locale of composition. For reasons that I have elaborated upon elsewhere, I propose to see the mid-fourteenth century as the time and the Byzantine Empire as the place in which both this book and the commentary written on it were composed.<sup>27</sup> The most important reason is that the author of *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* copied significant chunks from *Sefer ha-Temunah*, again without attribution, in his other book, *Sefer ha-Qanah*, a lengthy commentary on the rationales of the commandments.<sup>28</sup>

These two Byzantine kabbalistic books, composed sometime around the end of the fourteenth century, blend three types of Kabbalah that were almost totally

unknown in the Iberian peninsula: the anomian Kabbalah of Abulafia and his circle, the nomian Kabbalah of Recanati, and the antinomian Kabbalah from the circle of *Sefer ha-Temunah*. The religious possibilities immanent in such a synthesis remained part and parcel of the Byzantine, and later the Ottoman, center of Kabbalah, and ultimately contributed to the spiritual physiognomy of Sabbateanism. The chief protagonist of this messianic movement, Sabbatai Tzevi, was, in my opinion, very much a Byzantine Kabbalist even two centuries after the disappearance of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>29</sup> In one of the processes of the transformation of Kabbalah when it moved eastward, Spain originated the development of most of the nomian forms of Kabbalah, which had a huge impact everywhere in the Jewish world, and in Italy on Recanati. In another, Italy hosted the origination of the anomian Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia and his followers, which had an impact on the Byzantine Empire and the land of Israel.<sup>30</sup> Finally, the Byzantine Empire hosted the emergence of antinomian Kabbalah, which had a limited impact in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries but made an important contribution to Sabbateanism in the seventeenth century.<sup>31</sup> This development had much to do with the weakness of the rabbinic establishments in Italy and Byzantium,<sup>32</sup> in comparison to Spain, France, and Ashkenaz. Kabbalists who could not find a place in Spain because of their idiosyncratic views and the centralized structure of Jewish society in the Iberian peninsula were more easily accepted in Italy and even more so in the Byzantine Empire, though there, too, as the resort to anonymity demonstrates, antinomianism constituted a problem in Jewish society even in that region. This seems to be one of the reasons why such diverse Kabbalists as Abraham Abulafia and R. Shem Tov of Folia left Spain and flourished elsewhere.

Why did the anonymous author of *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* steal so unabashedly from so many kabbalistic sources? The answer is relatively simple: the book is presented as if it was written by three generations of scholars in late antiquity who had discussions among themselves, but from time to time there are some revelations by the prophet Elijah.<sup>33</sup> This pseudepigraphic framework precluded any acknowledgment of the numerous sources that were copied. To my best knowledge, no Kabbalist in Spain ever quoted this book, or *Sefer ha-Temunah*, or the other books from this school.

Outside Byzantium, to my best knowledge Yohanan Alemanno was the first to quote *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* and *Sefer ha-Temunah*. The arrival of these books in Italy sometime in the mid-fifteenth century influenced not only the Jewish Kabbalist but also two of the most important authors of the second phase of Christian Kabbalah, the cardinal Egidio da Viterbo and Francesco Giorgio Veneto.

The most conspicuous quotation from *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*—which Alemanno mistakenly calls *Sefer ha-Qanah*—is found in his *Collectanea*, where he adduces one of

the computations that prognosticate that the messianic redemption will occur in the year 1490.<sup>34</sup> Since there is no remark to the effect that the redemption has not yet come, I assume that Alemanno copied this material before 1490. In his own book, *Einei ha-'Edah*, the title *Qanah ben Qanah* recurs several times.<sup>35</sup> In his untitled treatise, the theories of *shemittot* recur several times, in my opinion under the influence of these Byzantine books.<sup>36</sup> What seems to me more interesting beyond those quotations is the fact that Alemanno adopted from *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah* a vision of history as a continuous confrontation between good and evil, a theory that is presented at the end of his *Hei ha-'Olamim*; but this demands a separate inquiry. Thus Alemanno adopted from the Byzantine Kabbalah a quite pessimistic and deterministic vision of history, which differs dramatically from the various theories found in the Italian and Spanish types of Kabbalah. Given that Alemanno was acquainted also with the views of both R. Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim and R. Yehudah Hayyat, the two Spanish Kabbalists who were his contemporaries and his critics, we may describe Florence in the late fifteenth century as the place where most—though certainly not all—of the main types of existent kabbalistic literature were available. Alemanno integrated these various forms of Kabbalah into his hierarchical schemes describing a schedule for advanced studies, as we shall see in appendix 4. The mediating role of Italy, mentioned above in chapter 12, is more evident in the variety of kabbalistic literatures known in late-fifteenth-century Italy.<sup>37</sup>

Although in my opinion Alemanno's references to the Byzantine books occurred relatively late in his career, and their impact on his thought is certainly less substantial than that of his Italian predecessors, they reflect once more the special status of Kabbalah in Italy: much material arrived from a variety of sources and was adopted and integrated into much larger structures, without inciting polemics.

This is the most important example of an influence on Kabbalah in Italy from kabbalistic sources written east of the peninsula. It made itself felt relatively late in Alemanno's career, at the very end of the fifteenth century. In the next century the center of kabbalistic creativity moved abruptly and dramatically from the Iberian peninsula to the land of Israel, and to a certain extent to the Ottoman Empire, and starting in the mid-sixteenth century the numerous kabbalistic writings composed there started to arrive in Italy and reshape the configuration of Kabbalah in the Apennine peninsula. Did Alemanno contribute some modest share to the strengthening of this east-to-west trajectory by his presumed trip to Jerusalem? In any case, his much younger acquaintance, R. David ben Yehudah Messer Leon, undoubtedly did so when he moved from northern Italy to the Ottoman Empire, and wrote there some kabbalistic discussions that reached and were debated by a leading Safedian Kabbalist, R. Moshe Cordovero.<sup>38</sup>

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

### 1. KABBALAH IN ITALY OR ITALIAN KABBALAH?

“Kabbalah in Italy” and “Italian Kabbalah” are, to be sure, merely umbrella terms, neither more coherent nor less precarious than designations such as Spanish, Byzantine, North African, and Safedian Kabbalah. The diversity of their contents notwithstanding, the use of such terms may serve both important historical and phenomenological aims. First and foremost, it is an efficient way of demarcating the specific books and schools that developed in a certain area from the huge kabbalistic literatures and of dealing only with those that did interact with their specific surrounding more than other works written elsewhere. Equally important, the awareness that a certain kabbalistic literature, however diverse, was available in

a certain geographical area contributes to a better understanding both of subsequent developments in Jewish Kabbalah in that area, and of why, for example, Christian interests in Kabbalah moved in one direction or another. Thus the existence of so many manuscripts of Abraham Abulafia's writings in libraries located in the Italian territories certainly contributed to their being translated into Latin and Italian during the Renaissance, and to his having a greater influence on Christian Kabbalists in Italy than on Jewish Kabbalists in Spain, both immediately before and after the expulsion. Repetition of certain ideas creates a certain structure of thought, which even if not intentionally different from other forms of thought, by the very act of putting in relief some ideas and not others, produces tendencies specific to one area and not to another.

Those statistical and historical understandings may, in turn, be usefully translated into more penetrating observations regarding the spiritual physiognomy of some phenomena in the early Florentine Renaissance, such as the propensity for prophecy<sup>1</sup> in the discussions and portraits of Giovanni Mercurio da Coreggio, Girolamo Savonarola, Giovanni Pico, Marsilio Ficino, Francesco da Meleto, and other, minor figures.<sup>2</sup> To be sure, not all discussions of prophecy in Florence necessarily reflect ties to Abulafia's Kabbalah, and Savonarola's *De Veritate Prophetica* may well stand quite independent of any influence from ecstatic Kabbalah. However, when Giovanni Pico and Ficino are described as looking for an experience of "prophecy," this cautious approach to the impact of ecstatic Kabbalah is much less relevant.<sup>3</sup> I know no better alternative found in Florence in Hebrew, Italian, and Latin to explain a search for prophecy by means of Kabbalah than Abulafia's books.

To be sure, the methods adopted by the Christian thinkers in their search for prophecy were more complex than just adopting Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah as a pure model, and the lessons we learn from detailed analyses of Yohanan Alemanno's conceptual hierarchies as described in chapters 14 and 20, showing that ecstatic material was embedded in philosophical magical and talismanic material, are profoundly relevant to some developments in late Quattrocento Florence. Thus, understanding the genesis of Abulafia's prophetology from the confluence of Maimonides' theories of cognition, Ashkenazi practices, and a variety of other elements, and understanding the additions that Alemanno made to it by drawing upon many other sources, including astromagical ones, may offer a better ground for understanding the two leading figures in Florence: Giovanni Pico and Ficino. Alemanno was not only interested in ecstatic Kabbalah, which he held in high esteem; he also combined it with the philosophical ideal of intuitive knowledge in an interesting observation found in his *Collectanea*. When quoting two passages from *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'* he introduces Abulafia's characterization of the true Kabbalist as "combining letters" and as one who seeks the "sudden

intuition [hashqafah pit'omit]<sup>4</sup> about all the sciences of the existence [kol madda'ei ha-nimtza'ot] by means of combinations of the divine name.”<sup>5</sup> This brief remark is itself a combination of a philosophical vision, stemming ultimately from Plotinus via Avicenna, and to a certain extent also Maimonides, with an ecstatic kabbalistic one. Though not totally new as a concept—it is found, in principle but not in a specific terminological expression, in a reference by R. Moshe Narboni (one of Alemanno's most venerated intellectual heroes) to Abulafia's *Sefer 'Or ha-Sekhel*<sup>6</sup>—this combination of Ashkenazi linguistic technique with Avicenna's theory of intuition is totally new in the history of Kabbalah. It reflects the affinity between the philosophical treatment of the superiority of intuition over discursive knowledge, which had probably influenced Abulafia's own Kabbalah,<sup>7</sup> and Abulafia's ideal of an easy attainment of a mystical experience. This concern with intuition is evident also in Marsilio Ficino's thought, and he, too, may have been influenced by the Avicennan theory of intuition.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere Alemanno connects “sudden vision,” or intuition, with a faculty in the soul of man that he calls *ha-tziyyur ha-'Elohi*, “the divine conceptualization,” which allows the vision and contemplation of the “world of the sefirah,” which for him means the world of the ten sefirot.<sup>9</sup>

That this theory of sublime gnoseology to be realized via manipulation of language, which was understood as prophecy, had an impact on one of the most important exponents of Christian Kabbalah, we learn from a passage by Paulus Riccius. The views of this very learned early-sixteenth-century Ashkenazi convert to Christianity—whom Erasmus pertinently compared to no other than Flavius Mithridates—had a huge impact on Johann Reuchlin's understanding of Kabbalah. In one instance he claims:

The Kabbalists and those who are called sons of the prophets proceed from the connection of the human mind with the higher and purer one. They take the symbols and the elements that are connected with the higher spirit as far as they can use them for their purpose. They meditate on the holy letters by contemplating their numerical value, their form, position, permutation, and combination, by thinking of their genus and referring and bringing them to the holiness of higher and eternal truths. No Kabbalist believes that he has completely exhausted or will completely understand the holy communication of the prophets. He intends only one thing: to convert his soul from earthly matter through the concentrated and repeated exercise of fantasy, reason, and mind and be transported to the upper forces in order to join with them.<sup>10</sup>

Kabbalists are therefore explicitly called “sons of prophets,” a biblical term related to small groups who used pneumatic techniques to reach a prophetic experience. The Kabbalists are portrayed as contemplating and manipulating

linguistic elements in order to attain a supreme experience, described in terms of imagination and intellect, in a manner quite reminiscent of Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah. Thus, Paulus Riccius, like Giovanni Pico and Ficino, can be better understood against the more solid background of the existence of pneumatic concerns (as well as others) among Jewish Italian Kabbalists, rather than by an overly generalized view of Kabbalah. Surely the more experiential dimension of ecstatic Kabbalah, which developed strongly in the Italian regions, contributes more to an understanding of those two Italian figures—as well as Riccius—than does assuming, quite anachronistically, that the less experiential Kabbalists arriving in Italy from Spain after the expulsion contributed to the emergence of Christian Kabbalah, a phenomenon that started several years before the expulsion. This understanding of Kabbalah as automatically Spanish Kabbalah is evident even in the writings of important scholars describing the emergence of the Christian Kabbalah. So, for example, we read in Frances A. Yates, when she was describing the spiritual background of Christian Kabbalah: "There is a wealth of spiritual experience waiting to be gathered from the great surge of interest in Jewish mysticism spread by the wandering exiles from Spain and Portugal."<sup>11</sup>

In my opinion, the emergence of the Christian brand of Kabbalah can be understood only in the context of the specific kabbalistic literatures and schools that were available in a given time and place, in our case in late-fifteenth-century Florence, or in Italy in more general terms.

Let me attempt to situate the kabbalistic literature written in Italy in relation to other forms of Jewish religious literature. There can be no doubt that before 1500, in fields such as Halakhah, philosophy, biblical interpretation, and even poetry, the Italian production was dramatically smaller than the aggregate amount of these literatures produced in Spain, France, or Germany<sup>12</sup>—a situation that would change substantially in the sixteenth century. However, in the field of Kabbalah, the situation in Italy was quite different. Although Italian production was smaller than that of Spanish Kabbalah and perhaps even of Byzantine Kabbalah, it was more diverse than both of them. Abulafia, Recanati, and Alemanno in particular produced significant, influential, and distinctive types of Kabbalah that diverged dramatically from each other in many respects.

Moreover, only in Italy did major Christian intellectuals absorb so many kabbalistic views, even though sometimes twisting the original kabbalistic intentions, to produce a literature of Christian Kabbalah.<sup>13</sup> The uniqueness of this development reflects something of the nature of Jewish Kabbalah in the area. Religious phenomena are defined not only by the insiders but also by the outsiders, even when the insiders would protest against the appropriation and the eventual distortion of what they may understand as their authentic tradition.<sup>14</sup>

The Italian territories were assuredly a center of Kabbalah in the period under scrutiny; the views of prominent Kabbalists active and creative there influenced other Italian Kabbalists in the sixteenth century, and some of them found their way to Byzantine Kabbalah. No less important is the fact, already noted in chapter 7, that Italian manuscripts of Kabbalah are so numerous that they constitute a substantial proportion of all the extant manuscripts of Kabbalah in the world, and they are a basic component of any serious research in this domain.

## 2. ITALIAN KABBALAH AND ABRAHAM ABULAFIA'S WRITINGS

Spanish Kabbalah has its classic book: the *Zohar*. The book was translated into Hebrew and commented upon and imitated by Spanish Kabbalists in the first generation after its appearance.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, the Italian Kabbalists in the same period did not focus on one central book. As we saw in chapter 9, even Recanati, who referred to the *Zohar* so often in his writings, misconstrued and thus transformed its basic theosophy, interpreting it as if it assigned an instrumental status to the sefirot. Certainly, Spanish Kabbalists newly arrived in Italy after the expulsion had—and expressed—their own prejudices against Italian developments in Kabbalah, as we have seen from R. Yehudah Hayyat's list of "pernicious" kabbalistic books, discussed above in chapter 18. Of the three Kabbalists whom Yehudah Hayyat criticized—R. Yitzhaq ibn Latif, R. Shmuel ibn Motot, and Abraham Abulafia—Ibn Latif, though far less well known in the Iberian peninsula than in Italy, had already been criticized by Spanish Kabbalists in the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>16</sup> The attack on R. Shmuel ibn Motot, who presented another type of synthesis between Kabbalah and philosophy, was not as vicious as that against "the many books" of Abraham Abulafia; we may assume that the wider the dissemination of a Kabbalist's works was, the more incentive Hayyat had to challenge him.

The Italian Kabbalist Yohanan Alemanno was acquainted with all the kabbalistic writings mentioned by Hayyat. The curriculum he constructed moves from earlier to later works, from the low to the sublime, implying also a movement from less important to more advanced forms of Kabbalah. Although Motot influenced several passages in Alemanno's writings,<sup>17</sup> he was not included in Alemanno's study program. Ibn Latif is mentioned relatively early. The books of Abulafia stand at the very end of the curriculum.<sup>18</sup> An inspection of Alemanno's texts shows that he knew two of the three of books by Abulafia included in Hayyat's list.<sup>19</sup> We may therefore conclude that Alemanno's predilections reflect a situation that corroborates Hayyat's critique.

Another Kabbalist active in Italy around 1500, in the region of Venice, R. Asher Lemlein, was also very fond of Abulafia's Kabbalah. He does not mention Motot and Ibn Latif at all, but traces of Abulafia's views are conspicuous in his extant



writings. He mentions *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'* three times, always in very laudatory terms.<sup>20</sup>

As for Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's knowledge of Kabbalah and the translations made for him, I have shown elsewhere that in his *Heptaplus* Pico demonstrates an acquaintance with Ibn Latif's *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*,<sup>21</sup> although this book was not translated into Latin. He does not appear to have known Motot's work. In contrast, many of Abulafia's books were translated by Mithridates and were deeply influential on Pico's Christian Kabbalah, as Chaim Wirszubski convincingly showed in his classic work *Pico della Mirandola*.

Last but not least, as Robert Bonfil has already indicated, *Sefer 'Or ha-Sekhel*, one of Abulafia's main mystical handbooks and one of the writings sharply criticized by Hayyat, was well known in Italy.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the great number of Italian manuscripts of Abulafia's works demonstrates the attraction his Kabbalah exercised in Italy from the time of his arrival in Sicily, attaining one of its peaks in the Florentine Renaissance.

### 3. MENAHEM RECANATI'S KABBALISTIC DESCENDANTS

So far as we know, Abulafia had several direct disciples, but no one in his family continued his kabbalistic heritage. Nevertheless his kabbalistic tradition continued both in Italy and elsewhere, and it is possible that the last of the ecstatic Kabbalists in Sicily was none other than Flavius Mithridates.

In contrast, the other major Kabbalist in Italy, R. Menahem Recanati, had, to my best knowledge, no students, but several of his descendants were Kabbalists. In his case, which is unparalleled in the history of Kabbalah, we may speak, on the basis of more than one document, about the longest line of Kabbalists in the same family, extending from the early fourteenth to at least the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>23</sup> A strong sense of continuity permeates this family list, composed by R. Jacob Israel Finzi in the mid-sixteenth century. Although R. Menahem's son Benjamin is not referred to as a Kabbalist, Benjamin's son, R. Yehudah Makaby Finzi, is described as "the great rabbi," "the great sage," "the great Kabbalist," "the holy man," who died "a wondrous death by the kiss."<sup>24</sup> He also mentions the great-grandson of this Yehudah, Yehudah Eleazar Makaby Finzi.<sup>25</sup> To this family belongs also R. Yitzhaq Eliahu, the author of a manuscript commentary on *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*, who is described by R. Jacob Israel as the uncle of his grandfather or, according to another piece of information, as the grandfather of his grandfather.<sup>26</sup> His commentary, dated 1462, is found in a Parma manuscript in the handwriting of the author.<sup>27</sup> Although a certain Yitzhaq is mentioned in R. Jacob Israel's family pedigree, it seems that he is a different person.

The interest in Recanati's Kabbalah in Italy is evident from testimony found in R. Elijah Hayyim of Genazzano, a late-fifteenth-century Kabbalist, who mentions

a certain R. Melli or 'Immanuel da Toscanella, who criticized some aspects of Recanati's theosophy sometime around 1450. Genazzano was acquainted with those criticisms, although he did not accept most of them; in fact much of his book is dedicated to refuting the critique of Recanati's views.<sup>28</sup> His admiration for Recanati is also evident elsewhere in *'Iggeret Hamudot*. Alemanno was quite respectful toward Recanati's thought, whom he introduces once as "the wise and understanding, the honorable Rabbi, our master Menahem Recanati."<sup>29</sup> These two examples demonstrate that in both Jewish and Christian kabbalistic sources in Italy, Recanati played an important role in the way in which Kabbalah was understood. His influence is surely related to the fact that his *Commentary on the Torah* was printed before most of the other important kabbalistic books. Even today R. Menahem's works account for the greatest number of kabbalistic treatises preserved in Italian manuscripts.

#### 4. BETWEEN SPANISH AND ITALIAN KABBALAH

Both Abulafia and Recanati are strikingly absent from the rich Spanish kabbalistic literature produced before the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian peninsula. There is a deep discrepancy between the forms of Kabbalah produced in its two major centers. Perhaps most noteworthy is the much more synthetic nature of Italian Kabbalah, discernible not only in Abulafia, Recanati, and Alemanno but also in Reuven Tzarfati and, to a lesser extent, in R. Yitzhaq Elijah of Recanati and R. Elijah Hayyim of Genazzano. The complexity undoubtedly reflects, at least in part, the arrival of uprooted traditions in new intellectual environments, facilitating new forms of encounters and organizations of knowledge. However, important segments of Spanish Kabbalah were either unknown or rejected or marginalized in those syntheses. For example, the elaborate theories on the structure of the realm of evil, found in Castile in the second third of the thirteenth century, which had an impact on the *Zohar*, played quite a negligible role in Italian Kabbalah. Gershom Scholem called the group that articulated these theories the circle of the ha-Kohen brothers, consisting of R. Jacob and R. Yitzhaq ha-Kohen, and including also R. Moshe ben Shimeon of Burgos (Cinfa), their disciple, and R. Todros ha-Levi Abulafia, the latter's student.<sup>30</sup> Abraham Abulafia, who visited Castile when this sort of Kabbalah was already at its peak, and who was acquainted with their major disciple, R. Moshe of Burgos, did not even find it necessary to reject their views, which would not have made any sense in his Kabbalah. Menahem Recanati was either unaware of or indifferent to their views.<sup>31</sup> Some acquaintance with a formulation that may have stemmed from this circle is found in Reuven Tzarfati, but it plays only a marginal role in his approach.<sup>32</sup> Nor are the views of this circle prominent in Genazzano or in Alemanno.

On the other hand, those elements played an important role in the vast literature written in Castile in Alemanno's lifetime, known as related to *Sefer ha-Meshiv*.<sup>33</sup> The stark demonization of Christianity that is found in several Spanish sources starting with the *Zohar*, and increasing in the period of the expulsion, is dramatically less important in Italian Kabbalah.<sup>34</sup>

Most of the Italian Kabbalists, much more so than all the Spanish ones—with the important exception of the young R. Joseph Gikatilla—were interested in and emphasized the special nature of the Hebrew language. This focus is quite evident in Abulafia and all his followers, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including Alemanno, and to a certain extent also in Christian Kabbalah. All of these Italian thinkers were attracted by the concept of a perfect language, an issue that remained marginal in the conceptual economy of Spanish Kabbalah. This is the background of the possible impact of certain formulations, found in Abulafia and in R. Nathan Harar's *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, on Dante Alighieri's theory of language.<sup>35</sup> The several commentaries on the Hebrew alphabet found in Spain differ in their content from the Italian treatment of language as a natural perfection. The Spaniards regarded the letters as basically reflecting the inner structure of the divine realm,<sup>36</sup> while the Italians, especially Abulafia, Tzarfati, and Alemanno, were far more interested in manipulating language by the well-known combinations of letters in order to induce an ecstatic experience. And of course the explicit emphasis on the importance of the ecstatic experience was certainly more evident in Italian than in Spanish Kabbalah.

In matters of theosophy there was also an important discrepancy between the dominant stands in Spain and Italy. The two main understandings of the nature of the sefirot, as essence and as instruments of God, were found already in the first part of the thirteenth century in Spain. The essentialist approach was more mythical; it assumed that kabbalistic knowledge and praxis had to do with the inner life of the divinity. This approach was dominant in Nahmanides and his school and in most of the *Zohar*, as well as in a variety of other Kabbalists.<sup>37</sup> The instrumental approach, which had a more philosophical orientation, was represented by the followers of R. Yitzhaq the Blind, especially R. Asher ben David and R. Azriel of Gerona, and was incorporated in the later layers of the *Zohar*, *Tiqqunei Zohar* and *Ra'aya Meheimna*.<sup>38</sup> In the general economy of theosophy in Spain, the essentialist view was preponderant, as a Spanish Kabbalist, R. Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim, attested around 1491.<sup>39</sup> In Italy, Recanati adopted the instrumental understanding of the sefirot and imposed it upon Spanish texts that espoused the essentialist approach. Alemanno also adopted this view.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, Recanati's theological stand was embraced by a Spanish Kabbalist active in Mantua, R. Yehudah Hayyat, one of the first Kabbalists to quote extensively from the later layer of the *Zohar*, which

promoted an instrumentalist theosophy. There is a certain correlation between the essentialist view and esotericism and between the instrumentalist approach and exotericism.<sup>41</sup> As we saw in chapter 7, in the first kabbalistic manuscripts copied in the 1280s in Rome the instrumentalist theory is quite prominent, as represented by R. Asher ben David, R. Ezra, and R. Azriel of Gerona. This theosophy was mediated by a short anonymous treatise that I have identified as written by R. Yitzhaq of Acre, which is an interpretation of a passage of R. Azriel, and which was integrated by Recanati into one of his books.<sup>42</sup> Thus the instrumentalist view that was marginalized in Spain in the second part of the thirteenth century was adopted in Italy, a situation reminiscent also of the fate of the writings of R. Yitzhaq ibn Latif.

Finally, the early-fourteenth-century classic of Kabbalah, *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*, which had a negligible influence on Spanish Kabbalah, received more attention in Italy, where it was the subject of commentaries by R. Yitzhaq Elijah, the descendant of Recanati, and R. Reuven Tzarfati.

In Spain groups of Kabbalists are known to have existed and in some cases to have worked together. Such was the case of the disciples of R. Yitzhaq the Blind in Gerona and the students of Nahmanides in Barcelona.<sup>43</sup> Scholars assume the existence of groups in Castile in the context of the composition of the *Zohar*;<sup>44</sup> and around 1470 there was testimony about a group of Kabbalists around R. Joseph della Reina.<sup>45</sup> In Italy, most of the Kabbalists were solitary people. Recanati, Tzarfati, and Alemanno are not known to have had Jewish disciples, much less to have headed a specific group of Kabbalists. In the case of Alemanno, we know much more about his relation to Giovanni Pico than to any Jewish Kabbalist. As a result of these contrasting situations, in Spain relatively cohesive groups of Kabbalists, who had much less contact with Christian material, produced more homogeneous writings, whereas in Italy there was little or no cohesion into Jewish groups, and the affinities between Jews and Christians were greater.

Last but not least: what seems also significant is, at least at the beginning, the reticence of the Italian Kabbalists toward the mythical theosophy and dynamic theurgy as represented in a classical manner by the *Zohar* and as presented by its Spanish disseminators.<sup>46</sup> Some of the Italian Kabbalists, as we have seen, leaned toward a much more magical interpretation of this lore. In a period when ancient and pagan mythologies were attracting great interest in some Christian circles in Italy, among both thinkers and artists, Jewish Italian Kabbalists preferred a more philosophical understanding of Kabbalah, which attenuated the mythical facets of their sources. This discrepancy is, however, superficial. In the Christian circles as well, the ancient myths were not accepted literally, but were interpreted by means of a hermeneutical framework that was basically allegorical.<sup>47</sup> In Jean Seznec's astute formulation, "Mythology still plays a considerable role (even more so than

in the past) but it is fatally submerged in allegory.”<sup>48</sup> In both cases, Renaissance thinkers appropriated ancient material in a manner that accorded with their intellectual orientations, and the mythical elements were often reduced to ahistorical speculative truths. Both the Spanish mythical Kabbalah and the ancient Greek myths informed Italian thought in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, but only after being adapted to the mindsets of their transmitters. This trend continued into the sixteenth century with the adaptation of the Safedian Kabbalah. However, throughout this period the importance of magic as basically an extroverted type of religiosity attenuated the introverted tendency of philosophical allegoresis that had been so obvious in medieval Jewish thought in general, including Kabbalah.

Both of these contrasting attitudes toward Kabbalah are forms of *cosmopoiesis*,<sup>49</sup> of different constructions of *imaginaires*, which adopt, adapt, innovate, and organize themes and create more comprehensive conceptual structures and forms of order as a way of trying to make sense of life in the universe in general and, in a more specific way, to offer rationales for the religious beliefs and practices that shape a certain community.

The Spanish Kabbalists who arrived in Italy after the expulsion had to cope with cultural challenges that were new, unexpected, and from their point of view sometimes very disturbing.<sup>50</sup> In seeking to make their tradition clear in this new environment, many openly dismissed or rejected cultural tendencies that deviated from their spiritual patrimony. These cultural encounters energized Jewish culture, especially Kabbalah, in all the late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century Jewish centers, and contributed to its creativity. Therefore, unlike the renowned historian of Italian Jewry Cecil Roth, who sees in the early fifteenth century the beginning of a weakening of creativity among Jews in Italy,<sup>51</sup> I assume that such a weakening took place much later, in the second part of the sixteenth century.

## 5. A NEW INTELLECTUAL MOBILITY

The forced mobility imposed by the brutal and unexpected expulsions from Spain and Portugal at the end of the fifteenth century created conditions for the dissemination of kabbalistic knowledge outside the Iberian peninsula, and thus for intellectual as well as physical mobility. One result was a series of vigorous cultural exchanges between Jews and Christians. This is most evident in the formation of the Christian Kabbalah, a project in which many Jews and converts participated. The new openness in some Christian circles in Italy to Jewish material, and notably to Kabbalah, is evident from the biographical details of individuals such as Elijah del Medigo, Yohanan Alemanno and his son Yitzhaq, Abraham Farissol, and, sometime later, Abraham de Balmes, Elijah Menahem Halfan, Elijah Bahur

Levita, and Shlomo Molkho. Contacts between exponents of Jewish and Christian thought required a willingness to participate in a variety of encounters, including the mentoring of Christian intellectuals in matters of Hebrew and Kabbalah and participation in religious debates. The influence of Christian Scholasticism on Jewish thinkers in this period is demonstrable in the writings of the Spanish thinker R. Joseph Taitachek<sup>52</sup> and of R. David Messer Leon,<sup>53</sup> among others. The significant influence of various Christian trends of thought is also discernible in both Isaac and Yehudah Abravanel's writings, where they were combined with Jewish views.<sup>54</sup> It seems to me that the encounter with Christian thought on a much larger scale than in the Middle Ages is emblematic of the new situation: apparently only in early-sixteenth-century Italy could a Jew write an intellectual bestseller like *Dialoghi d'Amore* for Christian readers. This openness was also reflected in the much more exploratory and philosophically oriented nature of Italian Kabbalah as compared to the Spanish version, which was much more antagonistic to universalist stands.<sup>55</sup> The Renaissance as a cultural phenomenon that introduced, inter alia, a significant study of Kabbalah among Christians invited some Italian Jews—whose more open attitude to Christianity was part of their communal tradition—to a greater receptiveness to Christian modes of thought. In this context we should point out the emergence of printing as a factor in the development of Kabbalah; the economic advantages arising from the esteem that Kabbalah enjoyed in many intellectual circles persuaded both Jewish and Christian printers to publish kabbalistic books, so that around 1560 someone could have amassed a library that included the classics of this lore. After the 1560s, the printing of kabbalistic books in both Hebrew and Latin accelerated, a factor that became formative in the wider development and propagation of Kabbalah.

The Spanish Kabbalists who arrived in Italy and criticized the version of Kabbalah that they encountered there did not address the phenomenon of Christian Kabbalah, even though some Spanish converts such as Abner of Burgos, Pedro de la Caballeria, and Paulus de Heredia had already produced Christological interpretations of kabbalistic topics.<sup>56</sup> Heredia in particular, who was active at the end of his life in Italy, was well acquainted with kabbalistic texts and probably also forged some passages or short treatises.<sup>57</sup> R. Abraham Farissol, a reliable source on intellectual life in Renaissance Italy, was acquainted with other kabbalistic forgeries produced by converts in Spain perhaps at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>58</sup> As we have seen, Flavius Mithridates, a Jewish native of Sicily who converted to Christianity, translated in Florence a huge array of Jewish kabbalistic writings, including works by Abulafia, Recanati, and Tzarfati, as well as other speculative medieval Jewish material. Some of these converts were of Ashkenazi extraction. Other figures, like Alemanno, remained practicing Jews. This was indeed a unique

phenomenon; the particularist conception of Kabbalah that was dominant in Spain encountered a much more cosmopolitan one in Italy.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, this phenomenon, which was deeply related to the philosophical understanding of Kabbalah, receives no mention in the critiques by Spanish Kabbalists living in Italy.

R. Elijah Menahem Halfan, a learned rabbi and Kabbalist in Venice in the first part of the sixteenth century,<sup>60</sup> and probably a student of the Spanish Kabbalist R. Joseph ibn Shraga, described what happened in his generation: "Especially after the rise of the sect of Luther,<sup>61</sup> many of the nobles and scholars of the land [namely the Christians] sought to have a thorough knowledge of this glorious science [namely Kabbalah]. They have exhausted themselves in this search, because among our people there are but a small number of men expert in this wisdom, for after the great number of troubles and expulsions,<sup>62</sup> only a few remain. So seven learned men [namely Christians] grasp a Jewish man by the hem of his garment and say: 'Be our master in this science.'"<sup>63</sup> This Italian Jew seems to react here in a moderately positive way to the possible consequences of this dissemination of Kabbalah, although in another text he is much less receptive to this development.<sup>64</sup>

Since it is obvious that other Jews, including Kabbalists, reacted negatively to the spread of Kabbalah among Christians, the question is why there was silence on this trend among three Sephardic Kabbalists, namely Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim, Yehudah Hayyat, and Joseph ibn Shraga, who lived for a while in Italy and openly criticized the Jewish Kabbalah espoused there. I assume that the refugee status of Hayyat and Ibn Shraga, and their perception of the potential danger involved in a critique of Christian thinkers, deterred them.

#### 6. FRANCES A. YATES ON THE EMERGENCE OF CHRISTIAN KABBALAH

Few scholars of the Italian Renaissance have offered a more comprehensive and penetrating assessment of the role played by Kabbalah in the predominant Christian culture than Dame Frances A. Yates. I have pointed out earlier the historical problems involved in Yates's treatment of Kabbalah, as if the lore propagated by the Spanish Kabbalists who arrived in Italy after the expulsion had a significant influence there. A more substantial question concerns the possible contribution of the introduction of Kabbalah within some circles in Europe. Unfortunately, Yates does not clearly address what precisely Kabbalah contributed to so many important areas of culture that was not found earlier in the Middle Ages or in the corpus of pagan writings translated by Ficino. Instead she claimed: "Fundamentally, the Greeks . . . regarded operations as base and mechanical, a degeneration from the only occupation worthy of the dignity of man, pure rational and philosophical speculation. The Middle Ages carried on this attitude in the form that theology is the crown of philosophy and the true end of man is contemplation."<sup>65</sup> According to Yates, the change



toward a much greater activism was related to “the religious excitement caused by the rediscovery of the Hermetica, and their attendant Magia; in the overwhelming emotions, aroused by cabala and its magico-religious techniques. It is magic as an aid to gnosis which begins to turn the will in the new direction. . . . Thus ‘Hermes Trismegistus’ and the Neoplatonism and Cabalism associated with him, may have played during his [Bruno’s] period of glorious ascendancy over the mind of the western man a strangely important role in the shaping of human destiny.”<sup>66</sup>

The emergence of a new, and quite positive, mode of relating to activity, which Yates attributes to the new emphasis on Hermetic and Neoplatonic magic and Kabbalah, is the main factor in her understanding of the transformation of the intellectual scene in Europe. This is a very important statement, which, if true, opens the door to a new understanding of the West. To a certain extent, it is parallel to Max Weber’s much-better-known assumption that Protestantism was successful because of the emphasis it laid on work. However, Yates deals with Catholicism and with intellectual circles. In the epilogue to her last book she claimed that “in its profoundly religious approach, Christian Cabala almost repeats the original situation from which Christianity derived. The early Christians appropriated a Christianised form of the Jewish religion. Similarly, the Christian Cabalists of the Renaissance appropriated Jewish mysticism or Cabala and used it for their own religious ends.”<sup>67</sup> Here Yates claims to see Kabbalah as repeating the formative moment of the acceptance of a certain form of Judaism by ancient gentiles, but now by a Christian audience.

Before undertaking a more detailed analysis of Yates’s proposal, let me dwell for a moment on the change that Kabbalah underwent when accepted by Renaissance Christian thinkers. As we saw in chapter 19, in Christian Kabbalah there was a separation between kabbalistic theosophy and Jewish rituals, as a result of which a form of Christian Gnosis emerged. Let us compare this complex change to a hypothetical development that could have taken place a millennium and a half before the emergence of Christian Kabbalah. My use of the term “Gnosis” in relation to Christian Kabbalah is no accident; the remarkable affinity between the ancient historical Gnosis and Christian Kabbalah seems very real. In Gnosticism we witness a certain type of thought that is mostly speculative; it does not consider the importance of human activity in the world; it is basically an escapist religiosity insofar as the structure of this world is concerned.

Let me attempt to highlight briefly from another point of view some of the points addressed above. Yates, like D. P. Walker, proposed visions of the Renaissance that were deeply indebted to the general orientation of the so-called Warburg school, which emphasized a less “enlightened” approach to religion, one that was more sympathetic to concepts of myth, symbol, astrology, and magic.



I fully agree with this approach. However, it seems that an understanding of Giovanni Pico as tolerant and liberal, the emblem of the Renaissance, informed their approach in an exaggerated way. The view of Giovanni Pico as the instigator of another intellectual tradition totally new, as a thinker who first merged mysticism and magic and created an alternative cultural quasi-pagan trend, seems to me unwarranted. Pico himself conceived his activity as consonant with Christianity, was ready to defend the orthodoxy of his theses in Rome, ultimately received the pontifical blessing, and perhaps ended as a monk under the wings of the less-than-tolerant Fra Girolamo Savonarola. These facts should detract nothing substantial from what he wrote before his alleged retreat to a monastery. However, I believe that we may detect in his writings sufficient statements indicating a critical attitude toward Kabbalah, an intolerance toward Jews, and in some instances a hostility toward magic. Indeed, he achieved a synthesis between magic and Kabbalah not because he strongly believed that either constituted an intellectual alternative to Catholicism, but precisely because he was certain that his intellectual enterprise strengthened his religious faith. Inadvertently, his amalgam developed into a new trend because of the less orthodox inclinations of some sixteenth-century thinkers such as Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim and, in a different manner, Johann Reuchlin, who were less concerned with the consonance of this amalgam with Catholicism.<sup>68</sup> If this observation is correct, we may ask what the relation is between the progenitor and the progeny, in this case between Giovanni Pico's Hermetic-kabbalistic synthesis and the history of this synthesis. Yates assumed that Cornelius Agrippa only "standardized" Pico's position, and that the reverberation of his thought is to be understood in terms of its further development; but the difference is a matter of amplitude, not of a change in the original and more conservative intention of the Italian prodigy. However, we must also ask whether this "tradition" retained the conservative role it had in Pico's thought after passing beyond the borders of Italy. It seems to me that the more complex and elaborated discussions of Cornelius Agrippa went beyond Pico's initial intentions not only in their quantity, but also in their audacity, helping to foster a Hermetic tradition combined with kabbalistic elements that was more independent of the authority of the church. In other words, in western and central Europe, Pico's syncretistic enterprise was taken some distance beyond his intention. This more extreme version influenced some circles in both Italy and Germany.

In the vein of Yates's proposal to delineate the vicissitudes of the amalgam of Hermeticism and Kabbalah in the parts of Europe she was concerned with, let me explore a possible parallel in the Near East and eastern Europe, however unexpected some may find it: the inclusion of eighteenth-century Polish Hasidism in the European history of Hermeticism.<sup>69</sup> While focusing upon the corpus of Ficino's

translations, both Walker and Yates paid less attention to other possible channels for the transmission of Hermetic concepts to the West. More recent studies have reduced the importance of Hermetic magic<sup>70</sup> and emphasized alternative channels.<sup>71</sup> Although Yates correctly described Hermeticism as somewhat declining in Christian western Europe beginning in the late sixteenth century,<sup>72</sup> it was in the Middle East, namely in Jerusalem<sup>73</sup> and in the Galilean city of Safed, in the mid-sixteenth century,<sup>74</sup> and in eastern Europe in the mid-eighteenth century,<sup>75</sup> that Jewish mysticism was heavily influenced by some more moderate talismanic-magical traditions that flourished in an unprecedented manner. Later research, especially the two important books of R. J. W. Evans, has opened the way for a much better understanding of the repercussions of the Italian versions of the occult, including Kabbalah and Hermeticism, among the upper classes of central Europe, especially in Prague and Vienna, from the late sixteenth century until the beginning of the eighteenth century.<sup>76</sup> Largely adopting Yates's overall picture of "occult philosophy," Evans examined its influence in regions that received less attention from his eminent predecessor. I do not assume that the Christian Habsburgan fascination with astrology, alchemy, Hermeticism, and Kabbalah influenced the Hasidic mystical-magical model, which had its own sources in Safedian and some earlier forms of Kabbalah.<sup>77</sup> In the immediate vicinity of the areas where Hasidism emerged and flourished, magic and a variety of occult preoccupations informed the world-view and the preoccupations—with alchemy, for example—of the Christian elite in the period immediately preceding the activity of the founder of Hasidism, R. Israel ben Eliezer Ba'al Shem Tov, known as the Besht. He, too, was in some ways a talismanic prophet, in a manner reminiscent of Ficino and Giovanni Pico, although his sources were mid-sixteenth-century Safedian discussions.<sup>78</sup>

## 7. ITALIAN KABBALAH AND MODERN RESEARCH ON KABBALAH

Having considered the impact of Kabbalah on Florentine Jewish and Christian intellectuals at the end of the fifteenth century, let me turn to scholarship on this topic in the past two generations. The rich cultural ambiance in which Christian Kabbalah emerged was closely tied to the rediscovery and translation of literary corpora that had previously been unknown or poorly known even to the most learned elites in central and western Europe. Translations of substantial corpora from Greek and Hebrew into Latin opened up the possibility of comparing them and of suggesting historical and phenomenological affinities between them. Translations from Hebrew were made from material available in Italy, which means mainly Italian Jewish Kabbalah. The synthetic and comparative mode that characterized many forms of Italian Kabbalah, especially the Christian one, created conditions for a more reflective and even historical approach to the history of Kabbalah. As we

have seen, Elijah del Medigo anticipated some of the findings of modern scholars on the affinity between Kabbalah and Neoplatonism and even the dates when Kabbalah and the *Zohar* were written.<sup>79</sup> In doing so, he followed the path of humanists in Italy, who had started their critical historical and philological activity some few decades earlier. Similarly, Reuchlin's remarks about the affinity between the views of R. Azriel and Neoplatonism triggered concurrence from Scholem.<sup>80</sup>

By and large, the mode prevailing in Florence was shaped by the widespread belief in some circles in a *prisca theologia*, the theory discussed in the Introduction and in chapter 13, which centered on the assumption that different cultures had expressed the same religious truths. Renaissance thinkers sought to discover the corresponding terminologies that reflected those truths in the different literary corpora, and to rescue these hidden messages from their specific expressions in individual works. Through the work of Giovanni Pico in particular, the allegedly ancient Kabbalah was transformed into an adumbration of Christianity. The speculations of Christian Kabbalists such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Johann Reuchlin, and Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim represent the first comparative efforts to understand Kabbalah. These Renaissance figures, especially Johann Reuchlin, were the first strong phenomenologists of Kabbalah and influenced the development of twentieth-century understandings of this mystical lore.

So, for example, in his classic *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* Gershom Scholem formulated his influential vision of the role of symbolism in a laconic manner: "the mystic refrains from destroying the living texture of religious narrative. . . . His essential mode of thinking is what I should like to call symbolical in the strictest sense."<sup>81</sup> The term "essential" is in fact much more essential for understanding Scholem's stand than for understanding mysticism or kabbalistic literature. Elsewhere, in a later and longer formulation, he wrote: "One could say that all of creation is only a language, a symbolic expression of that level which cannot be apprehended by thought. . . . The entire world is thus a symbolic body, within whose concrete reality there is reflected a divine secret. . . . If the entire world is one great symbol and it is entirely filled with symbols in each and every detail, how much more so the Torah."<sup>82</sup>

The apophatic tone of this passage, assuming some kind of a negative theology, is quite important. Thought is conceived of as very important but limited, and the introduction of the concept of symbolism is an attempt to solve this quandary. Scholem's statements about a symbolic essence of mysticism in general, which I propose to call "pansymbolism," stem, in my opinion, from a passage in Reuchlin's *De Arte Cabalistica* already quoted in the Introduction.<sup>83</sup> Elsewhere Reuchlin uses phrases such as "a symbolic philosophy of the art of Kabbalah" and "symbolic theology."<sup>84</sup> These usages were, in my opinion, crucial to Scholem's

own understanding of Kabbalah. In itself, Reuchlin's view is a simplification of the much broader spectrum of kabbalistic phenomena, which consist of a diversity of mythological, Neoplatonic, Aristotelian, and magical elements, and which are by no means reducible to symbolic Pythagoreanism. However, his reduction of the content of Kabbalah in its entirety to a form of thought consonant with, and even an ancient source of, Pythagoreanism can be easily understood as part of his intention to produce a book whose contribution was different from that of either Marsilio Ficino or Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples.<sup>85</sup> This view of Kabbalah as a kind of philosophy possessing a predominantly symbolic mode of expression finds echoes in modern interpretations of myth and Kabbalah as a type of "narrative philosophy," according to Friedrich Schelling and Scholem.<sup>86</sup> However, unlike Reuchlin and other Renaissance figures who combined their leanings toward symbolism with a belief in the reality of magic and its role in Kabbalah, modern scholars of Kabbalah have dramatically weakened this nexus.<sup>87</sup>

Even so, in my opinion the Renaissance philosophical understandings of Kabbalah, as represented in both Jewish and Christian thinkers, continue to reverberate in modern scholarship.<sup>88</sup> I am confident that this factor is a major clue to understanding the genesis of Scholem's pansymbolic approach. Indeed, he once remarked that if he believed in metempsychosis, he would perhaps see Reuchlin's soul as having transmigrated into himself.<sup>89</sup> This may well have been merely a metaphorical statement, but it may nevertheless also disclose something more profound about Scholem's self-perception as a scholar. It may disclose his understanding not only that the line of research in modern Jewish studies starts with Reuchlin as a founding father, "der erster Erforscher des Judentums,"<sup>90</sup> as the first of the systematic exponents of Kabbalah, but also that modern scholars of Kabbalah still follow his conceptual vision. This influence is conspicuous in the overemphasis by Scholem and his followers on the paramount importance of symbolic language and thought as representative of and essential to the entire kabbalistic literature.<sup>91</sup>

I have emphasized the importance of Reuchlin's vision of the *symbola* in Kabbalah in order to point to a view of this lore that has been in existence independently of many of the other sources that scholars have attributed to Scholem's view of symbolism, which include Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Georg Friedrich Creuzer, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Walter Benjamin.<sup>92</sup> Scholem was certainly well acquainted with their views, and they may indeed have influenced his thought. However, we should ask the basic question whether it is more plausible that he adopted an already existing and influential vision of Kabbalah as symbolic, found in a book whose author Scholem himself described as the founder of the science of Judaism, or that Scholem accepted a vision concerning the very nature of

Kabbalah from persons, however famous, whose acquaintance with this lore was at best marginal. Moreover, at least once, shortly before his death, Scholem explicitly described Reuchlin's view of Kabbalah as *receptio symbolica*.<sup>93</sup>

I propose a multilateral answer: Scholem adopted Reuchlin's vision of the nature of Kabbalah as quintessentially symbolic, but formulated his vision of symbolism under the influence of Goethe and Benjamin. Or, to formulate this complexity in a different way: the interest in the nature of symbolism in his immediate entourage, namely the acquaintance with Walter Benjamin, or, in a broader context, including Ernst Cassirer's early essays on symbolism, fostered a much greater openness toward Reuchlin and toward the influential nineteenth-century Christian author Franz Molitor, who was admired by Scholem and who viewed Kabbalah as fundamentally a symbolic lore. Whatever the nexus between the two main sources of Scholem's understanding symbolism may be, it is clear that he was influenced by views first formulated by German authors—Reuchlin, Goethe, and Molitor—and adopted their vision of Kabbalah as a symbolic mode of expression.

Reuchlin, as we have seen earlier, described himself as *Pythagoras redivivus*; Scholem described himself as *Reuchlin redivivus*. It is hard to believe that Scholem was not aware of Reuchlin's self-description. Reuchlin launched a new tradition, one emphasizing a symbolic reading of Kabbalah, indeed a *receptio symbolica*, which today represents not the specific conceptualization of Kabbalah by Jewish Kabbalists, but an academic tradition that emphasizes the importance of symbols.<sup>94</sup> To a certain extent Scholem was right: insofar as one of the major perceptions of Kabbalah by scholars is involved, namely as a prominently symbolic theology, Reuchlin was indeed the founding figure. Thus, a seminal statement dealing with the phenomenology of Kabbalah, as found in the Christian Kabbalah of Reuchlin, had a lasting impact on modern romantic scholarship on Kabbalah, which construed it as a unified form of literature, with symbolism constituting its unquestioned center.<sup>95</sup> When Giovanni Pico encouraged Reuchlin in 1490 in Florence to study Kabbalah, he probably did not know that he was assisting in establishing a new field in Christian theology; he certainly could not have known that he was a catalyst in creating the conceptual structure that would inform the academic study of Kabbalah centuries later.

One modern scholar, the Italian Jewish historian Arnaldo Momigliano, took issue with Scholem's general approach, claiming that Scholem was reflecting a form of "Catholic romanticism."<sup>96</sup> Although he did not elaborate upon the meaning of this observation, I assume that he was referring to Scholem's reliance on and admiration for Franz Molitor. Molitor was also influenced by Reuchlin's vision of symbolic theology.<sup>97</sup> Momigliano chose another figure as his imaginary predecessor, an Italian rabbi named 'Ahima'atz ben Paltiel, the author of the eleventh-century

*Megillat 'Ahima'atz*, or *Scroll of 'Ahima'atz*.<sup>98</sup> As a scholar Momigliano was more a humanist reminiscent of Lorenzo Valla than a Renaissance figure, whereas Scholem operated more as a Renaissance figure identifying himself with Johann Reuchlin than as a humanist. Indeed, in one of the few confessions about his purpose in studying Kabbalah, Scholem described his use of critical tools such as history and philology as means of attaining understanding of what he called “the mountain,” which in that context was a symbol of reality or of the absolute.<sup>99</sup> Jewish esotericism traveled a long way from the Byzantine Apulia’s R. 'Ahima'atz, with his focus on history, mythical though it might be,<sup>100</sup> and his belief that his ancestors could contemplate the *Merkavah* and perform miracles, to the Pythagorean-Neoplatonic approach of Kabbalah that emerged in Tuscany in the late fifteenth century and was embraced by Reuchlin in some of his formulations. 'Ahima'atz and Reuchlin, like many other thinkers between them, undoubtedly shared a widespread belief in the power of the divine name, but they lived in different cultural and imaginary universes.

The advent of the translated writings of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and their many followers in the Middle Ages, and even more so in the Renaissance, with their emphasis on the importance of intellection and contemplation, produced new syntheses between the fragmented, concrete, and extrovert propensities and experiences of late-antique Jewish mysticism and the new modes of thought. In fact they forged new forms of Judaism, just as the magical traditions of Hellenistic extraction did. The tensions between them never ceased during the history of Jewish mysticism. The importance of the Hebrew language, with the beliefs in its powers, in the crucial role of the commandments as a performative form of religious expression, in the essentializing specificity of the studied text, remained as central to the medieval Jewish mystics as ever and absorbed many of the contributions of the introvert, spiritual, and intellectual elements stemming from the Greek and Hellenistic heritage. Alemanno’s use of the term *tzefiyah*, which in the *Heikhalot* literature meant gazing, but which he understood in the Platonic sense of contemplation, is just one example of both the synthesis and the tension between the two religiosities. Alemanno, however, situated magical performance higher than contemplating the *sefirot*.<sup>101</sup> Such a stance is also found in Abraham Abulafia’s book *'Or ha-Sekhel* and, following him, Moshe Narboni’s *Commentary on Avicenna’s Intentions of the Philosophers*, where the claim is made that the prophet who can change the course of nature is the highest among all the prophets.<sup>102</sup> The prophets, too, were imagined to have used divine names. A belief in the importance of human action, basically linguistic, as higher than even the mental supreme accomplishment is often related to kataphatic propensities, namely to more positive types of theologies. Symbolism as defined by scholars of Kabbalah, when it occurs, is much more an expression of a negative theology, which may prevent a direct contact with the divine.

Scholem adopted one aspect of Reuchlin's complex Renaissance structure, the symbolic one, but marginalized the important "practical" aspects of his earlier book *De Verbo Mirifico* for understanding the nature of Reuchlin's project, as he attenuated magical aspects of Kabbalah in general. The marriage between Kabbalah and magic in the Renaissance, as highlighted by Yates, and in my opinion the same "marriage" in its precursors in both Spanish and Italian Kabbalah, discussed in chapter 21, have been considerably weakened by modern scholars' focus on the philosophical and symbolic aspects of Kabbalah.<sup>103</sup> For example, new interpretations of the *prisca theologia* have attenuated the diversity of the foci visible in the Renaissance understanding of Kabbalah, where both ecstasy and magic were regarded as more central than symbolism. As seen in the passage from Riccius quoted earlier in this chapter, symbols were used in order to produce an elevation of the mind to the divine realm.

Some years ago Amos Funkenstein and I described Gershom Scholem's project in terms of Renaissance approaches.<sup>104</sup> The vitality of the unifying visions of Kabbalah did not wane after their promulgation by Christian Kabbalists. More recently, such a vision formed the center of one of the most fascinating scholarly understandings of Kabbalah as proposed by Elliot R. Wolfson. At the end of his most recent book he writes about what he calls the "axiom" of Kabbalah: "Suffering the suffering of this axiom is a first step to redeeming an ancient wisdom, tiredly waiting to be liberated from the confinement of its own textual embodiment."<sup>105</sup>

What is the content of this "axiom"? Wolfson lays it out in a passage just before: "In the symbolic view of medieval Kabbalah, as in a variety of ancient Gnostic sources, especially of Valentinian provenance, the cultic retrieval of sexual unity is in fact a 'reconstructed masculinity.'"<sup>106</sup> Apparently Wolfson identifies with the suffering of this axiom; otherwise I cannot explain this statement. Although I cannot undertake a discussion of the content of Wolfson's statements here,<sup>107</sup> the fact that one unified message transpires from so many documents, medieval and ancient, when understood symbolically, is a nice example of the revival of Giovanni Pico's and Reuchlin's approach to Kabbalah as *prisca theologia* and *receptio symbolica*. They, too, attempted to redeem Kabbalah from its textual confinement, and to find in it a masculine divine figure at the center. Another potential proof of continuity resides in the fact that Giovanni Pico intended to write a poetical theology; although he apparently never did so, Wolfson has.<sup>108</sup>

Whereas the Zoharic and Safedian Kabbalah succeeded in establishing themselves at the center of traditional studies of Jewish Kabbalah, Christian Kabbalah, forged by Giovanni Pico and Reuchlin, richly fertilized some approaches found in modern scholarship on Kabbalah, as well as contemporary challenges in Italy from the likes of the famous seventeenth-century anti-Kabbalist Leone da Modena.



Perhaps the most important lesson that can be drawn from the discussions above is that discerning differences among the three basic models of Kabbalah—the theosophical-theurgical, the ecstatic, and the magical<sup>109</sup>—and understanding the reasons for the emergence and development of those divergences, as well as the manner in which they were dealt with by various individuals, is the beginning of the joy of understanding, whether of Kabbalah or of any other widespread cultural phenomenon. Following Ficino, and to a certain extent also Ioan P. Culianu, we may see in the scholarship on Kabbalah an instance of *iocare serio*, a “serious game,”<sup>110</sup> in which discernment of the profound variety of phenomena under scrutiny is the main rule. Although I have surveyed several developments of Italian Kabbalah, from my point of view there is no reason to prefer one of them, or any version of models, as a phenomenological starting point for understanding Kabbalah as a whole. From the phenomenological point of view the main lesson one can learn from studying Italian Kabbalah is the predominance of diversity even in a single geographical center.

The fact that I have concentrated above on the topic of Kabbalah does not mean that I believe that this form of knowledge was the central preoccupation of either Jews or Christians in Italy either in the Middle Ages or during the Renaissance. Unlike Jacob Burckhardt, who defined the Renaissance in terms of the ascent of the arts,<sup>111</sup> I would like to avoid defining a long period of creativity in terms of one dominant activity. Thus I would also reject the view that mysticism constituted a central interest and activity, in the vein of Henry Thode’s proposal, more than a century ago, to explain the Renaissance as the culmination of the impact of St. Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan order.<sup>112</sup> The different models of Kabbalah described above should be understood as threads in a much more complex constellation of intellectual processes that shaped both Jewish and Christian culture in Italy between the late thirteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century.



## APPENDIX I

### THE ANGEL NAMED RIGHTEOUS:

### FROM R. 'AMITTAI OF ORIA TO ERFURT AND ROME

In the Introduction and chapter 7 we traced the trajectory of the mythologems from Apulia and Lucca first to the Rhineland early in the tenth century and then back to Rome in the late thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Because the extant statements about the export of esoterica from Italy are general and apocryphal, the details of transmission are impossible to substantiate. As a result, although scholars have accepted the mediating role of Italy in the passage of esoterica from East to West, no one, to my best knowledge, has attempted to show in any detail what was transmitted and who accepted the views of specific material.

There is hard evidence that the ninth-century poems of R. 'Amittai ben Shefatiah arrived in Germany and were interpreted there. The poems of R. Moshe ben Qalonymos, written in either Lucca or Mainz in the eleventh century, are still

available in southern Germany, though they are less influenced by esoteric themes.<sup>2</sup> Let me present some verses from two of R. 'Amittai's poems and show that a specific theme developed in an early-thirteenth-century Ashkenazi work must have drawn upon earlier sources, most probably Italian:

Metatron, the mighty<sup>3</sup> angel, which turned into fire from flesh,<sup>4</sup>  
 Teaches ethics [musar],<sup>5</sup> as he is appointed over the children of light ['or]<sup>6</sup>  
 .....  
 Yefeifiah, the angel of the Torah, collects black fire<sup>7</sup>  
 In order to link a diadem ['atarah]<sup>8</sup> to the letters of the Torah<sup>9</sup>  
 .....  
 The foundation of His world is called by the name Tzaddiq;<sup>10</sup>  
 By the utterance of his speech he shakes the world.<sup>11</sup>

The last two lines are my chief concern here. In order to understand them I suggest comparing their content with that of the earlier verses. The three doublets can be seen as unrelated and can be read independently of each other, and so the righteous, the Tzaddiq, may be understood as a human figure; but according to another reading, which I prefer, the righteous is the name of just another angel. In fact I assume that in this case as in others, Metatron and Yefeifiah are identical, or at least quite similar, since both function as angels of the Torah.<sup>12</sup> In any case, the Torah is mentioned implicitly and explicitly in the first two doublets. If there are indeed affinities among the three angelic powers, we may see the three doublets as treating the same entity, and thus Metatron, Yefeifiah, and Tzaddiq, or the Righteous, are synonyms. This triple identity is not totally evident, but we may be confident that the Righteous is not a human but an angelic power, since R. 'Amittai writes in another poem:

An angel that is called Tzaddiq, upon whom the footstool [is found],<sup>13</sup>  
 Is appointed upon the countenance [qelaster]<sup>14</sup> together with other members  
 of the camp.<sup>15</sup>  
 He is both awake<sup>16</sup> and answers—shortens the answer [of the angels].<sup>17</sup>

I assume that “the countenance” is to be understood as the face of God, and thus the anonymous angel is appointed upon the face of God. If this assumption is correct, we have again the claim that an angel called Tzaddiq functions just as Metatron does, as the angel of the countenance: *Sar ha-Panim*. We also have rabbinic statements, especially the Babylonian Talmud's *Hagigah*, to the effect that the Righteous is the foundation of the world.<sup>18</sup>

However, between the two poems there is a clear discrepancy: in the first the world is supported by an angel called Tzaddiq that constitutes its foundation; in

the second it is the footstool of the seat of glory that is supported by the angel named Tzaddiq. This discrepancy is indeed an issue that should be addressed. I could find only one example in which the two functions are fulfilled by the same figure: Atlas is sometimes described as supporting the globe of the world, and in other cases as supporting a footstool.<sup>19</sup> I shall return to the Atlas theme later, but the entire issue deserves a more detailed inquiry that I cannot undertake in this framework. It should be noticed that 'Amittai's verses are compact texts, which bring together themes found in different contexts. The density of the messages reflects a rather articulated worldview, which is summarized in very few lines in two disparate poems.

In the main Ashkenazi esoteric school related to the Qalonymos family, I did not find a continuation of this line of thought.<sup>20</sup> However, according to a tradition found in a thirteenth-century Ashkenazi passage, the term "pillar" in the *Hagigah* text, which is understood as the Righteous, is identified as an angel that shakes the world once every seventy years.<sup>21</sup> The identity of the angel is not clear. However, in an Ashkenazi treatise by R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo of Erfurt, a nexus between the pillar as the righteous and the angel Metatron seems quite plausible.<sup>22</sup> In his *Commentary on the Haftarah*, the Ashkenazi author glosses one of the names of Metatron as follows: "ve-Tzaddiq—because a pillar seizes the world and its name is Tzaddiq, and it seizes the world by the right hand, as it is said: 'And the righteous is the foundation of the world' [Proverbs 10:25]."<sup>23</sup> Here the pillar and the hand are explicitly identified. A few lines before this passage, the identity of the entity that seizes the world is revealed more explicitly: "ve-'Akhy'el in gematria [amounts to] 'Ofan, and in gematria Yuppiy'el, and this is the name of the angel of the countenance, and this is the meaning of the statement that there is an 'Ofan on high, and the arm of Metatron is linked to the 'Ofan, and it seizes the world. And the storm passes from the 'Ofan to the arm of the Holy one, blessed be He, as it is said: 'and under the arms, the world [is found].'"<sup>24</sup>

The significance attributed by Nehemiah ben Shlomo to the string of numerical equivalences of these words is not totally clear. They may indicate the identity among the three terms, which I find difficult in the hierarchy that is explicit in the passage; I find it more plausible that they refer to the relationship among them. According to the latter reading, the name of the angel of countenance is equivalent to the term 'Ofan because it is dependent on, or linked to, that angelic figure. Likewise, I would read the first name, ve-'Akhy'el, as referring to God, in a manner reminiscent of what is written in precisely this context, "ve-'Ay'el amounts in gematria to ha-Gadol, because God is great."<sup>25</sup> The remaining question to be resolved is the specific meaning of the arm. According to this passage, the world is held by the arm, and the arm, which is also a pillar, is linked to the 'Ofan. I am not sure that I can provide a visual

representation of the relationship among the four factors mentioned above: God, 'Ofan, Metatron, and the world. Given the prominence of the verb TPS, "to seize," in connection with an arm, I am inclined to relate this passage to a misunderstood Heikhalot passage describing another angel, 'Anafiel, as holding the world in his hand in a manner reminiscent of Apollo/Helios in some mosaics from the Hellenistic period.<sup>26</sup> However, for our purposes, it will suffice to point out that Metatron, or his right hand, is identified as the cosmic pillar. Elsewhere the *Commentary on the Haftarah* states that "the pillar of the world is called Tzaddiq, the foundation of the world, [and] it is linked to the cherub, and 'Adaneyah is the pillar, as it is written: 'whereupon are its foundations ['adaneyah] fastened' [Job 38:5]." <sup>27</sup>

The plural form of 'Eden, "foundation stone"—'adaneyah, "its foundation stones"—has been understood as a proper name for the pillar. As in the earlier sentence, this entity is linked to a supernal entity, a cherub, quite reminiscent of the 'Ofan. We encounter here a specific hierarchy constituted by three beings: God, an angelic figure ('Ofan or, alternatively, a cherub), and the lower cosmic entity designated as Metatron, which is also the pillar and the righteous. Unlike the rabbinic text, which does not create any specific link between the pillar and God, a continuum and similarity between them is articulated. They are connected by an angelic median figure, and both are described anthropomorphically. This cosmic pillar Righteous is obviously connected to the world, and I assume that Metatron is understood both as the angel appointed over the world and also as the sustaining power of the world. However, this medieval text describes Metatron as depending upon the arm of God, and thus emphasizes the strong linkage between the angel and God. In a way, Metatron is a reverberation on a lower plane of a part of the divine structure. In the same treatise, in the immediate vicinity of the discussions of the pillar and the angels, Nehemiah ben Shlomo draws a parallel between the divine form and the angelic world: since the angels are portrayed in some places in rabbinic literature as standing, having no knees, and thus as inflexible, the Ashkenazi writer describes them as being like "pillar[s] of iron."<sup>28</sup>

Some interesting parallels to these passages, found in a manuscript closely related to R. Nehemiah, eliminate the cherub as an intermediary between God's arm and Metatron. In this fragment Yuppi'el is identified with Metatron.<sup>29</sup> In his *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, R. Nehemiah combines a view of Metatron as the righteous with the view that this angel and God seize the world in their hands.<sup>30</sup> Closer to the *Commentary on the Haftarah* is a version found in a manuscript of the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, where Yuppiy'el is described as amounting in gematria to "'Ofan . . . since the entire world stands upon a pillar named righteous . . . and Yuppiy'el is linked to the finger of the Holy One, blessed be He."<sup>31</sup> My assumption is that this is a powerful parallel to the

Ashkenazi texts presented above, and we may assume that one of the groups of Ashkenazi esoteric authors articulated a hierarchy based on three supernal entities connected among themselves and related to the concept of the cosmic pillar.

Moreover, in a short sentence in the same treatise, the commentator compresses a view that occurs in his writings several times: “*Tahsasiyah* . . . in gematria ‘a righteous comes to me,’ that is, ‘the righteous is the foundation of the world’ [Proverbs 10:25],<sup>32</sup> because he sustains the pillar that is called righteous and the entire world suffers<sup>33</sup> with him.”<sup>34</sup> Again in the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, we read: “*Ala’liyah* in gematria is *Bore’o*,<sup>35</sup> because he seizes [tofes] the entire world in his fist, and he hangs upon the Creator.”<sup>36</sup> Shortly before this, R. Nehemiah writes: “Metatron bears the world by his great power,<sup>37</sup> and he depends upon the finger of God.”<sup>38</sup> In these two last statements the angel has a double nature: he depends upon God, and he seizes the world in his hand or fist. This double function is reminiscent of the two descriptions of the angelic Tzaddiq in R. ’Amittai’s two poems. In R. Nehemiah’s *Commentary on the Haftarah* we have a similar stance: “The pillar that sustains the world is called Tzaddiq, and he sustains it by his right hand, as it is written: ‘The righteous is the foundation of the world’ [Proverbs 10:25].”<sup>39</sup>

A subordination of the angel of the countenance to the cherub is found also in a late-thirteenth-century Ashkenazi text printed by Gershom Scholem, which also demonstrates an acquaintance with theosophical Kabbalah.<sup>40</sup> However, much more important is the following anonymous text presumably related to theosophical Kabbalah, again printed by Scholem: “I heard that about him it is hinted at [in the verse] ‘Righteous is the foundation of the world,’ ‘because for one righteous the world stands,’<sup>41</sup> and it is Enoch ben Yared.”<sup>42</sup> I wonder whether the oral tradition alluded to by the Kabbalist reflects a tradition passed orally from an Ashkenazi source.

The affinity between Metatron, related in some cases to Enoch, and the cosmic pillar is reminiscent of the role played by Atlas in Greek mythology. Indeed Eusebius of Caesarea reported a view in the name of Pseudo-Eupolemos, according to which “the Greeks say that Atlas invented astrology, and that Atlas is the same as Enoch.”<sup>43</sup> This identification has no direct relationship to the role of Atlas and Enoch as pillars, but they indicate an affinity between those figures, and the possible influence of the Greek mythologem on the Jewish one deserves further exploration.

Whether these themes explain better the early theosophic discussions of the cosmic or phallic figure of the righteous in early Kabbalah is an important issue for understanding the emergence of theosophical Kabbalah, but it should not concern us here.<sup>44</sup> In any case, it is possible that a discussion found in Abraham Abulafia’s *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, written in Rome in 1280, and dealing with the eschatological role

of the pillar—quite an exceptional topic in Abulafia's writings—may have something to do with the views of R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, adduced above.<sup>45</sup>

Let me summarize: the tradition first documented in R. 'Amittai's poem is found indeed in a special type of Ashkenazi literature, different from the main school of Hasidei Ashkenaz, presumably in Erfurt.<sup>46</sup> At the end of the thirteenth century, it made its way to Rome. Thus, Jews in Italy imported a more elaborated form of raw material that was, presumably, exported three centuries earlier to Ashkenaz. Interestingly, I did not find this mythologem in the writings of the main school of Hasidei Ashkenaz associated with the Qalonymos family. To my best knowledge, it is found only in the writings of R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, whose views differ from the other and more influential school, or it occurs as a result of his influence. This and some other conceptual distinctions between his writings and those of the Qalonymos school<sup>47</sup> may imply that it was not the Lucca-Mainz line of transmission that was instrumental in bringing this mythologem from Italy to Ashkenaz, but another line, whose views were known to both R. Nehemiah and R. Abraham ben Azriel, the author of 'Arugat ha-Bosem, in which R. 'Amittai's poem is quoted. In this work R. Abraham also quoted briefly from R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo's interpretations of earlier poems.<sup>48</sup>

We may assume that sometime in late antiquity or in the early Middle Ages, Apuleian Jews imported the theory of Metatron as the righteous and the pillar of the world, related to angelology reminiscent of the Heikhalot literature; the theory does not survive in the European manuscripts preserving forms of this literature. This mythologem was transmitted to Ashkenaz, and apparently also to theosophical Kabbalah, and returned to Italy in a manuscript now preserved in Rome, Angelica 46, described in chapter 7. R. 'Amittai's poems are therefore the earliest evidence, though not, I assume, the origin of the mythologem, and they enhance our understanding of a small piece of history in Jewish mysticism.

The mythologems elaborated above are based upon an implicit and an explicit anthropomorphism. The archangel is appointed, according to a verse in R. 'Amittai, on the countenance of God, whereas R. Nehemiah describes the connection of Metatron with the divinity in quite an organic manner. Let me present another verse by 'Amittai and compare it with Ashkenazi esoteric material. After a long description of how God created Adam, the poet writes:

He appointed [*pequdim bo*] within him ten things from the face of the  
Dynamis [*Penei ha-Gevurah*]:<sup>49</sup>

The sight of the eye and the hearing of the concave ear,  
The Countenance of the Face,<sup>50</sup> Understanding, and upright Knowledge,  
Spirit, Soul, Intelligence, and Stature and Form.<sup>51</sup>

The list of the ten things is not new: it echoes a rabbinic statement about ten things given to the infant by its father and mother, and the other ten given by God;<sup>52</sup> and this is undoubtedly 'Amittai's source. However, what is especially interesting for our discussion here in the formulation of the Italian poet is the formulation "the face of the Dynamis." This means that the ten things reflect qualities of the divine face, a clear anthropomorphic statement. To be sure, terms like *Stature*, *Qomah*, do not represent the divine or human face, but their body, as we learn from the widespread phrase *Shi'ur Qomah*, meaning the dimension or size of the body. In other words, R. 'Amittai speculates about the isomorphism of God and man, as well as the similarity of the functions of their limbs. While the talmudic statement enumerates ten things given by God, there is no implication that God himself possesses those qualities or limbs. However, the way in which the father gives a substance from himself, as do the mother and also the third partner, God, can be understood not just as giving those ten things, but as giving them from Himself. That R. 'Amittai was not necessarily an attentive reader of the Talmud and presumably did not extrapolate his formulation through exegesis of the talmudic passage in *Niddah* is evident from the fact that R. Eleazar of Worms offers in one of his discussions the following recommendation: "You should think in your heart that . . . the Holy One, blessed be He, gave me ten things of His own [*mishelo*], which are Soul, Countenance of the Face, and the hearing of the ear and the sight of eye, and the smell of the nose, and the speech of the lips, and the usage of the tongue, and the touch of the hands, and the walk of the feet, Wisdom, and Understanding."<sup>53</sup>

It is evident that R. Eleazar had a version similar to that of R. 'Amittai but neither identical with it nor derived from it. Both assume that God gives something He has in Himself, but they differ on the details. The most important difference seems to me to be the appearance of the term *Qomah* in R. 'Amittai, and the absence of this concept in R. Eleazar<sup>54</sup> or in any of the lists of ten things that I have seen. This means, in my opinion, that in ninth-century Italy an older version of this list was preserved, one closer to an anthropomorphic view and presumably close to the literature connected to the *Shi'ur Qomah* speculations; and that the details of that list had changed. On the background of these observations, let me briefly draw attention to the fact that one of the most anthropomorphic passages found in the Middle Ages, and printed anonymously by E. E. Urbach,<sup>55</sup> stems, in my opinion, from one of the lost writings of R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo of Erfurt,<sup>56</sup> whose views have been analyzed above in the context of other verses of R. 'Amittai. As Urbach pointed out, there was an episode in Ashkenaz in which books with anthropomorphic views were destroyed.<sup>57</sup> In the other books of R. Nehemiah, interest in the *Shi'ur Qomah* is also substantial.<sup>58</sup> That speculations about Metatron and *Shi'ur Qomah* went together

and were an integral part of an anthropomorphic Jewish theology seems to me a plausible assumption, as the archangel was called YHWH Qatan, “the small YHWH,” or ‘Adonai Qatan, in order to distinguish it from “the Great YHWH,” or ‘Adonai Gadol.<sup>59</sup> There can be no doubt that the two major topics in the various books of R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo are commentaries on Shi’ur Qomah regarding the seventy names of Metatron and the seventy names of God.

Let me now address another important passage from the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*. In section 30, ‘Uzah is mentioned as one of the names of the archangel. Its numerical valence is calculated as 19 and as identical with Havah, namely Eve, since Enoch was the offspring of Adam and Eve, a child of “flesh and blood.” Then the author adduces another name, ‘AHiY, which means “my brother,” which also amounts to 19. The meaning of “my brother” is described as follows: “he [Enoch] become as a brother to the Holy One, blessed be He, because he judges in the firmament after the Holy One, blessed be He.”<sup>60</sup> Therefore, Metatron is not just an angel or, according to another passage in this book, the adopted son of God,<sup>61</sup> but also an entity similar to His brother.<sup>62</sup> In some other cases, the two figures occur together in an emphatic manner.<sup>63</sup>

It seems therefore that in Italy, long before any other place in Europe, issues related to these themes permeated the thought of a major figure, and their presence in the peninsula may explain how those views, otherwise unknown, reached the Ashkenazi regions. It is plausible that Italy first imported those views from some early groups in the land of Israel, and then exported them to Germany.

One more important observation on our topic: as we saw in the Introduction, ‘Ahima‘atz described his ancestors not only as experts in esoterica, but also as engaging in activities such as contemplating the Divine Chariot. Thus, we have testimony that the *Heikhalot* literature was used both magically and mystically in the mid-eighth century, even outside the land of Israel.<sup>64</sup> The fact that the ancestors were some kind of mystics did not foreclose magical inclinations, or vice versa. A similar combination is found in R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, who describes the magical powers of some of the names of Metatron but also describes prophecy as some form of enthronement. So, for example, we read in his *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron* about the translation of Enoch that “he had two likenesses [*shetei demuyiot*]:<sup>65</sup> at the beginning he had the likeness of a man<sup>66</sup> and, at the end, the likeness of an angel . . . so that when He has chosen a prophet to worship him<sup>67</sup> He will elevate him [*yariymehu*]<sup>68</sup> by means of the radiance of the Glory, [to sit] upon the seat of Glory.”<sup>69</sup>

If my proposal of *yariymehu*, “he will elevate him,” is indeed correct, this passage addresses a pattern of apotheosis by enthronement, and not only contemplation of a sublime throne from a distance, as in the case of many descriptions in the



Heikhalot literature. This specific type of experience is already found in much earlier forms of Jewish mystical literature in connection with Enoch.<sup>70</sup> However, what is more important is the fact that the Heikhalot hero, Enoch, becomes a paradigm for understanding the nature of prophecy as related to enthronement. To be sure, enthronement is quite a widespread theme in late antiquity as a way of describing elevation, and it is found also in a Jewish Hellenistic text.<sup>71</sup> In any case, the theme of enthronement is known in the lifetime of R. Nehemiah, from a passage in R. Eleazar of Worms dealing with the recipient of the secrets of the Merkavah, who is compared to an enthroned Adam.<sup>72</sup> Thus descriptions of the old figures were sometimes accompanied by the assumption that those experiences were still available.

In general terms, then, R. Nehemiah is in concert rather than in conflict with a view of R. Eleazar of Worms,<sup>73</sup> although whereas the former speaks about the elevation of the body, the latter speaks about the elevation of the soul. However, the important fact for the discussion here is the interpretation of prophecy proposed by R. Nehemiah, a person who was himself described as a prophet. Thus, we may suggest that in Ashkenazi Jewish culture, a person who was described as a prophet was deeply affected by the Heikhalot literature and espoused some themes that are hardly identifiable except in the poems of the ninth-century R. 'Amittai.

Let me compare the semiotic tenor of these discussions to that of the theosophical and ecstatic Kabbalists. The basic worldview of both R. 'Amittai and R. Nehemiah is concrete and continuous. No allegoresis or analogical symbolism,<sup>74</sup> but an almost ontic continuity of a universe linked by the median angel, is dominant in these discussions. No emanation theory is invoked, nor does a theology of a *deus absconditus* preside over the lower universe. It is this concept of a more unified universe, which is also reflected in many other discussions, that was transformed by the arrival and integration of new speculative corpora of Greek and Hellenistic origins in Judaism, and the various reactions to them both in the Ashkenazi-French milieus and in the Provençal-Spanish ones. This transformation is already evident in R. Nathan of Rome's interpretation of the *Pardes* legend in *Sefer ha-'Arukh*, as seen above in the Introduction; but it was only in the new waves of speculative knowledge that arrived in Italy from the West in the thirteenth century that the new comprehensive religious worldviews began their crystallization in Italy.

## APPENDIX 2

### THE INFANT EXPERIMENT:

### ON THE SEARCH FOR THE FIRST LANGUAGE IN ITALY

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

As we have seen above, a preoccupation with the origins of knowledge was part and parcel of the revival known as the Renaissance. My assumption is that this search for old sources was an attempt to find sources of authority in a time when new material was being introduced on the intellectual market. Johann Reuchlin's attempt to see in Kabbalah an ancient philosophy that inspired Pythagoras represents just such an effort. Let me now turn to another attempt to claim superiority by establishing anteriority.

The search for a primordial language was as much a concern of many Kabbalists as it is of some modern linguists attempting to reconstruct the alleged *Ursprache*.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in the Middle Ages, millions of Jews regarded Hebrew as the primordial language. Extrapolating from the Bible, where God is described as using the holy language for both creation and revelation, most ancient and medieval Jews assumed that the first recorded dialogues took place in Hebrew. This view was explicated in a medieval midrashic discussion.<sup>2</sup> But the most articulate medieval account was formulated by R. Yehudah ha-Levi, a twelfth-century theologian active in Spain, who strenuously insisted on the perfection and superiority of Hebrew in an attempt to counteract Muslim claims about the superiority of the Qur'an and Arabic.<sup>3</sup> After the mid-twelfth century, Jewish thinkers exploring the nature of language were less emphatic about the superiority of Hebrew. Their reluctance to rely upon the "evidence" of the ancient canons, whose authority was accepted not only by Jews but also by Christians, owes much to the encounter with the more naturalistic approach stemming from Greek philosophical and scientific sources as mediated by the Arabic language and culture.

Before surveying the various Hebrew versions of the infant story, it is worth noting that the first descriptions of an experiment to establish the first language by observing an uneducated infant are found in Herodotus 2.2 and in the thirteenth-century chronicle by Fra Salimbene, which deals with the escapades of Frederick II. By and large, this issue did not attract the attention of Christian authors, and even Salimbene's account of Frederick's experiment does not reflect his own curiosity about the first language, but rather a concern to list instances of the monarch's cruelty; Frederick's "experiment" provided no answers, because the children died.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. THREE PHILOSOPHICAL STANDS

### Semitic Phonetics as Original Language

R. Abraham ibn Ezra, the mid-twelfth-century thinker, commentator, astronomer, and linguist,<sup>5</sup> engaged this issue in one of his numerous writings on the Hebrew language, *Sefer Safah Berurah*, composed either in Italy or after his visit there.<sup>6</sup>

So first I searched to discover which is the first [ro'shah]<sup>7</sup> of all languages. Many have said that Aramaic is the most ancient [qadmonit],<sup>8</sup> and that it is even in the nature of man to speak it without having been taught by anyone, and that if a newborn child were placed in a desert with no one but a mute wet nurse to nurse him, he would speak Aramaic. And that is because if a child is taught a foreign language he forgets his natural language [leshon toladah]. But these words are utterly without meaning, for something [learned] as a result of chance cannot cause one to forget his natural [language], which is the root. Moreover, the sacred language and the

Aramaic one and the Arabic one [*leshon Qeidar*] are one language and one speech [Genesis 11:1].<sup>9</sup>

An excellent linguist, Ibn Ezra supports his theory of the resemblance among the three languages by citing phonetic similarities such as the use of guttural sounds. This comparative exercise reinforces the theory about the existence of a primordial language, believed by some people to have been Aramaic. However, Ibn Ezra rejects the idea that someone forgets the natural language when he is taught another one. What is common to the two points, the existence of shared features in the three Semitic languages and the rejection of the theory of oblivion, is the fact that language consists not solely, or even quintessentially, of semantic components but rather of phonetic ones: “all the nations, in all the lands, are equal in [their] pronunciation, but are distinguished from one another [only] slightly by the speech [namely utterance] of their sounds in a clear way.”<sup>10</sup> Ibn Ezra’s rejection of oblivion is reinforced by another astute observation. Immediately before the passage on his search for the first language, he discusses the famous passage in Genesis about Adam’s calling things by their names. He indicates that God would not have assigned such a task to a stupid person, and so we must admit that Adam knew the nature of the animals; then Ibn Ezra writes: “He, blessed be He, planted in man the power to pronounce sounds.”<sup>11</sup> I read this assessment as an attempt to solve the problem not of the human capacity to know the nature of things, but of the capacity to express what that nature is. Here Ibn Ezra makes another fine point: he claims not that God planted the faculty of pronunciation in Adam, but that He planted it in man. In Hebrew the difference is quite subtle. Adam is the primordial man, while *ha-’adam* designates the species of man. Thus, pronunciation, like intelligence, may be understood as an attribute of humankind in general, and not only of the mythical first man. If so, content, namely the nature of things, and the power of expressing what that nature is are not restricted to a mythical event, but are part of the nature of man as man. Thus, if all the ancient languages share some phonetic features, those features will not be forgotten by the study of another, somewhat different language.

Ibn Ezra’s opinion that the primordial language was Aramaic and not Hebrew is quite rare in the Jewish sources.<sup>12</sup> He dissented from the prevailing acceptance of Hebrew as the first language and shifted the focus from texts to linguistic facts.

### Hebrew Phonetics and Semantics

In his correspondence with another philosopher, R. Zerahyah ben Sha’altiel Hen, R. Hillel ben Shemuel, who lived in Capua or Verona (or, according to another source, Ferrara) in the thirteenth century, presents the following version of the

infant experiment: “If the infant has been for a long period among mute persons or among nonspeaking nurses, who do not speak among themselves before him at all, after a while, when the natures [ha-teva‘im]<sup>13</sup> [of the child] emerge and strengthen, it is part of the nature that he will speak hesitantly or stammer.<sup>14</sup> The majority of his stammering will be pronounced words until he reaches the stage of perfect speech out of this stammering, and the language he speaks at the beginning will undoubtedly be the holy language, because it was the first and it was given to Adam by [his] nature [be-teva‘].”<sup>15</sup>

This stance is apparently closer to that of R. Abraham ibn Ezra than to that of Hillel’s own student, Abulafia. Hillel believes that, by nature, the infant is imprinted with the capacity for speech, which will emerge in the form of stammering, which will change into a clear-cut speech, which will be Hebrew. Hillel’s inclusion of “by nature” in his account produces a perspective that differs from the formulation—though perhaps not the intention—of Ibn Ezra, who describes God’s implantation of the speech faculty in man. In Hillel’s account, language may be part of the perfect nature of man. Thus, by a different route, Hillel may point to the same idea of the perfect phonetic over the perfect semantic. The phonetic aspect of language is hinted at by the stammering, which implies an initial stage in a progression. I assume that the first stage involves confused sounds that gradually become articulated. The stammering points to overcoming an initial imperfection, but from the very beginning the phonetic apparatus is described as if designed to generate the sounds of Hebrew. The transition from stammering to perfect speech may stand, as J. B. Sermoneta has proposed, as the perfection of the speech organs, referred to here as the strengthening of “the natures [ha-teva‘im].”<sup>16</sup> This phonetic reading does not preclude also a semantic one; the passage should be understood not only as that the sounds produced by the child correspond to those of Hebrew but also as that the combinations of letters into words having a meaning in Hebrew.

### A Rejection of Hebrew as a Natural Language

R. Hillel’s naturalistic stand infuriated his much more extreme contemporary, the Maimonidean philosopher Zerahyah ben Sha’altiel Hen, originally from Barcelona but a resident of Rome in the late 1270s and the 1280s. He emphatically rejected the assumption that Hebrew, or language in general, was an integral part of human nature and asserted instead that a child raised among mute people would not speak at all but would perhaps “bark like a dog.”<sup>17</sup> If Hebrew was a natural capacity of Adam, then everyone would speak Hebrew. Zerahyah’s behaviorist approach presupposes that language is learned by imitation, and is basically an acquired faculty.

## 3. THREE KABBALISTIC MODELS

Although the three philosophical positions surveyed above tend to a naturalistic understanding of the infant experiment, among the Kabbalists discussed below three different models can be discerned in the way the experiment is understood. Since I have articulated elsewhere the phenomenological structure of three major models of Kabbalah,<sup>18</sup> here I shall refer to them only in the detail necessary for understanding the different interpretations of the experiment.

## Abraham Abulafia: An Ecstatic Model

As we have seen, Abraham Abulafia traveled from Capua, Italy, to the Iberian peninsula, studying Kabbalah in Barcelona in 1270. Thereafter he became not only a dedicated Kabbalist but also the founder of a new form, the ecstatic one, which differed from the main trend of Kabbalah—which concentrated more on the nature of the divine manifestations—in his evident concern with language, its nature, and the technique of its manipulation either as part of a mystical practice or as an exegetical device.<sup>19</sup> In one of his earliest kabbalistic writings, *Mafteah ha-Re'ayon*, composed in 1273, language is the major subject. Among a variety of topics, he addresses the question of the original language, an issue that will fascinate him for years to come. In this context he adduces a famous story about an experiment to discover what the first language was, whose methodology consisted in preventing an infant from listening to any language. His use of this story may reflect awareness of Ibn Ezra's book.<sup>20</sup> In *Sefer Mafteah ha-Re'ayon* we read:

[a] Know that for every human being who has come to be, there was a human being who preceded him, and so on until Adam. So, too, be informed that for any speaker of any language to have come to speak, there were earlier users of spoken language. And if not, for the previous existence of language there would never have been a speaker, for such is [human] nature [*ha-teva'*]. Observe the various forms and representations and imaginative devices [used by] human education [in order to] determine the language ability of a child until he becomes a proficient speaker of a language. [b] Therefore, it is certain that if we were to imagine that if a child were, by agreement, abandoned to be raised by a mute, that he would by himself learn to speak the holy language, this would be no reason to sustain [the experiment]. And even if you heard that a particular king conducted this experiment and found it to be the case, if you possess reason and perceive truth . . . so, too, concerning our belief that the child was a Hebrew speaker, being in actuality a nonspeaker, this would be a very good story, for we would thereby raise the stature of our language in the ears of those who adhere to this story, although it be an

entirely false fabrication. In addition, he diminishes the stature of the proofs he uses. And as for me, it is not wise to use false claims to raise the stature of anything. . . . However, since our language is indeed of a higher quality, but for different reasons . . . therefore it is called the “holy language.”<sup>21</sup>

The story of the mute nurse, which may have reached Abulafia from oral traditions related to the alleged experiment of Frederick II, should be understood on two different levels. The first one is the factual: the diffusion of such a story about a real experiment should not be believed, because it contradicts reason. As the educational efforts necessary for the learning of a language, including Hebrew, demonstrate, a spontaneous production of language, both phonetic and semantic, is precluded by observation. Thus, the experiment story cannot generate solid evidence for the priority of Hebrew, although its dissemination on a false presumption may fortify the status of Hebrew. Abulafia clearly rejects the use of such traditions or stories. On another level, he presupposes the need for the existence of a language prior to any existing conventional language. His argument is logical, based on experience, and not theological or scriptural. Nevertheless, he is eager to point out that human nature alone cannot reach the attainment of language without external guidance. Though equipped with the linguistic apparatus, man would not operate it spontaneously. The importance of the vocal equipage is mentioned in a very important passage:

But the form that comprises all writing is the “form of speech [tzurat ha-dibbur],” which is natural and adheres to the mouth, and is also inscribed in the heart [haquqim ba-lev] in the moment of formation. And the witness to it is the fact that if this [namely the form of speech] were not the form of man, he would not [be able to] speak, neither would the essence of his existence [mahut metzi’uto] be speech. And you know that the quintessence of man is a living [and] speaking [medabber] being; and the form of life is perfected in the senses, and the “form of speech” is perfected by the intellect.<sup>22</sup>

As in the case of Abraham ibn Ezra, the vocal and intellectual components of language are crucial; both are inscribed in human nature from the very beginning, and their perfection constitutes human perfection. The use of the phrase “form of speech” is parallel to Dante’s contemporary expression *forma locutionis*, a term that is apparently not found before Dante.<sup>23</sup> I do not wish to belabor the implications of such a striking similarity, especially given that Abulafia wrote these words in Spain, though after his first sojourn and study in Italy.

The next passage of interest to us comes from one of Abulafia’s most widespread writings, *Sefer ’Or ha-Sekhel*, composed in Sicily sometime in the mid-1280s:

The human intellect is the mover of all languages, although it is itself immovable, either by its essence or by accident, and what is intended is the human intellect operating within the human species in *actu* from its side, but in *potentia* from their [humans'] side. And it [the intellect] changed the languages after they were one entity, understood by all speakers, and also today they are one entity, [a circumstance] which is, nevertheless, not understood by all speakers. And this was the cause of the dispersion of the nations, as is hinted at in the secret of [the pericope of] dispersion, and from [the verse] "So the Lord scattered them" [Genesis 11:8], and from "The Lord confounded them" [Genesis 11:9]. Because when you find one nation in India and the other in Kush, and the one is at an extreme distance from the other, and the language of the one nation accords with [muskkemet] its environment,<sup>24</sup> and the language of the other with its environment, and one does not see the other, and there are no negotiations between the two, the geographical distance between the two is the reason for the fact that one nation does not understand the language of the other; and it is already clear that languages are conventional but that speech is natural but not conventional. And man's nature does not compel him to cause the transition of what is possible in *potentia* into *actu* by speech, and [so it is with respect to] all the crafts: despite the fact that they are possible in *potentia*, if he does not study them he will never know them. They are not like youth and agedness, which are in *potentia* but will pass into *actu* by necessity; and there is no obstacle to this transition, except only the absence of his form. Therefore these outcomes [namely youth and agedness] will not reach him as a result of study or exercises, but as a result of nature. However, knowledge of the crafts and the understanding of speech are spiritual capacities, which need an agent that causes their passing from *potentia* into *actu*. And if an agent that causes the transition is not found, they [the crafts] will pass into *actu*. And because man possesses an intellect in *actu*, if he is taught, he will receive, and if not, he will not. And because he compares one topic to another even if he has not studied, after he has seen someone who has studied he imagines the outcome of a certain act, and it is possible that he will perform an act similar to that act by accident, without studying it, or will combine one act with another and generate a third act, because everything follows the natural issue.<sup>25</sup>

This passage has a direct impact on the way we should properly understand Abulafia's view of language as represented in the passage dealing with the infant ordeal. Speech is defined here as a possibility found in *potentia*, in Hebrew *be-koah 'efshari*. It needs either a conscious external agent to teach the infant to speak or at



least a model of imitation, which will enable the infant to project what he hears in a way that will enable him to create his own linguistic acts. Therefore, innate though the language capacity is in the infant, it cannot be actualized without the minimum of a speaking model. Innate capacity and environment are therefore quintessential for the emergence of the actual use of language. But who is the agent that can actualize the hypothetical Adam into a speaking being? The answer offered to this question, formulated in the passage from *Sefer ha-Melammed*, can be found in the passage from *Sefer 'Or ha-Sekhel*: the human intellect, or the intellect active within the human species, is such a possible agent. This answer is correct in general because according to a statement in *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, the intellect causes the emergence of speech.<sup>26</sup> But what is the specific nature of the intellect mentioned by Abulafia in the passage quoted just above? On the one hand, he speaks about the “human intellect,” namely the intellect found in the human body. On the other hand, he speaks about the intellect operating within the human species. According to Jewish medieval Neo-Aristotelian traditions, influenced by Arabic sources, this is the Agent Intellect, a cosmic intellect conceived of as separate from matter.<sup>27</sup> In the classical formulations of the Arabo-Jewish philosophical tradition, as found for example in Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, it would be a contradiction in terms to speak about the Agent Intellect as found in matter. However, it seems that a less widespread view of the cosmic intellect among the Jews, as exposed for example by Averroës,<sup>28</sup> might explain the Abulafian concept. In *Sefer 'Or ha-Sekhel*, in a passage preceding the one quoted above, Abulafia discusses the interaction between the separate and the human intellects as follows: “the active intellect, which produces in us an active intellect in actu, is the Lord of All the Worlds, not another of all of the separated intellects. And the intellect that is ours is the tenth, [and] is all [ha-kol], and is reserved to the First Cause.”<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the human intellect can be described as an active intellect. A few lines later Abulafia asserts that a leader has to comprise two modes: the one separate from the outcomes it guides, which does not move together with the things that it moves; and an immovable one, which does not participate in the moved outcomes.<sup>30</sup> No doubt this is the case of the intellect that is conceived, according to Averroës, as both a separate spiritual entity and one immersed in matter. According to Abulafia’s *Ve-Zot Li-Yhudah*, the Agent Intellect is identified with primordial speech,<sup>31</sup> while biblical revelation, more precisely the dialogue between Moses and God, is described as the divine use of Moses’ voice in order to transform the divine intellectual message into a voiced one.<sup>32</sup> Thus, an ordinary person cannot acquire human speech without a human model, the speaking nurse, but we may imagine that Adam, either as a historical person or as a species, could acquire speech as a result of the impact of the intellectual influx upon the organic apparatus. So, for

example, we learn that “speech is conceptualized [metzuyyar ba-sekhe]”<sup>33</sup> in the intellect, and the imaginative faculty [ve-koah ha-medammeh] and the appetitive faculty and the sensory one are ruled by it . . . and the intellect commands speech, and speech commands desire, and desire the imagination, and imagination the senses, and the senses become active in order to fulfill the command of the intellect.”<sup>34</sup>

Already in Abulafia’s first book, *Sefer Get ha-Shemot*, we read:

All languages are included within the language that underlies them all,<sup>35</sup> that is, the holy language [leshon qodesh], expressed through 22 letters<sup>36</sup> and five ways of pronunciation<sup>37</sup> . . . for there is no speech or writ but this, and there are no other letters, for they are holy, and this is the holy language, [the consonants of qodesh being] quf vav daleth shin. This is theos in Greek<sup>38</sup> τυυυτ [tav vav], and snty or sntv in Italian—synnvn tynnyv [shin nun tav vav]<sup>39</sup> or tyt vyv [tet vav]. So if you recite any of the seventy languages you find that its letters are none other than those of the holy language, and that all is but one matter; only that this language is available to those who know, and not available to those who do not. Pay attention to this exalted matter, for it contains a secret derived from the verse “And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech” [Genesis 11:1], and it is further indicated in the verse that refers to the messianic era: “For then will I turn to all nations a pure language, that all of the seventy languages be included in the holy language” [Zephaniah 3:9].<sup>40</sup>

The holy language, which comprises all the others, is not precisely Hebrew according to its semantic nature but much more the fundamental elements, the consonants and the vowels, and the principle of combination of letters, which is one of the major sources of the diversification of languages. Since meaning is also found in other languages in combinations that are meaningless in Hebrew, Abulafia, unlike the theosophical Kabbalists, was strongly inclined to use a variety of words in other languages, in order to calculate their numerical values and to put them in relationship with Hebrew words. So, for example, he used Arabic, Greek, Latin, Italian, Basque, Tatar, and German, and some examples are found in the previous discussions. Thus, he attenuated the stark differences between those languages and historical Hebrew, by assuming that they were part of the universal Hebrew, conceived of as the perfect and original language. Language is also conceived of as both the technique for reaching and the vehicle for attaining a divine revelation: with regard to “the true essence of prophecy, its cause is the ‘word’ that reaches the prophet from God by means of the ‘perfect language,’ which includes under it the seventy languages.”<sup>41</sup>

Abulafia emphasizes the natural essence of human language less as revealed by God than as part and parcel of the human constitution. As what is natural, language is also divine; the two concepts overlap in Abulafia's views.<sup>42</sup> In many respects the model of the ecstatic Kabbalist is much closer to Aristotelian naturalism than are the two models explored below.

### R. Aharon Berakhiah of Modena: Linguistic Immanence

An interesting version of the infant experiment is found in a famous book by R. Aharon Berakhiah of Modena, *Sefer Ma'avar Yaboq*, printed in Mantua in 1626.<sup>43</sup> In the context of the three models organizing kabbalistic thinking, Aharon Berakhiah articulates the magical or talismanic model, which assumes that language is part of the natural order and that it is possible to attract the divine power here below by means of linguistic and other forms of rituals. This model, which is found already at the end of the thirteenth century, is well represented in the writings of one of the Kabbalists who had a lasting impact on Aharon Berakhiah of Modena, namely the Safedian sixteenth-century R. Moshe Cordovero.<sup>44</sup> The Italian Kabbalist writes:

Because nature has imprinted this word in the mouths of infants . . . even the children of non-Jews at the beginning of their speech say "Yako." . . . And it is already known from the story . . . that a child that has not heard any language at the beginning of his speech will speak the holy language, because the master of nature, which is 'Elohim, which amounts in the gematria to "Nature," has imprinted it in such a way on His world, by the secret of the letters of His Torah, into which He looked and created the world.<sup>45</sup>

Let me start with what seems to me the most interesting element of this passage: God or nature, these being one and the same thing, imprinted the Hebrew letters both on humans' inner nature and on external nature. The constitution of the world, like that of the infant, is informed by the same divine power; in fact Aharon Berakhiah's vision involves a linguistic immanence that permeates existence, human and nonhuman. Not only is language imprinted separately on man and nature; the correspondence between the names given by Adam and the things he named is also significant because Adam understood the "spiritual power [ruhaniyyut]<sup>46</sup> of the letters," which constitute the names that correspond to natural entities.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the human soul itself is formed out of the holy letters.<sup>48</sup>

The structure of the world as reflecting that of the Torah is an old midrashic leitmotif, quoted almost verbatim at the end of the passage above: God contemplated the preexisting Torah and created the world, just as Plato's demiurge contemplated the world of the ideas for the same purpose.<sup>49</sup> What the Kabbalist adds

here is an emphasis upon the letters of the Torah, which are the elements relevant for a correspondence with spoken language. The inscribing power is designated as 'Elohim, which in several kabbalistic sources, as here, is identified with nature, because the Hebrew term for nature, *ha-teva*, is numerically equivalent to 'Elohim. This equivalence is very important not only for a more naturalistic understanding of some forms of Kabbalah, as found already in Abulafia and the young Joseph Gikatilla, but also, I assume, for a better understanding of the background of Spinoza's famous expression *Deus sive natura*.<sup>50</sup> The double signature of God upon nature and upon the speech of man is also reminiscent of the famous view of Jacob Boehme, who compared the two as expressing the divine presence on the mundane plane.<sup>51</sup>

Let us return to the infant experiment. What is the nature of the primordial word *Yako*? Aharon Berakhiah explains its origin just before the passage quoted above: "Some few days after their birth, children will say, as the beginning of their speech, the word *Yako*, and so also light-minded women [namely prostitutes] are accustomed to say *Aho*. The infant says *Yako* of his own volition, and wise nature has accustomed him to do so, since he [the infant] [thereby] blesses himself as he says: *Yasimeni 'Elohim ke-'Efraiyim u-Menasheh*, 'God make me as Ephraim and Menasseh,' or *Yasimkhem 'Elohim ke-'Efrayyim u-Menasheh*, 'God make you as Ephraim and Menasseh,' and he [thereby also] blesses his father and mother who have begotten him."<sup>52</sup>

The word *Yako* is therefore conceived of as an emblem, which is the acronym of the first letters of Jacob's blessing, and with this word the infant blesses himself and his parents for begetting him. Wise nature teaches the infant a respectful mode of behavior. Jewish or not, the unconscious knowledge of Hebrew, as represented by what I take to be an onomatopoeic sound, is innate in the infant and is subsequently forgotten. Let us return to the "first word," which is in fact an acronym: *Yako*. The Kabbalist mentions twice that it is a blessing, and indeed the two formulas are a slight variation on Jacob's blessing to his youngest sons in Genesis 48:20, and a formula used by Jews to this day to bless their male offspring at the ritual of the beginning of the Sabbath. The nexus between the formula and the concept of blessing is explicit.

We may learn something more about Aharon Berakhiah's concept of language by turning to his concept of blessing, treated in the same book. In a very important passage, which reflects earlier kabbalistic views and may have served as a channel for their transmission to much later generations, we read:

"By all His ways," even by the corporeal ones, "you shall know Him" [Proverbs 3:6], namely the Holy one, blessed be He, and cleave to Him, and

He will guide your corporeal ways to His worship, so that you shall attain true happiness [ha-'osher ha-'amitti]. And the blessing after [the performance of] the commandments and the acts [ha-pe'ulot] consists in the drawing down of the spiritual power [ruhaniyyut] from the height of the degrees to the sefirah Malkhut,<sup>53</sup> which collects all the influxes that she receives from the [sefirah], and this is the reason why it is called the Knesset Yisrael. Thereafter the influx is drawn onto the lower entities, although it is incumbent on us to draw it down [only] onto her [namely Malkhut].<sup>54</sup>

Here, as in Cordovero, the act of blessing is understood as bringing down the divine power from the highest of the sefirotic powers to the lowest, Malkhut, and then to the lower beings. Blessing is therefore not only an expression of a good wish, a traditional formula, but actually a magical act, linguistic by essence. When blessing himself and his parents, the infant uses one word that is the quintessence of blessing, and there is good reason to assume that the Kabbalist understood its efficacy in talismanic terms.<sup>55</sup> In other words, the nexus between Jacob's blessing in the Torah and the first sounds uttered by the infant, understood to be also a blessing, may reflect a broader dynamic that automatically ensures the descent of power upon the formulas that are pronounced correctly. Such a dynamic seems to be implied in the mention of worshipping God even by deeds, which are purely corporeal and not related to halakhic deeds. In any case, it is unlikely that a Kabbalist would consider the formula that is the quintessence of the blessing as merely a matter of expressing a wish, since the child in any case does not understand the content of *Yako*, and if this word is significant at all, its significance is not semantic but, so I am inclined to assume, talismanic. Language, namely the perfect language, must operate independently of the speaking agent in order to be effective. Whereas the ecstatic Kabbalah regarded language as a means to reach a mystical experience, the talismanic Kabbalah would understand the main role of language as instrumental in bringing the divine power downward, for either magical or mystical purposes.

#### R. 'Ovadiah the Prophet: The Theosophical Model

R. 'Ovadiah the prophet, about whom we know nothing except that he was apparently a contemporary of Aharon Berakhiah of Modena, preserved a unique version of the infant experiment. In one of his glosses on the commentary of Rashi, the famous eleventh-century commentator, he relates the following story:

I have heard from my teacher that sometimes the king Ben Hadad<sup>56</sup> asked the sages of Israel: "How do you know whether the holy language is the best of the languages and the first [ro'sh]<sup>57</sup> of [all] the languages, and that this

language is spoken in heaven? They answered him: "Take two babies from the day they are born and appoint over them someone to survey [them] so that no one will speak with them any language, even the holy language, until the age of seven, because it is at this age that understanding comes to the child, so that he understands all things thereafter. And [you will] see that they will speak only the holy language at the end of these seven years." And the king did so. He took two Israelite infants on the [very] day they were born, and [as they were] males [he] circumcised [them], and he took also a female [infant]. And he put them in a dark house, and he alone gave them food and drink, and he did not speak with them at all, as the sages had instructed him; the sages had told him to take children of Israel and to circumcise the males. And the king did not speak with them, nor did he use the holy language until the end of the seven years. Then he took them from this chamber and spoke with them in the holy language, and the children answered all his questions in the holy language, and they did not understand any other language. And my teacher told me that this is the case just at the end of the seven years, because then the sefirah Binah presides over man. The king also took two uncircumcised children, non-Jewish, and did not circumcise them, and he put them [in the house], and the male could not speak but resembled a mute person, until he was instructed to speak. But the female spoke in the holy language. And whoever has brains in his head will understand it [namely the topic discussed beforehand] according to his intelligence, that the Holy One, blessed be He, has given to man a rank higher than that of the animals and beasts, which [consists of] the speaking faculty. Even if he stays closed in darkness and separated from man, the speaking faculty is not separated [namely divorced] from him. The fact that the uncircumcised child did not speak was a miracle, because he was not circumcised.<sup>58</sup>

Many formulations found in this passage are quite awkward in their Hebrew original, and I would not say that the logic of the discourse is always evident in this text in general. Nevertheless, it is conspicuous that unlike all the former discussions, R. 'Ovadiah the prophet—or perhaps his anonymous teacher—was oriented to a more particularist understanding of the actualization of language. Circumcision is regarded as the touchstone for the attainment of an independent linguistic status. It is far from being clear precisely how this operation is thought to prepare the infant for knowledge of the holy language. We may speculate, on the basis of the nexus in some sources between circumcision and the inscription of the divine name on the penis or, according to another tradition, on the body of

man in general, that the divine name was thought to have a special power of enabling someone to understand Hebrew. Although this explanation is no more than a speculation, what appears to be more certain is the fact that the age of seven is related to the acquisition of wisdom, as the third sefirah, Binah, is conceived of as being appointed to watch over humans at that age. In some sources, this sefirah is related to the concept of language. In any case this is a quite theosophical explanation, which presupposes a correlation between the growth of human beings and the different divine powers, in a manner reminiscent of the psychology characteristic of the *Zohar*. Unlike the two other models, which regard the efficacy of language as depending upon human acts, in this case man—in our case the infant—is strongly conditioned by supernal processes and occult sympathies and correlations.

#### 4. SOME CONCLUSIONS

The emergence, from the twelfth century on, of sustained discussions about the nature of language in general, and the infant experiment in particular, was part of an attempt by Jewish intellectuals, philosophers, and Kabbalists altogether to establish their religious and cultural identity vis-à-vis their Muslim and Christian intellectual environments. Either as attempts to counteract Muslims' claims about the superiority of Arabic, or as attempts to neutralize the claims of Jewish thinkers, mostly philosophers, about the conventionality of language in general, including Hebrew, some Jewish authors strove to conceptualize the view, expressed in less elaborated ways by many of their predecessors, that Hebrew was the primordial language.

Two major lines of thought emerge from the discussions above. The first emphasizes phonetics as the natural and perfect language and is more universalist. It assumes the paradigmatic superiority of Hebrew as a repository of the twenty-two perfect phonemes, but also that, semantically speaking, every word in non-Hebrew languages that can be reduced to the twenty-two letters will have a certain meaning even if it is yet unknown. Though conferring a paramount role to the oral aspect of Hebrew, this approach cannot be seen as a simple claim to the superiority of the Jews who practice this language as a specific combination of ideal sounds and perfect letters, because most of them did not use Hebrew as a vernacular, although they often used it as a written language. This discrepancy between ideal and praxis is most explicit in a passage by Abraham Abulafia, one of the major exponents of the phonetic theory.<sup>59</sup>

On the other hand, the semantic approach is much more particularist: not only the phonemes but also entire Hebrew words are conceived of as natural, either because of the divine promulgation or because of their “natural” expression of the



essences of things. The major motivation in the discussions surveyed above is not the discovery of the alphabet of nature, namely an attempt to understand the cosmic order by decoding the imprint or the signature of the divine language, but linguistic concern. Whereas for many of the Christian thinkers concerned with the first language there was a nexus between the primordial and natural language, in the sense that language corresponded to nature, the Jews were more concerned with the nature of man, seen as an eminently speaking being. The inner rather than the external nature is the main focus of the infant story, and this is part of the more inward orientation of the Jewish interest in language. Whether thinkers were oriented to a universalist or particularist approach, nature remained at the margin of Jewish discussions of language. This distinction was already discernible in the thirteenth century, when Abulafia used combinations of letters in pursuit of attaining a prophetic experience, whereas Ramon Llull was more concerned with external topics, theological or natural.<sup>60</sup> Although the passage by R. Aharon Berakhiah expands the scope of the discussion of the infant experiment to nature, this extension, too, emphasizes the affinity between nature and the Torah. While the search for the perfect and primordial language was connected in European thought to the idea of a comprehensive and natural philosophy, with the Jews it had often to do with the validation of the sacred text. More concerned with communication and with knowledge of objects, Christian thinkers—and some Jewish philosophers—tended to see language as conducive to cognition; most Jewish thinkers, especially Kabbalists, conceived of words more as modes of influence or as instruments for discovering the meaning of the divine message as inscribed in the Bible.

To the extent that we know the circumstances of the lives of the authors discussed above, they were connected in one way or another to Italy. Why did the stories of experiments with infants not draw the attention of Jewish authors outside Italian soil? Although my answer can be no more than speculation, it nevertheless seems to illuminate a certain facet of Jewish culture. If we assume that the sources that significantly influenced the Jews were composed in Italy—and this seems to be the case insofar as the version of Salimbene is concerned—then the Jewish authors dealt with here borrowed the story from the Latin culture, but gave it a special twist, a phenomenon that is obvious already in the case of Ibn Ezra. Unlike their Spanish contemporaries during the thirteenth century and later, the Italian Jews were more open to the Christian environment and thought; this trend is especially evident in the case of R. Hillel of Verona.<sup>61</sup> Cooperation between Jewish and Christian scholars was much more salient in Italy than anywhere else in Europe both in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance.<sup>62</sup> Last but not least, let me introduce some statistical evidence: though starting its life in the history by the Greek pagan Herodotus, and then being connected to the Christian Frederick II,<sup>63</sup>



the story of the infant experiment survives in a greater number of Hebrew versions than Latin ones. Given the vastness of Latin medieval literature in comparison to the corpus of medieval writings in Hebrew, this greater concern with the meaning of the experiment is surely a reflection of the cultures in which they occurred: while the Jews were more interested in the priority of their language, the Christian thinkers were more concerned with ideas about what constituted the perfect language.

## APPENDIX 3

### R. YOHANAN ALEMANNO'S STUDY PROGRAM

As we saw earlier, Alemanno's autograph *Liqqutim*, or *Collectanea*, is a collection of quotations from different sources, all quoted in Hebrew. In addition to these numerous citations, the work contains notes and explanatory glosses by Alemanno.<sup>1</sup>

Folio 64b of Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana, Catalogue A. Neubauer 2234 (= Reggio 23), presents a curriculum and syllabus of works recommended for those striving to attain intellectual success. This document is interesting from several points of view:

- [a] The selection provides a reliable indication of the sources that were available to Alemanno and the breadth of his intellectual interests.
- [b] Because the curriculum is structured progressively, and implicitly also hierarchically, culminating in the works considered most valuable in the

attainment of the ultimate knowledge, and because it is also structured according to the different fields of knowledge, it reveals Alemanno's assessment of the relative value of philosophy, Kabbalah, and magic.

- [c] The content of the list indicates that for Alemanno, as for Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, magic enjoyed a high status. Indeed, some of the Jewish texts cited by Alemanno are the same as those in Pico's library, which contained Hebrew books<sup>2</sup> as well as translations from Hebrew made by his collaborators, in particular Flavius Mithridates.

Here is a translation of Alemanno's Hebrew text, with a minimal apparatus.

This is the order of study for the person whom God has endowed so that he will reach human felicity [Hatzlahah 'enoshit]<sup>3</sup> at the end of his days in accordance with our times, and in accordance with the books that are found among us today, and in accordance with the proper time, and in accordance with his will to dedicate himself [to study].

From the age of four to the age of thirteen he should study the Torah [namely the Pentateuch] with understanding of the [Hebrew] language and the plain sense of the [biblical] text, as well as the twenty-four books, without putting any commentator in front of his eyes, but interpreting the plain sense of the text alone, because it [namely study] stabilizes the text in accordance with the foundation of the language that is most common among the populace. And he will accustom himself to write a subtle writing [calligraphy] and a square one, and the concise artificial grammar that is in use, together with knowledge of the accustomed number by heart, and the Mishnah with Maimonides' commentary.

He should also be accustomed for [the next] seven years to study every week, four days a week, three hours early in the morning, ten [talmudic] tracts with commentaries, and the *Tosafot*, and three legal authorities [Poseqim]. From the order of Zera'yim, the tract *Berakhot*; from the order of *Mo'ed*, the tracts *Sabbath*, *Pesahin*, and *Yom Tov*; from the order of *Neziqim*, the tracts *Babba' Metziy'a* and *Sanhedrin*; from the order of *Nashim*, [the tracts] *Ketubbot* and *Gittin*; from the order of *Qiddushin*, the tract *Hullin*; from [the order of] *Tehorot*, the [tract] *Niddah*. And the legal authorities are Rav 'Alfasi, and Yisaiah the last, and the Asheri.<sup>4</sup> During these mentioned seven years he should accustom himself to study during the evening in the [field of] the art of language, [the book] *Mikhlol* by [David] Qimhi, and those of 'Efodi<sup>5</sup> and of Immanuel, and Aristotle's art of rhetoric, and that of [Yehudah] Messer Leon,<sup>6</sup> and that of the prophets, with the practice<sup>7</sup> of languages customary in his days,<sup>8</sup> in books and rhetorics. And Aristotle's art of logic, together with

the commentary on the translation of [Yehudah] Messer Leon, and what is necessary from [the commentaries of] Averroës and of [Joseph ibn] Kaspi. And during the days of [the months of] Nisan and Tishrei, [approximately] three months in [each of] these years, when he does not study the Talmud or *Poseqim*, he should be preoccupied evening, morning, and noon by the science of numbers by Gersonides and [Abraham] ibn Ezra and the practice found with us, and Euclid's science of geometry, and that of Ibn Ezra. And after mastery of the art of logic, he should read during the evening in the science of astronomy [Claudius] Ptolemaeus's *Almagest*,<sup>9</sup> and that of Averroës,<sup>10</sup> and *Tzurat ha-'Aretz*,<sup>11</sup> and Al-Fargani,<sup>12</sup> and the art of the sphere and the astrolabe and the *Qadran*, together with [the books] *Hashav ha-'Efod*,<sup>13</sup> and *Yesod 'Olam*,<sup>14</sup> and *Sefer ha-Nasiy*,<sup>15</sup> together with the [astro-nomical] Tables that are common.

Also during the other [namely next] seven years, whoever dedicates himself early in the morning to inquire into wisdom should read Aristotle's books *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, and Averroës' *Abridgments*, and *De'ot ha-Filosofim* by R. Samuel ibn Tibbon;<sup>16</sup> and in the evening of these days [he should read] the political philosophy of Aristotle and Plato, and of Abuhamed [al-Ghazzali],<sup>17</sup> and of [Solomon ibn] Gabirol.<sup>18</sup> In the same years after [reading] them, if he has dedicated himself to conjunction [*devequt*], he should read Averroës' *Possibility of Conjunction*,<sup>19</sup> and Abu Bakr's *Quality of Conjunction*,<sup>20</sup> and Abu-Hamed's *Scales of Inquiries*. And during the days of Nisan and Tishrei during these seven years he should read the science of medicine of Avicenna, and the *Healing of the Body*,<sup>21</sup> and the *Tzedat ha-Derakhim*,<sup>22</sup> and the *Treasury of Leaves*,<sup>23</sup> and the books on alchemy<sup>24</sup> by the philosophers called Turban [sic] *Philosophorum*,<sup>25</sup> and he should learn the artisanship of *Halenbicum* [alembic] and the composition of medicines and the acquaintance with poisons and the special qualities, the individual and the composite ones.<sup>26</sup>

Over the next seven years, whoever has dedicated himself to inquiry into religion should read in the morning the *Intention of the Philosophers*<sup>27</sup> with Narboni's commentary, and Isaac Albalag,<sup>28</sup> and the [book] *Incoherence*,<sup>29</sup> and Averroës' *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, and the *Kuzari*,<sup>30</sup> and 'Emunah Ramah,<sup>31</sup> and the *Guide [of the Perplexed]*, with the commentaries of Narboni, and Joseph,<sup>32</sup> and [Shem Tov] Falaquera,<sup>33</sup> and Ephod[y], and the *Light of God*,<sup>34</sup> and the *'Iqqarim*,<sup>35</sup> and Joseph Caspi's books, and the books of Ibn Shem Tov,<sup>36</sup> and the *Account of Genesis* and the *Account of Merkavah* by R. Yehudah [Romano],<sup>37</sup> and *Liwyat Hen*.<sup>38</sup> And during the evening [he should study] the commentaries on the Torah by Rashy, and Nahmanides, and [Abraham] ibn Ezra, and Gersonides. And during the days of Nisan and

Tishrei, whoever has dedicated himself to the roots of the Kabbalah<sup>39</sup> [should study] that which is understood by reason,<sup>40</sup> such as the *Roots of Falaquera*,<sup>41</sup> and the five chapters of R. Joseph Dagaph,<sup>42</sup> and the seven books of Latif,<sup>43</sup> and *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*,<sup>44</sup> and [Menahem] Recanati, and the book *Yetzirah* with its proper commentaries,<sup>45</sup> which are extant, and [Abraham] Abulafia's books.<sup>46</sup> And whoever dedicates himself to the science of spirituality<sup>47</sup> should read *Sefer Raziel*, which is translated from the Christian [language], and the *Intellectual Art*,<sup>48</sup> and *Takhlit ha-Hakham* [*Picatrix*],<sup>49</sup> and Plato's *Tahabbulot*,<sup>50</sup> and *Sefer ha-Tamar*,<sup>51</sup> and the *Almandel*,<sup>52</sup> and *Sefer ha-'Atzamim*,<sup>53</sup> and a Christian book *On Agriculture*, authored by [Petrus de] Crescentiis.<sup>54</sup>

Thus we have here some basic areas of study: the Bible and Hebrew earlier; followed by rabbinic studies, a variety of philosophical studies, astronomy, mathematics, and alchemy; then Kabbalah and finally books on magic, all of the latter translated—as Alemanno was well aware—from other languages. The joint presentation of Kabbalah and magic as the peak of human studies, which I assume Alemanno formulated in the 1470s, is reminiscent of Pico della Mirandola's later association of these two fields at the end of his *Theses* as the best way to prove the truth of Christianity.

## APPENDIX 4

### MAGIC TEMPLES AND CITIES IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE: MAS'UDI, IBN ZARZA, ALEMANNIO

One of the most important achievements of Frances A. Yates's study of Giordano Bruno is her insightful discussion of the impact of both the *Corpus Hermeticum* and *Picatrix* on Tommaso Campanella's conception of the *Città del Sole*.<sup>1</sup> Her comparison of the description of the City of Adocentyn in *Picatrix* with Campanella's ideal City of the Sun demonstrates that in both cases there were magic-oriented structures that aimed at preserving favorable astral influences.<sup>2</sup> Because the passage from *Picatrix* quoted by Yates is her only proof of the knowledge of an ideal magic city in the Renaissance period,<sup>3</sup> it seems worthwhile to expand the evidence by drawing attention to a description of a magical temple found in Yohanan Alemanno's *Sha'ar ha-Hesheq*, which is a printed part of his commentary on the Song of Songs, *Hesheq Shlomo*, extant in manuscripts. In the introduction he quotes

a passage that may have as its first source the tenth-century historiographer Abu al-Hasan 'Ali al-Mas'udi's book *Muruj al-Dhahab* (Meadows of Gold), mediated by the fourteenth-century Castilian thinker R. Shmuel ibn Zarza:<sup>4</sup>

We have seen in the book of the ancients<sup>5</sup> wonderful things that they did in their days out of their great desire to make a shape of the superior world and its wonders below on earth. They said that Jafet the son of Noah had built a wondrous temple at the borders of China,<sup>6</sup> which is in the uttermost East. On its construction is written that there were seven windows; at each window there were standing statues<sup>7</sup> representing the forms of each of the seven planets. Each statue was made of a stone related to that planet and corresponding to its color—the color<sup>8</sup> gold for the sun, white for the moon, black for Saturn, red for Mars, green for Jupiter, blue for Venus, and one composed of various colors for Mercury. And he [Jafet] had designed in that temple many forms, and from them every wise man could understand the nature of the superior forms:<sup>9</sup> how the lower bodies adhere to the superior and whatever comes into being out of their, namely the superior bodies', movements, their influences, and their sparks,<sup>10</sup> and other, similar things.<sup>11</sup> And I have heard with my own ears what was related by a Greek, who had traveled from the beginning of the world to its end and who did not read or study, and he told us that he had been to a temple similar to that in China. We investigated and interrogated him in order to be sure in our hearts of the sayings of the wise and their allusions, which though they appear vain in the eyes of the multitude, which has not seen the light of the intellect [or *ha-sekheh*], these things are wonderful things.<sup>12</sup>

This passage, including the description of the miraculous temple and the interrogation of the Greek traveler, is clear evidence of a particular interest in the relationship between architecture and magic. This concern with magical buildings is part of a larger conception in Alemanno, which we saw in chapter 14, that the whole Jewish tradition shows the way by which to draw down the influences that stem from the world of the sefirot. A large part of this view is expounded in an imaginary dialogue with a philosopher concerning the temple of Solomon, of which the passage above forms a part. A few pages later, still in the imaginary dialogue, Alemanno writes:

Perhaps you will say to me: What is this dream that you entertain about the preparations hidden from the eyes of the philosophers, who neither know nor understand what these [preparations] mean to you? For they say: "Let us come to wisdom and [intellectual] union only by way of intellectual speculation or

by sudden intuition,<sup>13</sup> but not by magical actions and buildings, vessels, prayers, vain things, and many dreams, things that are baseless in the eyes of the philosophers, the men of intellect and reason.”<sup>14</sup>

Alemanno’s answer is:

[But] all the things that we said are the words of the ancients, who knew the nature of existing beings, the relations among them, how they are linked with one another, and how to prepare a vessel for reception of the influence of the superior bodies. This was obvious to them as a result of [their] wisdom and experience, just as to the cultivators of the land [‘ovedei ha-’adamah]<sup>15</sup> the preparations of [ha-hakhanot] the plants and the seeds and the soils are obvious, so that they will receive the propitious influx that is flowering there. And just as it would be strange for someone who does not know the manner of cultivation and plowing and planting and grafting that produce things in such a way, it would be strange in our eyes if we did not see the light [‘or ‘otam ha-hakhanot] of the preparations so that the divine light and His goodness and mercy will be born in us that the powers and sefirot will receive and emanate. And if you have studied or subscribed to the preparations of the masters of the forms<sup>16</sup> and secondary natures and the contrivances [tahab-bulot]<sup>17</sup> of nature, your spirit will not be confused by anything I have told you, because it is holy.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the philosopher characterizes as dreams the techniques—all of them futile, in his opinion—used to achieve wisdom and intellectual union with the spiritual world. In Alemanno, dreaming is conceived of not only as an eminently passive state of consciousness, a moment when God or other supernal beings visit men in order to inform them about the future, but also as the expected effect of meticulous preparations that may induce a revelation during sleep. The astral nature of all these techniques, including dreams, is explicit. Moreover, this approach is presented as an ancient wisdom, in the vein of the *prisca theologia* of Alemanno’s Christian contemporaries in Florence.

The question should be asked: Who were those unnamed ancient masters who used astromagical techniques or preparations—a term dear to Alemanno, and stemming from astromagic—and, at the same time, who is the anonymous philosopher who derides their practices? Let us have a look in a classic of Jewish philosophy:

And they built temples, set up the statues in them, and thought that the forces of the planets overflowed toward these statues and that consequently these statues talked, had understanding, gave prophetic revelation to



people—I mean the statues—and made known to people what was useful to them. Similarly they said of the trees, which were assigned to the various planets, that when one particular tree was set apart for one particular planet, planted with a view to the latter, and a certain treatment was applied to it and with it, the spirit of the planet overflowed toward that tree, gave prophetic revelation to people, and spoke to them in sleep.<sup>19</sup>

The author of this passage is no other than the famous Maimonides. Who were those people whom Maimonides describes as cultivating the astromagical cult of the statues, so similar to the scenario presented by Alemanno in such a positive light? They are no other than the idolatrous Sabians, whom Maimonides criticizes fiercely in both the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Guide of the Perplexed*. In other words, Alemanno presents positively a cult that involves dreams induced by an astromagical practice strongly opposed by Maimonides. Is Maimonides the philosopher who derides the astromagical cult? If this is the answer, and it seems to me that this is indeed the case, we see here in Alemanno's text one of the few refutations of Maimonides' critique of Sabianism. Alemanno's discussion emphasizes a form of spirituality that Maimonides and most of his followers emphatically rejected. The discussions in the passages above represent a debate between the astromagic of R. Abraham ibn Ezra and his many followers, including Ibn Zarza, and the Maimonideans. Alemanno is certainly taking the side of the Ibn Ezra party, which is also closer to that of most Kabbalists. In the same years when the Hermetic literature, and some Neoplatonic type of magic found among Neoplatonists like Iamblichus, both translated by Marsilio Ficino, made their ways to the center of one of the most influential circles in the Italian Renaissance, similar ideas were moving to the center of the thought of Alemanno, who chose this somewhat Hermetic stand over that of its great critic, the medieval Maimonides. Thus a parallel development took place among thinkers who were in contact, and it will be interesting to pursue this concomitance in further research.

Another attribution to the ancients of the relationship between architecture and magic appears in the long version of the *Book of Josiphon*, a tenth-century southern Italian book of Jewish history that was printed in Venice in 1544.<sup>20</sup> It, too, contains a description of a magic city:

It is reported that Alexander of Macedon found an isle on which there was the grave of an ancient king, whose name was Keinan the son of Enos, who ruled before the flood over the whole world. He was wise and understood the sciences and ruled over the spirits, the demons, and the maleficent spirits, and he built on the isle a great city<sup>21</sup> surrounded by a wall and built there a great courtyard of marble, and there he stored a great number of precious

stones and gems and treasures of gold and silver. And there he also built a tower over his grave in order to preserve his memory. Because it was built according to the science of the seven planets and according to the art of magic, no one could enter the city, since whoever reached the walls died on the spot.<sup>22</sup>

Thus we seem to have in Hebrew writings the earliest Renaissance texts linking magic with architecture. Alemanno mentions explicitly the art of magic, the seven planets, and the tower, which probably reflects the earlier mention of a pagoda. These accounts were followed at the beginning of the seventeenth century by an encyclopedic work written in Hebrew, attesting that the Florentine duke Cosimo de' Medici "established laurel woods as walls of the city that he built in Romania, which was named the City of the Sun."<sup>23</sup> This statement describes the City of the Sun as a fact, and it basically agrees with the diary of the librarian of the Abbey of St. Victor, reporting that "Jordanus told me that he knew nothing of the town built by the Duke of Florence where only Latin would be spoken, but he has heard it said that this duke wished to build a *Civitas Solis*, on which the sun would shine every day of the year as it does on other cities such as Rome and Rhodes."<sup>24</sup>

Both the encyclopedia's and the librarian's testimony indicate that such a city had been built before the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>25</sup> The city was built by a Florentine who could have been aware of the possibilities inherent in a construction in accordance with the laws of magic, since such a conception had already been elaborated in *Picatrix* and in Alemanno at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries.<sup>26</sup> To make it more explicit: it is possible that the term "Sun" in the phrase "the City of the Sun" is related to some form of astromagic, in the manner mentioned in the text translated above from Ibn Zarza and Alemanno.

It is plausible to assume a combined influence of astromagical material, translated and available in medieval Spain, on the Renaissance: both *Picatrix* and Mas'udi's texts on the magical cities reached Florence and were known by both Pico and Ficino. Although *Picatrix* was available in Latin, to my best knowledge Ibn Zarza was not, and the fact that Alemanno was acquainted with and impressed by his thought makes the Italian Kabbalist a plausible mediator between the Hebrew original of Ibn Zarza and Ficino.

# NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

1. For some different definitions of Kabbalah see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 3–7; Idel, “Defining Kabbalah”; idem, “On the Meanings of the Term ‘Kabbalah,’ ” pp. 69–73.
2. See, e.g., Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, trans. J. Neugroschel and J. Chipman (Schocken, New York, 1991), pp. 88–139, 140–196.
3. See, e.g., Idel, *Golem*.
4. See Idel, *Enchanted Chains*.
5. See Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 82–83.
6. For more on these models and the conjunctions between them see Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 45–145; and more recently idem, “Sabbath: On Concepts of Time in Jewish Mysticism,” in *Sabbath: Idea, History, Reality*, ed. Gerald Blidstein (Ben Gurion

- University Press, Beer Sheva, 2004), pp. 57–93, citing additional studies dealing with the three models. See also app. 2 in this volume.
7. For the need to distinguish among different layers as portents of different structures of kabbalistic knowledge see M. Idel, “Kabbalah and Elites in Thirteenth-Century Spain,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 9 (1994), pp. 5–19; idem, “Transmission in the Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah,” in *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion*, ed. Yaakov Elman and Israel Gershoni (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000), pp. 138–164; and idem, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 265–269.
  8. Ta’am Zegenim (Frankfurt am Main, 1855), fol. 54b.
  9. Ibid., fol. 56a.
  10. See Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, p. 203.
  11. See BT, Hagigah, fol. 15b. For the latest scholarly survey of this legend see Maria E. Subtleny, “The Tale of the Four Sages who Entered ‘Pardes’: A Talmudic Enigma from a Persian Perspective,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 11 (2004), pp. 3–58.
  12. R. Nathan ben Yehi’el, *‘Arukh ha-Shalem*, ed. A. Kohut, vol. 1 (Grab, 1878), p. 14, s.v. ‘avnei shayish tavor. See also Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 90–91; idem, *Ascensions on High*, pp. 33–34; Assi Farber-Ginat, “Inquiries in Shi’ur Qomah,” in *Massu’ot: Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in Memory of Professor Ephraim Gottlieb*, ed. Michal Oron and Amos Goldreich (Mossad Bialik, Jerusalem, 1994), p. 374 n. 70 (Hebrew); and Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 146–147. On the background of R. Nathan of Rome see Israel M. Ta-Shma, “Il contesto italiano des Sefer he-‘Arukh di Rabbi Natan den Yechi’el da Roma,” *La rassegna di Israel* 67 (2001) = *Minchat Yehuda: Saggi sull’ ebraismo italiano in memoria di Yehuda Nello Pavoncello*, ed. Angelo Piatelli and Myriam Silvera, pp. 21–26 (Hebrew).
  13. Nathan ben Yehi’el, *‘Arukh ha-Shalem*, p. 14.
  14. See Colette Sirat, *Les théories des visions surnaturelles* (Brill, Leiden, 1964), pp. 33–35; Azriel, *‘Arugat ha-Bosem*, 1: 198 n. 2 and 199–200. See also ibid., p. 202, for the phrase *ba-sekheh libam*, “the understanding of their heart”; and David Halperin, “Origen, Ezekiel’s Merkavah, and the Ascension of Moses,” *Church History* 50 (1981), pp. 263 and 273–274. The occurrence of the phrases *cordis oculis* in Origen and *binat levavkhem* in Hebrew texts may evidence a psychological interpretation of the vision of the supernal chariot, called Merkavah in ancient Jewish sources; see also Halperin, *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature* (American Oriental Society, New Haven, 1980), pp. 174–175; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 147–148; Adena Tanenbaum, *The Contemplative Soul: Hebrew Poetry and Philosophical Theory in Medieval Spain* (Brill, Leiden, 2002), pp. 77–79 and 190. On the great impact of Rav Hai Gaon in Italy see also Avraham Grossman, *The Early Sages of France* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1995), pp. 89–90 n. 25 (Hebrew).
  15. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 29, where he mentions Macarius the Egyptian, who in the fourth century interpreted the vision of Ezekiel as a vision of “the secret of the soul.”
  16. *Megillat ‘Ahima’atz ben Paltiel*, ed. Benjamin Klar (Tarshish, Jerusalem, 1974) (Hebrew), p. 30. For an Italian translation of the chronicle see *Sefer Yuhasin: Libro delle discendenze*,

vicende di una famiglia ebraica di Oria nei secoli IX–XI, Ahima'az ben Paltiel, ed. Cesare Colafemmina (Messaggi, Cassano delle Murge, Bari, 2001).

17. Megillat 'Ahima'atz ben Paltiel, p. 12.
18. See R. Tzidqiah ben Abraham, *Shibbolei ha-Leqet*, ed. Shmuel K. Mirsky (Sura, New York, 1966), p. 194. See also the use of the term *merkavah* to refer to Heikhalot material in Azriel, 'Arugat ha-Bosem, 4: 173.
19. Tzidqiah ben Abraham, *Shibbolei ha-Leqet*, p. 183. See also the bibliography in Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Mysticism and Asceticism in Italian Rabbinic Literature of the Thirteenth Century," *Kabbalah* 6 (2001), p. 139 nn. 15–16 (Hebrew).
20. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 41, 46, 84; Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 18–20; Roberto Bonfil, "Tra due mondi: Prospettive di ricerca sulla storia culturale degli ebrei nell'Italia meridionale nell'Alto Medioevo," *Italia Judaica* 1 (1983), p. 149 n. 54; Israel Weinstock, "The Discovery of Abu Aharon of Baghdad's Legacy of Secrets," *Tarbitz* 32 (1963), pp. 153–159 (Hebrew); Gershom Scholem, "Has Abu Aharon's Legacy of Secrets Been Discovered?," *ibid.*, pp. 252–265 (Hebrew); and Weinstock's rejoinder, "The Treasury of 'Secrets' of Abu Aharon—Imagination or Reality?," *Sinai* 54 (1964), pp. 226–259 (Hebrew); Daniel Abrams, "The Literary Emergence of Esotericism in German Pietism," *Shofar* 12 (1994), p. 68; Sara Tzfatman, *The Jewish Tale in the Middle Ages: Between Ashkenaz and Sefarad* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1993), pp. 139–142 and 146–148 (Hebrew); and, more recently, Dan, *The "Unique Cherub" Circle*, pp. 210–212.
21. This term recurs in Ashkenazi discussions of the prayer, and I have translated it as seems to me most appropriate. See also *tiqqun tefilot* at the beginning of the genealogy in Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, p. 15.
22. Namely sin. See Megillat 'Ahima'atz ben Paltiel, pp. 12–13.
23. On new information regarding this Rabbi Moshe see Avraham Grossman, *The Early Sages of Ashkenaz: Their Lives, Leadership, and Works (900–1096)* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 33–34 (Hebrew).
24. See the sources for this passage in Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 15–16, especially n. 2. This is one of two versions. The historical background of this story is dealt with in detail in Grossman, *The Early Sages of Ashkenaz*, pp. 29–44, where the texts and pertinent bibliography are provided. For the extant poems of R. Moshe ben Qalonymos, see Abraham M. Habermann, ed., *Liturgical Poems of R. Shim'on bar Yis'haq with an Appendix, Liturgical Poems of R. Moshe bar Kalonymos* (Schocken, Berlin, 1938), pp. 192–218.
25. See especially Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 14–20, and Grossman, *The Early Sages of Ashkenaz*, pp. 29–44.
26. On this issue I shall elaborate elsewhere.
27. See Azriel, 'Arugat ha-Bosem, 4: 14–15; and the extensive analyses of Grossman, *The Early Sages of Ashkenaz*, especially pp. 348–357.
28. Megillat 'Ahima'atz ben Paltiel, pp. 15, 21.
29. For an important analysis of the mythical structure of 'Ahima'atz's chronicle see Robert Bonfil, "Myth, Rhetoric, History? A Study in the Chronicle of 'Ahima'atz," in

- Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Haim Hillel ben Sasson, ed. Menahem ben Sasson, Robert Bonfil, and Joseph R. Hacker (Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 99–135 (Hebrew), including the pertinent bibliography; and now Robert Bonfil, *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle: The Family Chronicle of Ahima'az Ben Paltiel* (Brill, Leiden, 2009).
30. See, e.g., the poems of R. 'Amittai ben Shefatyah, in *Megillat 'Ahima'atz ben Paltiel*, pp. 79–80, 81–82, discussed in detail in app. 1. On the move of southern Italian poetry to Ashkenaz see Ezra Fleischer, *The Yozer: Its Emergence and Development* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 607–626, 660–672 (Hebrew).
  31. See Hugo Odeberg's introduction to *3 Enoch, or The Hebrew Enoch* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1928), p. 28; Robert Bonfil, "The Cultural and Religious Traditions of French Jewry in the Ninth Century as Reflected in the Writings of Agobard of Lyon," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy, and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby*, ed. J. Dan and J. Hacker (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 327–348 (Hebrew); Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Peering through the Lattices": Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 2000), pp. 27–28; Moshe Idel, "The Evil Thought of the Deity," *Tarbitz* 49 (1980), pp. 356–357 (Hebrew).
  32. *Megillat 'Ahima'atz ben Paltiel*, p. 12. See also Klar's discussion, *ibid.*, p. 120. For the importance of the root BYN, "to understand in a profound manner," in the history of the terminology of Jewish mysticism see Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 209–215. For the description of R. Shefatiah, the father of 'Amittai, as dealing with secrets of the supernal world see *Megillat 'Ahima'atz*, p. 29, and also p. 35 on R. Paltiel as *mevin sodot*, "understands secrets profoundly." The emphasis on the root BYN is obvious also in *ibid.*, p. 38, verses 15–16. Especially interesting is the claim of R. 'Ahima'atz himself, that he wished to understand the secrets of the Torah, *ibid.*, p. 40. These descriptions are intertwined with the assumption that the sons of R. 'Amittai are "poets" and "compose rhymes." For the affinity between knowledge of secrets and poetry in connection with the ancient Ashkenazi masters see Azriel, *'Arugat ha-Bosem*, 4: 6, 73; and Kanarfogel, "Peering through the Lattices", p. 131 n. 1. The combination of esoteric knowledge with an exoteric one by elite founding figures is known also in the case of early Kabbalah, R. Abraham ben David (Rabad) and R. Jacob the Nazarite of Lunel in Provence, and some of the leaders of Hasidei Ashkenaz. According to a later testimony, both R. 'Amittai and R. Shefatyah were described as *ba'alei shem*, "masters of the (divine) name," a term that became widespread later in the Middle Ages. See *Megillat 'Ahima'atz ben Paltiel*, p. 47.
  33. See Idel, *Ascensions on High*, pp. 35–36.
  34. *Ibid.*, p. 63 n. 59.
  35. Kanarfogel, "Mysticism and Asceticism," pp. 148–149.
  36. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
  37. See Israel M. Ta-Shma, "R. Jesaiah di Trani the Elder and His Connections with Byzantium and Palestine," *Shalem* 4 (1984), p. 411 (Hebrew).
  38. See Kanarfogel, "Peering through the Lattices," p. 244 n. 67; and Idel, "Some Forlorn Writings." As we shall see in chap. 7, some of the writings of R. Nehemiah the prophet

were presumably known in the early 1280s in Rome, and had an impact on Abraham Abulafia. See also app. 1 in this volume on Nehemiah and prophecy.

39. Idel, "Between," pp. 79–95.
40. For Abraham Abulafia see, e.g., his *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, p. 21. For Recanati, see Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 119–120. For Alemanno's use of this literature in one of his treatises see Klaus Herrmann, "The Reception of Heikhalot Literature in Yohanan Alemanno's Autograph MS Paris 849," in *Studies in Jewish Manuscripts*, ed. Joseph Dan and Klaus Herrmann (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1999), pp. 9–88; and more in the material cited below, chap. 16, note 4.
41. See Rabbenu Tam, *Sefer ha-Yashar*, ed. Shraga Rosenthal (Berlin, 1898), no. 46, p. 90, the answer of Rabbenu Tam to R. Meshullam. See also Tzfatman, *The Jewish Tale*, pp. 132–133.
42. See his studies mentioned in Tzfatman, *The Jewish Tale*, p. 130 n. 137. The famous legend about the four captives who founded Jewish centers in Europe situates the starting point of this adventure in Bari.
43. J. B. Sermoneta, "Il neo-platonismo nel pensiero dei nuclei ebraici stanziati nell'Occidente latino (riflessioni sul 'Commento al Libro della Creazione' di Rabbi Sabbetai Donnolo)," *Gli Ebrei nell'alto Medioevo* 2 (1980), pp. 883–887. In more general terms see Andrew Sharf, *The Universe of Sabbetai Donnolo* (Ktav, New York, 1976).
44. Elliot R. Wolfson, "The Theosophy of Sabbetai Donnolo, with Special Emphasis on the Doctrine of Sefirot in His *Sefer Hakhmoni*," *Jewish History* 6 (1992), pp. 281–316; idem, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 127–144.
45. See Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 141–142.
46. M. Idel, "On the Doctrine of Divinity at the Beginning of Kabbalah," in *Shefa Tal: Studies in Jewish Thought and Culture Presented to Bracha Sack*, ed. Z. Gries, Ch. Kreisel, and B. Huss (Ben Gurion University Press, Beer Sheva, 2004), pp. 131–148 (Hebrew); and idem, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 239–243.
47. See Zev ben Hayyim, ed. and trans., "On the Twenty-two Letters," in *Tibat Marqe: A Collection of Samaritan Midrashim* (Israeli Academy for Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 358–359 (Hebrew). The term for Glory is *Yeqarah*. The term "Glory," as well as the number ten, recurs also elsewhere in this late-antique treatise. See, e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 348–348 and 350–351.
48. See Isaac E. Barzilay, *Between Reason and Faith: Anti-Rationalism in Jewish Italian Thought, 1250–1650* (Mouton, The Hague, 1967), pp. 19–32; Giuseppe B. Sermoneta, "Federico II e il pensiero ebraico nell'Italia del suo tempo," in *Federico II e l'arte del Duecento italiano: Atti della III settimana di studi di storia dell'arte medievale dell'università di Roma*, vol. 2 (Galatina Congedo Editore, Lecce, 1980), pp. 183–197; and Colette Sirat, *La philosophie juive médiévale en pays de chrétienté* (Presses du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1988), pp. 33–34.
49. Thirteenth-century Italian commentaries on the *Guide of the Perplexed* were written by R. Moshe of Salerno, R. Zerahyah Hen, and R. Abraham Abulafia. R. Hillel of Verona discussed issues found in the *Guide* in his writings and letters.
50. Introduction, *Malmad ha-Talmidim* (Efk, 1866), unpaginated.



51. See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 49–54. Nevertheless Anatoli's translation of Averroës' commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* did have an impact on a Kabbalist like Abraham Abulafia. See *ibid.*, pp. 12–13.
52. Colette Sirat, "Juda b. Salomon Ha-Kohen—philosophe, astronome et peut-être kabbaliste de la première moitié du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Italia* 1:2 (1979), p. 48 n. 21. For more on this figure see Sirat, *La philosophie juive*, pp. 62–71, especially pp. 68–69.
53. For more on his views see chap. 12.
54. On Hillel's more moderate attitude and Zerahyah's and Abulafia's more extreme and critical one toward Frederick II's alleged attempt to discover, by experimentation with infants, what the first language was, see app. 2.
55. See Joseph B. Sermoneta, "Una trascrizione in caratteri ebraici di alcuni brani filosofici della Divina Commedia," in *Romanica et Occidentalia: Études dédiées à la mémoire de H. Peri*, ed. Moshe Lazar (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1963), pp. 29, 33.
56. See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 422–423, 425, 428–430, 439; Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, "L'influence de Jean Scot sur la doctrine du Kabbalist Azriel de Gerone," in R. Roques, ed., *Jean Scot Érigène et l'histoire de la philosophie* (Presses du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1977), pp. 453–462; Shlomo Pines, "Nahmanides on Adam in the Garden of Eden in the Context of Other Interpretations of Genesis, Chapters 2 and 3," in *Exile and Diaspora: Studies in the History of Jewish People Presented to Professor H. Beinart*, ed. A. Mirsky, A. Grossman, and Y. Kaplan (Makhon Ben Zvi, Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 159–164 (Hebrew); Amos Funkenstein, "Nahmanides' Symbolical Reading of History," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan and F. Talmage (Association of Jewish Studies, Cambridge, Mass., 1982), pp. 129–150; and Mark Sendor, "The Emergence of Provençal Kabbalah: R. Isaak the Blind's Commentary on *Sefer Yezirah*," vol. 1 (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1994), pp. 115–116, 377. On whether the more recent scholarly focus on possible historical affinities between the concept of the Shekhinah in the *Book of Bahir* and the worship of Mary in the Latin West is the best explanation for understanding the concept of the Shekhinah I have my reservations; see Peter Schaefer, *Mirror of His Beauty* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2003), pp. 147–216; Arthur Green, *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997), pp. 160–161 n. 35; and *idem*, "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs: Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in Its Christian Context," *AJS Review* 26 (2002), pp. 1–52. Cf. Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, pp. 28–42, 45–52; and *idem*, *Ben*, pp. 377–399. For the pertinence of comparison of Abulafia's sevenfold exegetical system with the seven stages of St. Bonaventura's ascent of the mind to God see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 82–83.
57. Giuseppe B. Sermoneta, "Dall'ebraico in latino e dal latino in ebraico: Tradizione scolastica e metodica della traduzione," in *Rencontres de cultures dans la philosophie médiévale*, ed. J. Hamesse and M. Fattori (Casino, Louvain, 1990), pp. 149–165.
58. See Sermoneta, "Una trascrizione in caratteri ebraici," pp. 30–31 n. 21.
59. See R. Elnathan ben Moshe Qalqish of Constantinople, *Sefer 'Even Sappir*, Ms. Paris, BN 728, fol. 179a.



60. See Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 190–196.
61. See Sermoneta, “Una trascrizione in caratteri ebraici.”
62. On the relations between the two see Umberto Cassuto, *Dante e Manoello* (Florence, 1922); and, more recently, Giorgio Battistoni, *Immanuel Romano: L'Inferno e il Paradiso* (Giuntina, Florence, 2000), pp. xi–xxii. On the relationship between Jews and Christians in Italy in the Middle Ages see also the bibliography below, chap. 7, note 56.
63. See Joseph Dan, “Ashkenazi Hasidism and the Maimonidean Controversy,” *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1992–93), pp. 29–47. None of the following studies deals with substantial controversies in Italy: Daniel J. Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy* (Brill, Leiden, 1965); Joseph Sarachek, *Faith and Reason: The Conflict over the Rationalism of Maimonides* (New York, 1935); Bernard D. Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1982); Charles Touati, *Prophètes, Talmudistes, Philosophes* (Le Cerf, Paris, 1990), pp. 201–218; idem, “Les deux conflits autour de Maimonide,” in *Juifs et Judaïsme de Languedoque*, ed. M. Vicaire and B. Blumenkranz (E. Privat, Toulouse, 1977), pp. 173–184; Azriel Shohat, “Concerning the First Controversy on the Writings of Maimonides,” *Zion* 36:1–2 (1971), pp. 27–60 (Hebrew); Sarah Stroumsa, “Twelfth-Century Concepts of Soul and Body: The Maimonidean Controversy in Baghdad,” in *Self, Soul, and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten, Jan Assmann, and Guy G. Stroumsa (Brill, Leiden, 1998), pp. 313–334; and idem, *The Beginnings of the Maimonidean Controversy in the East* (Ben Tzvi Institute, Jerusalem, 1999) (Hebrew).
64. See Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 58–60.
65. On this issue see more in Concluding Remarks.
66. See chap. 21 and app. 4.
67. See, for example, Nemesius of Emessa, John of Damascus, and Shahrastani, cited by Harry A. Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, ed. I. Twersky and G. H. Williams, vol. 1 (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1973), p. 357; Sa'īd al-Andalusi, *Tabaqat al-umam*, trans. G. Blachère (Larose, Paris, 1935), pp. 57–62; and Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (Routledge, London, 1975), p. 40. See also Isidore Levy, *La légende de Pythagore de Grèce en Palestine* (E. Champion, Paris, 1927); and Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, pp. 12 n. 40, 53–54.
68. See Idel, “On the Meanings of the Term ‘Kabbalah,’” pp. 50–51. Eusebius’s quote from Numenius’s lost *Book of the Good* in *Praeparatio Evangelica* IX.7, a first and very important religious concordance, was explicitly quoted in connection with Pythagoras by several Jewish authors in the Renaissance. See R. Gedalyah ben Yehiya, *Shalshet ha-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem, n.d.), p. 237; Yehudah Muscato’s commentary on R. Yehudah ha-Levi’s *Kuzari*, named *Qol Yehudah*, pt. 2, fol. 76a; Isaac Cardoso, *Philosophia libera* (Bertanorum sumptibus, Venice, 1673); cf. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso* (University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1981), pp. 221–222. For Pythagoras in Alemanno see his *Sha’ar ha-Hesheq* (Halberstadt, 1860), fol. 10a; and his *Liqqutim*, or *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234 (numbered, like all subsequent citations of Mss. Bodleiana, according to Catalogue A. Neubauer),

fol. 10a, 17a, where he deals with matters of psychology. An issue I cannot pursue here is the reverberation of the association between Pythagoras and metempsychosis in other sixteenth-century Kabbalists in Safed.

69. See a similar discussion in Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, p. 238. For more on this issue see the final section of Concluding Remarks.
70. Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, p. 39. See also S. K. Heninger Jr., *Touches of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics* (Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif., 1974), p. 245; and Joseph Dan, "The Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin and Its Historical Significance," in *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters*, ed. J. Dan (Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Mass., 1997), pp. 59–60.
71. Quoted and translated by Daniel R. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Duckworth, London, 1972), p. 50.
72. See Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 122, 187, 197–199.
73. Numenius was one of the last major Neopythagoreans. See also below, note 85, the quotation from Numenius in Flavius Mithridates' *Sermo de Passione Domini*.
74. On this figure's identity see Idel, "Differing Conceptions," pp. 158–161; and cf. Lelli, *La lettera preziosa*, pp. 44–45, 77–79.
75. On Numenius's belief in metempsychosis into animal bodies see John Millon, *The Middle Platonists* (Duckworth, London, 1977), pp. 377–378. Later in the passage R. Elijah alleges that Numenius stated that he was a reincarnation of Moses. Although Numenius was indeed an admirer of Moses, I could not trace the origin of this self-evaluation. See the discussion of Numenius and Moses in John G. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Abington Press, Nashville, 1972), pp. 64–68. It is possible that R. Elijah's statement is a distortion of Numenius's best-known dictum: "What is Plato but Moses speaking Attic?" (see *ibid.*, pp. 66–67), which occurs several times in Renaissance authors such as Ficino and Pico. See Trinkaus, *In Our Likeness and Image*, 2: 741–742.
76. I.e., the fifteenth-century Catalan philosopher R. Joseph Albo's *Sefer ha-'Iqqarim*, pt. 4, chap. 29, attacking the belief in reincarnation in animal bodies.
77. The concept of transmigration of the soul in animal bodies apparently occurs only in the works of Kabbalists who wrote in the late thirteenth century: R. Joseph of Hamadan, R. Joseph Ashkenazi, and R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid. Joseph of Hamadan's views are mentioned and quoted by R. Menahem Recanati as part of "the later Kabbalists." See Alexander Altmann, "Sefer Ta'amei ha-Mizwot Attributed to R. Isaac ibn Farhi and Its Author," *Qiryat Sefer* 40 (1965), pp. 256–276, 405–412 (Hebrew); Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape*, p. 303 n. 26; Gottlieb, *Studies*, p. 380; Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 2: chap. 19. The view of R. Joseph Ashkenazi on cosmic or vertical metempsychosis, which was known to Yohanan Alemanno, was discussed in one of the meetings in Pico's house. See Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape*, pp. 227–228, 305 n. 46, 308 n. 75.
78. R. Elijah Hayyim ben Benjamin of Genazzano, 'Iggeret Hamudot, in Lelli, *La lettera preziosa*, pp. 153–154.
79. See Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*, p. 15 n. 50; and Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, p. 70.

80. For a bibliography on this influential figure see Wirszubski, *Sermo de Passione Domini*, p. 12 n. 2; Shlomo Simonsohn, “Some Well-Known Jewish Converts during the Renaissance,” *REJ* 148 (1989), pp. 17–26; Angela Scandaliato, “Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada e il suo background culturale: Un caso siciliano esemplare di interculturalità tra ebraismo, cristianesimo e islam,” in *L’interculturalità dell’ebraismo atti del Convegno internazionale*, Bertinoro-Ravenna, 26–28 maggio 2003, ed. Mauro Perani (Longo Editore, Ravenna, 2004), pp. 269–285; idem, “Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada alias Flavio Mitridate, ebreo convertito di Caltabellota,” *Sefer Yuhasin* 18–19 (2002–2003), pp. 3–9.
81. See Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, p. 70.
82. Ibid., passim; Saverio Campanini, “Pici Mirandulensis bibliotheca cabbalistica latina: Sulle traduzioni latine di opere cabbalistiche eseguite da Flavio Mitridate per Pico della Mirandola,” *Materia Giudaica* 7:1 (2002), pp. 90–96; idem, “La radice dolorante: Ebrei e cristiani alla scoperta del giudaismo nel Rinascimento,” in *L’interculturalità dell’ebraismo atti del Convegno internazionale*, Bertinoro-Ravenna, 26–28 maggio 2003, ed. Mauro Perani (Longo Editore, Ravenna, 2004), pp. 229–255; Michela Andreatta, “La traduzione latina del ‘Cantico dei Cantici’ eseguita da Flavio Mitridate per Pico della Mirandola,” *Materia Giudaica* 8:1 (2003), pp. 177–189; and *The Great Parchment: Flavius Mithridates’ Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, ed. Giulio Busi with Simonetta M. Bondoni and Saverio Campanini (Nino Aragno Editore, Turin, 2004), pp. 13–16. See also chap. 15, sec. 3.
83. Wirszubski, *Sermo de Passione Domini*, p. 49.
84. On this fragment of the Middle Platonist Numenius, who was the closest to Judaism among all the pagan Platonic thinkers, see Edouard des Places, ed., *Numenius, Fragments* (Belles Lettres, Paris, 1973), p. 42.
85. See Wirszubski, *Sermo de Passione Domini*, p. 101: “Ut Numenius Pythagoricus in volumine de bono scribit, Plato atque Pythagoras quae Abraham et Iudaei invenerunt ea ipsi graece exposuerunt.” For the ancient source see Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio Evangelica* IX.7; translated as *Preparation for the Gospel* by Edwin H. Gifford, vol. 1 (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1981), p. 443.
86. Wirszubski, *Sermo de Passione Domini*, pp. 33–34.
87. See Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 114–118.
88. See especially the kabbalistic schools of Nahmanides and R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid; Moshe Idel, “Kabbalistic Material from R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s School,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2 (1983), pp. 169–207; idem, “Kabbalistic Prayer and Colors,” in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. David R. Blumenthal, vol. 3 (Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1988), pp. 17–27; idem, “Kavvanah and Colors: A Neglected Kabbalistic Responsum,” in *Tribute to Sarah: Studies in Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah Presented to Professor Sarah O. Heller Wilensky*, ed. M. Idel, D. Dimant, and S. Rosenberg (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1994), pp. 1–14 (Hebrew). See also in this volume chap. 5 and Concluding Remarks. In more general terms, reflecting also sixteenth-century developments of Kabbalah in Italy, see Idel, “Particularism and Universalism.”

## CHAPTER 1: KABBALAH

1. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 7–8.
2. For more on the view shared by Baer and Scholem about the intervention of supernal powers in Jewish history see Moshe Idel, “The Ascent and Decline of the ‘Historical Jew’ ” (forthcoming). On the Kabbalah as a particularist lore see now Elliot R. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006).
3. For a critical review of Scholem’s overemphasis on the role of messianic Lurianism in the emergence of Sabbateanism, see Moshe Idel, “‘One from a Town, Two from a Clan’: The Diffusion of Lurianic Kabbalah and Sabbateanism: A Reexamination,” *Pe’amim* 44 (1990), pp. 5–30 (Hebrew); English version in *Jewish History* 7:2 (1993), pp. 79–104; and Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 183–185.
4. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 45; idem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 404–414.
5. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*.
6. See Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, pp. 139–161.
7. Alexander Altmann, “Maimonides’ Attitude toward Jewish Mysticism,” *Studies in Jewish Thought*, ed. A. Jospe (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1981), pp. 200–219; Idel, “Maimonides and Kabbalah,” pp. 54–70.
8. Moshe Idel, “Major Currents in Italian Kabbalah between 1560–1660,” *Italia Judaica* 2 (1986), pp. 243–262; reprinted in Ruderman, *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. D. B. Ruderman (New York University Press, New York, 1992), pp. 345–368.
9. This strategy started before the emergence of Lurianism. See Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” pp. 186–242. For later phenomena, see Alexander Altmann, “Lurianic Kabbalah in a Platonic Key: Abraham Cohen Herrera’s *Puerta del Cielo*,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 53 (1982), pp. 321–324; Nissim Yosha, *Myth and Metaphor: Abraham Cohen Herrera’s Philosophic Interpretation of Lurianic Kabbalah* (Ben Zvi Institute and Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1994) (Hebrew).
10. See, for the time being, Moshe Idel, “Saturn and Sabbatai Tzevi: A New Approach to Sabbateanism,” in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. Peter Schaefer and Mark Cohen (Brill, Leiden, 1998), pp. 179–180; idem, “On Prophecy and Magic in Sabbateanism,” *Kabbalah* 8 (2003), pp. 7–10; Matt Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2003); and in more general terms M. Idel, “On European Cultural Renaissances and Jewish Mysticism,” *Kabbalah* 13 (2005), pp. 7–41.
11. See, e.g., Idel, “Defining Kabbalah,” pp. 97–99.
12. See Moshe Idel, “On Adolph Jellinek and Kabbalah,” *Pe’amim* 100 (2004), pp. 15–22 (Hebrew).
13. Scholarly awareness of the importance of the Byzantine center of Kabbalah for the general development of this lore is only now emerging in a significant way. See chap. 22.
14. Idel, “Defining Kabbalah,” pp. 101–103.

15. See the Ashkenazi tradition translated and analyzed by Ivan G. Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Brill, Leiden, 1981), pp. 67–68; as well as the discussions in the Introduction and app. 1.
16. See Moshe Idel, “Gazing at the Head in Ashkenazi Hasidism,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 6 (1997), pp. 265–269.
17. See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 209–211; Moshe Idel, “Kabbalistic Prayer in Provence,” *Tarbitz* 62 (1993), pp. 265–286 (Hebrew).
18. See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 35–39, 44, 205–206, 238–243; Daniel Abrams, ed., *R. Asher ben David: His Complete Works and Studies in His Kabbalistic Thought* (Cherub Press, Los Angeles, 1996), p. 39 (Hebrew).
19. This is one of the few occasions when Abulafia explicitly mentions the oral reception of traditions from some masters. On the reception of esoteric traditions concerning the secrets of Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, see Idel, *Maimonide et la mystique juive*, p. 39 n. 90. For the Renaissance misunderstanding of the identity of Abulafia’s master as Maimonides himself, see Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 87–88, 91–98.
20. A list of ancient mystical books appears in a similar context in Abulafia’s epistle *Sheva’ Netivot ha-Torah*, p. 21.
21. The manuscript has MHTY, which is meaningless in Hebrew. This may be one of many copyist’s errors in what is unfortunately the only surviving manuscript of this text. If not, we should read the clause as follows: “which came to me in the form of a Bat Qol [daughter of the voice].” However, it may be that Abulafia was alluding to the Greek form THY, namely “god,” in which case MTHY would mean “from God.” Abulafia already used THYV to refer to God in his early *Sefer Get ha-Shemot*; see Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1658, translated in Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 24. See also app. 2 of this volume.
22. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, Ms. New York, JTS 1801, fol. 4b. Cf. Abulafia, *Sheva’ Netivot ha-Torah*, p. 21, where he values the revelation from the Agent Intellect more highly than the secrets he learned from various esoteric books. Cf. Idel, *Maimonide et la mystique juive*, pp. 37–38.
23. Cf. an earlier discussion by Abulafia, translated by Scholem in *Major Trends*, pp. 140–141. Although there are some divergences between it and the passage quoted here, a variety of channels for receiving Kabbalah is accepted in both.
24. See also Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 170, 343.
25. Moshe Idel, “Nahmanides: Kabbalah, Halakhah, and Spiritual Leadership,” *Tarbitz* 64 (1995), p. 545 n. 43 (Hebrew); for an English-language version of this study see M. Idel and M. Ostow, eds., *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership* (Jason Aronson, Northvale, N.J., 1998), pp. 15–96.
26. Idel, “Nahmanides” (*Tarbitz*), pp. 572–573.
27. On this important work see also chaps. 15 and 16 and app. 3.
28. See Yehuda Liebes, “Rabbi Solomon ibn Gabirol’s Use of *Sefer Yetsira* and a Commentary on His Poem ‘I Love Thee,’” in *The Beginning of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan (Institute of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 73–123 (Hebrew).

29. See Elliot R. Wolfson, “Merkavah Traditions in Philosophical Garb: Judah Halevi Reconsidered,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 57 (1991), pp. 179–242.
30. See more recently Moshe Idel, “Ramón Lull and Ecstatic Kabbalah,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 51 (1988), pp. 170–174; idem, “Dignitates and Kavod: Two Theological Concepts in Catalan Mysticism,” *Studia Luliana* 36 (1996), pp. 69–78; Harvey J. Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (Brill, Leiden, 2000).
31. On the three models in Kabbalah see, e.g., Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 45–145; idem, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 248–256; idem, *Absorbing Perfections*, passim; idem, “Sabbath: On Concepts of Time in Jewish Mysticism,” in *Sabbath: Idea, History, Reality*, ed. Gerald Blidstein (Ben Gurion University Press, Beer Sheva, 2004), pp. 57–93; and idem, *Kabbalah and Eros*, pp. 213–223.

## CHAPTER 2: ABRAHAM ABULAFIA AND ECSTATIC KABBALAH

1. On this important Jewish Kabbalist see Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 119–155; Idel, *The Mystical Experience*; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*; Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*; Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 11–15; idem, “Maimonides and Kabbalah,” pp. 58–62; idem, “Abraham Abulafia, un kabbaliste mystique,” *La vie spirituelle* 68 (1988), pp. 381–392; and idem, “Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed,” pp. 206–208.
2. On this issue see chaps. 3 and 6.
3. For a detailed description of these techniques see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*; and chap. 5 of this volume.
4. See a bibliographical description of these lost writings in Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 11–15.
5. See Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1580, fol. 164b; as well as a fragment from the *Commentary on Sefer ha-'Edut*, Ms. Munich 43, printed by Henrich Graetz, “Abraham Abulafia, der Pseudomessias,” *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 36 (1887), p. 558.
6. See Idel, “Maimonides and Kabbalah,” pp. 58–62; and later in this chapter.
7. For a portrait of this mystic see Moshe Idel, “Abraham Abulafia, un kabbaliste mystique,” *La vie spirituelle* 68 (1988), pp. 381–392; Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*.
8. Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1580, fols. 164a–b. For a detailed analysis see Idel, “Maimonides and Kabbalah,” pp. 60–63; and idem, “Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed,” pp. 206–208.
9. Abulafia, *Sefer ha-'Ot*, p. 76. See also *ibid.*, p. 86.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
11. *Ibid.* For another instance of discussing secrets of the Torah with a gentile see Abraham Abulafia, *Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, Ms. Parma 141, fol. 29b.
12. See Abulafia, *Sefer ha-'Ot*, pp. 75, 78.
13. The poetic opening to his book *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, printed by Jellinek as an appendix to Abulafia's *Sefer ha-'Ot*, p. 87. For the propagandistic activity of Abulafia see also his *Commentary on Sefer ha-Yashar*, Ms. Rome, Casanatense 38, fol. 41a.
14. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 122.



15. See Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, 3: xlii.
16. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 22–24.
17. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 98–99.
18. Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, 3: xli.
19. The very few other significant discussions in Spain of the combinations of letters are found in Kabbalists who either were Ashkenazi by extraction or drew their inspiration from Hasidei Ashkenaz. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, p. 45 n. 38; and idem, “Ashkenazi Esotericism and Kabbalah in Barcelona,” *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 5 (2007), pp. 69–113.
20. Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, 3: xlii–xliii.
21. In general, Abulafia’s attitude to several central topics in Jewish esotericism is drastically different from that of theosophical-theurgical Spanish Kabbalah. See Idel, “Maimonides and Kabbalah,” pp. 31–79; and idem, “The Kabbalistic Interpretations of the Secret of ‘Arayyot in Early Kabbalah,” *Kabbalah* 12 (2004), pp. 157–185, 199 (Hebrew).
22. Gershom Scholem, *The Qabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah and of Abraham Abulafia*, ed. J. ben Shlomo (Akademon, Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 229–239.
23. See Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, 3: xliii.
24. In fact we can easily understand the evolution of Spanish Kabbalah either before or after Abulafia without resorting to ecstatic Kabbalah. However, this is impossible in the cases of Italian, Byzantine, and Middle Eastern Kabbalah.
25. Symptomatically, Abulafia has influenced two philosophers living in Spain, R. Abraham Shalom and R. Moshe Narboni; see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 63–71.
26. Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 3–68.
27. See Idel, “The Study Program,” pp. 330–331.
28. See Abulafia’s epistle *Ve-Zot li-Yhudah*, pp. 15, 19.
29. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, p. 63; Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, p. 92; Gershom Scholem, *Die Erforschung der Kabbala von Reuchlin bis zur Gegenwart* (Selbstverlag der Stadt, Pforzheim, 1969), pp. 11–12. In his thoroughgoing presentation of this distinction in *Major Trends*, p. 124, Scholem proposes this theory concerning the divergence between ecstatic and theosophical Kabbalah as his own, without mentioning Abulafia as a source. For a more detailed examination of Abulafia’s own definition of Kabbalah as distinct from the theosophical one see Idel, “Defining Kabbalah” and “On the Meanings of the Term ‘Kabbalah,’ ” pp. 69–73.
30. Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 14–17, 22–23.
31. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 112–136, 156–172, 173–176, 191–194; and idem, “On the Doctrine of Divinity at the Beginning of Kabbalah,” in *Shefa Tal: Studies in Jewish Thought and Culture Presented to Bracha Sack*, ed. Z. Gries, Ch. Kreisel, and B. Huss (Ben Gurion University Press, Beer Sheva, 2004), pp. 131–148 (Hebrew).
32. See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 91–96.
33. See *ibid.*, pp. 126–132, 136–140.
34. Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 61–64.
35. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 131–134.

36. Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 56–60. See also M. Idel, “On Prophecy and Early Hasidism,” in *Studies in Modern Religions: Religious Movements and Babi-Baha’i Faiths*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Brill, Leiden, 2004), pp. 68–70.
37. See Moshe Idel, “R. Menahem Mendel of Shklov and R. Avraham Abulafia,” in *The Vilna Gaon and His Disciples*, ed. M. Hallamish, Y. Rivlin, and R. Shuhat (Bar Ilan University Press, Ramat Gan, 2003), pp. 173–183 (Hebrew).
38. See, e.g., Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*; and Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder*.
39. Amnon Gross, personal communication to author, 2002.

### CHAPTER 3: ABRAHAM ABULAFIA’S ACTIVITY IN ITALY

1. For more on Rome as the locus of eschatological events see Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 82–84, 332 n. 65. See now also Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder*, pp. 71–88.
2. Nahmanides, *’Otzar ha-Vikkuhim*, ed. Y. D. Eisenstein (Reznik, New York, 1928), p. 88.
3. Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 11–12, 42–43 n. 43.
4. Namely Capua in gematria.
5. This is one of the designations that Abulafia took for himself, as it amounts in gematria to the numerical value of Abraham, namely 248.
6. *Ziv ha-shekhinah*. This rabbinic term was interpreted in ecstatic Kabbalah as pointing to an ecstatic experience. See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 32–33.
7. This may be a remark pointing to anthropomorphic understandings of the divinity, influential in some circles in contemporary Italy. See Israel M. Ta-Shma, “Nimmugei Humash le-Rabbi Isaiah mi-Trani,” *Qiryat Sefer* 64 (1992–93), pp. 751–753 (Hebrew).
8. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Paris, BN 774, fol. 120a.
9. See Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 62–68.
10. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer ’Otzar ’Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1580, fol. 165b; Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, 3: xli.
11. See Abulafia, *Sefer ’Otzar ’Eden Ganuz*, fol. 164a. On the somewhat earlier and more famous figure see Israel M. Ta-Shma, “R. Jesaiah di Trani the Elder and His Connections with Byzantium and Palestine,” *Shalem* 4 (1984), p. 411 (Hebrew).
12. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 197–200; and idem, “On the History of the Interdiction against the Study of Kabbalah before the Age of Forty,” *AJS Review* 5 (1980), pp. 1–20 (Hebrew Section).
13. This is one of the names Abulafia took for himself. Raziel is numerically equivalent to Abraham. See Harar, *Sha’arei Tzedeq*, pp. 47–51.
14. *Hitboded*. On this significance of this text see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 108–111.
15. Abraham Abulafia, *Commentary on Sefer ha-’Edut*, Ms. Munich 43, fols. 203b–204a, printed by Heinrich Graetz, “Abraham Abulafia der Pseudo-Messias,” *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 36 (1887), p. 558.
16. See Augustin Demski, *Pabst Nicholas III—Eine Monographie* (H. Schöningh, Münster, 1903), p. 347 n. 2. Abulafia’s testimony regarding the pope’s sudden demise, “he was suddenly smitten by a plague, and on that night he was slain and died,” corresponds to an amazing degree with the Christian sources, which emphasize the suddenness of



the pope's demise. Demski collects these sources, *ibid.*, p. 348 n. 1. I offer here two examples: "Item iste Nicholaus Papa Postae existens in Castro Firmano (Soriano) loquelam suam perdidit et subito ipse decessit"; "Dominus Johannes Gaitanus Papa nominatus Dominus Nicolaus Papa IV [sic] obiit non bono modo sine poenitentia ut dicebatur." Another source, also recorded in Demski, *ibid.*, describes the pope's death as follows: "Nicolaus Papa III, in castro Suriano existens subito factus apoplecticus, sine loquela moritur." The word *subito* (suddenly) recurs in two of these texts, whereas the third text emphasizes the strange nature of his death, and apparently comes closest to Abulafia's "smitten by a plague." These texts also corroborate Abulafia's version of the pope's death in Soriano.

17. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer ha-'Edut*, Ms. Rome, Angelica 38, fols. 14b–15a; Ms. Munich 285, fol. 39b; see also Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 126–127, 199. The Hebrew original of the passage is printed in the Hebrew edition of this book (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 110–111, 154. See also Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 336–338.
18. For more on this passage see Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 82–84. On Abulafia and messianism see also Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 45–62. This allegorical technique is representative of Abulafia's hermeneutics, covered further in chap. 5 of this volume.
19. M. Idel, "On Symbolic Self-Interpretations in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Writings," *Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts* 16 (1988), pp. 90–96.
20. *Seyirim*. See Leviticus 17:7, in Asher Weiser, ed., *Abraham ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch*, vol. 3 (Mossad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem, 1976), p. 53. On the danger of goats, plausibly pointing to demonic powers, when met on Friday evening, see already in the talmudic discussions and *Mahzor Vitry*, by R. Simhah, a student of Rashi, ed. Shimeon ha-Levi Horowitz (reprint; Bolka, Jerusalem, 1963), p. 81 (Hebrew). These sources discuss the term *sakkanat se'yirim*, apparently following a biblical theme. See also Nahmanides on Leviticus 16:8 for the nexus between Sammael and goats; and Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 5 (JPS, Philadelphia, 1968), p. 312.
21. Abulafia, *Sefer ha-'Ot*, p. 67. For more on issues contained in this passage see Moshe Idel, "'The Time of the End': Apocalypticism and Its Spiritualization in Abraham Abulafia's Eschatology," in *Apocalyptic Time*, ed. Albert Baumgarten (Brill, Leiden, 2000), pp. 155–186.
22. Abulafia, *Sefer ha-'Ot*, p. 67. BYT in gematria is 21, the gematria of the divine name 'eHeYeH.
23. See the text translated and analyzed in Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 105.
24. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer 'Ish 'Adam*, Ms. Rome, Angelica 38, fol. 3a.
25. This is a play on the Hebrew consonants of the name of the town Messina.
26. Abulafia, *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, fol. 165b.
27. Namely sometime in the fall of 1285.
28. Abulafia, *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, fol. 166a.
29. *Ibid.* For more on his fantasies and visions see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 144–145.
30. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, Ms. Moscow, Guensburg 133, fol. 1a, reproduced in Idel, "Abraham Abulafia," p. 20.

31. On the possible relationship between the name of this student of Abulafia and Lessing's Nathan the Wise, see Harar, *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, pp. 32, 345–346.
32. On this book see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 91–92.
33. Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, fol. 1a, reproduced in Idel, "Abraham Abulafia," p. 20.
34. Abulafia, *Ve-Zot li-Yhudah*, p. 19. On this controversy see Moshe Idel, "R. Shlomo ibn Adret and Abraham Abulafia: For the History of a Neglected Polemic," in *Atara L'Haim: Studies in the Talmud and Medieval Rabbinic Literature in Honor of Professor Haim Zalman Dimitrovsky*, ed. D. Boyarin et al. (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2000), pp. 235–251 (Hebrew).
35. In his *Responsum I*, 548, printed now in *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, ed. H. Z. Dimitrovsky, vol. 1 (Mossad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem, 1990), p. 101, he mentions his writings and those of the holy communities in Sicily. The use of the plural shows that it was not only to Palermo that Ibn Adret wrote in this context.
36. *Ibid.*; and Idel, "R. Shlomo ibn Adret and Abraham Abulafia."
37. See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 91–92.
38. See Abulafia, *Ve-Zot li-Yhudah*, pp. 13–28.
39. Abulafia, *Sefer ha-'Ot*, p. 85.
40. Abulafia, *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, pp. 1–24.
41. See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 91–92.
42. Abulafia, *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, fol. 55a.
43. Abulafia, *Ve-Zot li-Yhudah*, p. 19. On this passage see Idel, "On the Meanings of the Term 'Kabbalah,'" pp. 40–42; and Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 99–107. For Abulafia's own interpretations of the Trinity, see Idel, *Ben*, pp. 315–318.
44. François Secret, "L'Ensis Pauli de Paulus de Heredia," *Sefarad* 26 (1966), pp. 79–102, 254–271, especially p. 100.

#### CHAPTER 4: ECSTATIC KABBALAH AS AN EXPERIENTIAL LORE

1. For a survey of this understanding of Kabbalah see Moshe Idel, "On the Theologization of Kabbalah in Modern Scholarship," in *Religious Apologetics—Philosophical Argumentation*, ed. Y. Schwartz and V. Krech (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 2004), pp. 165–167. For more on this issue see the beginning of chap. 9 in this volume.
2. For a survey of changing attitudes toward Abulafia's Kabbalah in recent scholarship see Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 119–155; Moshe Idel, "The Contribution of Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah to the Understanding of Jewish Mysticism," in *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism: Fifty Years After*, ed. P. Schaefer and J. Dan (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1993), pp. 117–143; Ronald Kiener, "From Ba'al ha-Zohar to Prophet to Ecstatic: The Vicissitudes of Abulafia in Contemporary Scholarship," *ibid.*, pp. 145–159; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*; and Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*.
3. On techniques in Jewish mysticism see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 74–111; and *idem*, *Enchanted Chains*, *passim*.
4. See Paul Fenton, "La 'Hitbodedut' chez les premiers Qabbalistes en Orient et chez les Soufis," in *Prière, mystique et judaïsme*, ed. R. Goetschel (Presses Universitaires de

- France, Paris, 1987), pp. 133–157; Moshe Idel, “Hitbodedut: On Solitude in Jewish Mysticism,” in *Einsamkeit: Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation*, vol. 6, ed. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann (Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Munich, 2000), pp. 192–198.
5. See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 103–169; idem, “Hitbodedut as Concentration in Jewish Philosophy,” in *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Moshe Idel, Zeev W. Harvey, and E. Schweid, vol. 1 (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 39–60 (Hebrew); Sara Klein-Braslavy, “Prophecy, Clairvoyance, and Dreams and the Concept of ‘Hitbodedut’ in Gersonides’ Thought,” *Da’at* 39 (1997), pp. 23–68 (Hebrew).
  6. *Yitboded*. This term can also be translated here as “concentrate.”
  7. Abraham Abulafia, *Matzrefla-Kesef*, Ms. Sassoon 56, fols. 33b–34a. On this passage see also Idel, “Hitbodedut: On Solitude in Jewish Mysticism,” p. 195.
  8. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, Ms. New York, JTS 1801, fol. 9a, corrected in accordance with the quotation of this passage in Ms. London, British Library 749, fols. 12a–b, where Abulafia’s passage has been copied in R. Hayyim Vital’s *Sha’arei Qedushah* under the mistaken title *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*. Even so, it is essentially a better version of the unique extant manuscript of *Sefer ha-Hesheq*.
  9. *Simhah shel mitzvah*. Cf. BT, *Sabbath*, fol. 30a.
  10. Eleazar of Worms, *Sefer Sodei Razayya’*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1572, fol. 130a.
  11. Psalms 33:2, 47:7, 66:2, etc.
  12. Cf. *Mekhileta’* on Exodus 18:19; and Boaz Cohen, *Law and Tradition in Judaism* (JTS, New York, 1959), p. 24 n. 70.
  13. Eleazar of Worms, *Perushei Siddur ha-Tefillah la-Roqeah*, ed. M. Hershler and Y. A. Hershler, vol. 1 (Makhon ha-rav Herschler, Jerusalem, 1992), p. 145. See also *ibid.*, p. 149.
  14. See BT, *Sabbath*, fol. 30b. Cf. the texts of R. Eleazar of Worms quoted earlier.
  15. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer ‘Otzar ‘Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1580, fol. 62a; Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 61–62.
  16. Abulafia, *Sefer ‘Otzar ‘Eden Ganuz*, fols. 59b–60a. On the kiss of death as a moment of ecstasy in other texts of Abulafia see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 180–184.
  17. Abulafia, *Sefer ‘Otzar ‘Eden Ganuz*, fols. 60a–b.
  18. See the anonymous Ms. Paris, BN 848, fol. 7b; and Adam Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers in Early Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Cherub Press, Los Angeles, 2004), pp. 25–26, 285–286 (Hebrew). See also below, notes 43 and 45.
  19. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 13–71.
  20. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Re’ayon*, Ms. Vatican 291, fol. 21a.
  21. Abulafia, *Sefer ‘Otzar ‘Eden Ganuz*, fols. 163b–164a.
  22. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII.7.1072b; idem, *Ethics* VII.1174a–1176a. For Maimonides see *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 8:2; *Haqdamah le-Pereq Heleq*, *Sefer ha-Ma’or* (Tel Aviv, 1948), pp. 121–122; Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963), pt. III, chap. 51. Maimonides emphasized that the pleasure that accompanies apprehension “does not belong to the genus of bodily pleasures.”
  23. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, pt. III, chap. 51.

24. Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, p. 125.
25. Abraham Abulafia, *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1582, fol. 14b. See also Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," pp. 77–78. For more on the death by a kiss in Kabbalah in general see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 180–184; and more recently Michael Fishbane, *The Kiss of God* (University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1994), pp. 39–41.
26. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Paris, BN 774, fol. 117a.
27. Idem, *Sefer ha-Ge'ulah*, Ms. Leipzig 39, fol. 4b.
28. Idem, *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, Ms. Munich 408, fol. 1b.
29. Idem, *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, fol. 115b. For more on the figure 177 in Abulafia's thought see Idel, "Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed," pp. 212–216.
30. Untitled fragment in the untitled, anonymous Ms. Florence, Laurenziana-Medicea Plut. II, 48, fol. 89b. On this manuscript see the identification of Abulafia as author and the discussion in M. Idel, "A Unique Manuscript of an Untitled Treatise of Abraham Abulafia in Biblioteca Laurenziana-Medicea," *Kabbalah* 17 (2008), pp. 7–28.
31. Abulafia, *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, fols. 4b–5a.
32. Ibid., fol. 54a.
33. Ibid., fols. 4b–5a. On the allegorical understanding of the "congregation of Israel" in Abulafia's thought see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 211–212 n. 36; and Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 66, 127, 215.
34. Abraham Abulafia, *'Or ha-Sekhel*, Ms. Vatican 233, fol. 127b.
35. Abulafia, *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, fol. 35b.
36. See, e.g., Deuteronomy 4:4. On the importance of the unitive expressions in both Kabbalah and Hasidism, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 36–73; and idem, "Universalization and Integration: Two Conceptions of Mystical Union in Jewish Mysticism," in *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith: An Ecumenical Dialogue*, ed. M. Idel and B. McGinn (Macmillan, New York, 1989), pp. 27–58, 157–161, 195–203.
37. Namely the Agent Intellect, envisioned as Metatron. For more on this passage see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 10.
38. Abraham Abulafia, *Commentary on Sefer ha-Yashar*, Ms. Rome, Angelica 38, fols. 31b–32a; Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 382; Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, p. 126.
39. See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 109. Gikatilla's *Sha'ar ha-Niqqud* was printed in a collection of early kabbalistic tracts titled *'Arzei Levanon* (Venice, 1601), fol. 38a. This collection was reprinted in 1748 in Kraków, and later in Koretz, and Hasidic masters quoted it; see Moshe Idel, "The Magical and Theurgic Interpretation of Music in Hebrew Texts from the Renaissance to Hasidism," *Yuval* 4 (1982), p. 61 n. 164 (Hebrew). Compare also some texts of Abulafia and his school, discussed in Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 18–19; and R. Joseph Gikatilla's *Sha'arei 'Orah*, ed. J. ben Shlomo, vol. 1 (Mossad Bialik, Jerusalem 1970), pp. 48, 206, and passim. See also the view of R. Elijah de Vidas, dealt with in Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 171–172, 179, where cleaving to God is also related to linguistic elements. Compare also Scholem's remark that the formula used by Hasidic masters in order to convey the idea of cleaving to God, *devequt ha-Shem*, may be related to views of Gikatilla found in (the unfortunately

- unmentioned) manuscripts of this Kabbalist. See Gershom Scholem, “Two First Testimonies on the Contrarities of Hasidism and the Besht,” *Tarbitz* 20 (1950), p. 236 (Hebrew); and the different opinion of Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 2: 302 n. 151.
40. Abulafia, *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, fol. 140a.
  41. Abraham Abulafia, *Shomer Mitzvah*, Ms. Paris, BN 853, fol. 48b. On this view of Kabbalah, which assumes both mystical and magical aspects, see my discussion of the mystico-magical model in *Hasidism*, pp. 95–102.
  42. Abulafia, *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, fol. 115b.
  43. *ha-Mitzvot* (commandments) = 541 = *sekhel ha-po’el* (Agent Intellect). On this gematria see Moshe Idel, “The Kabbalistic Interpretations of the Secret of ‘Arayyot in Early Kabbalah,” *Kabbalah* 12 (2004), pp. 157–159 (Hebrew). See also below, note 45; and chap. 5 of this volume.
  44. In Hebrew the consonants of *ha-ner*, “candle,” are the same as those of *nahar*, “river.” On a different understanding of this verse, especially the term “river,” see M. Hellner-Eshed, “A River Issues Forth from Eden”: *On the Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar* (‘Alma ‘Am ‘Oved, Tel Aviv, 2005) (Hebrew).
  45. Untitled fragment, Ms. Florence, Laurenziana-Medicea Plut. II, 48, fols. 79a–b. On the possible authorship of this treatise, see note 30 above. The affinity between letters and the knowledge of the Agent Intellect means that the cosmic intellect is attained by means of the combination of letters. Thus also the term “commandments,” which amounts in gematria to *shekhel ha-po’el*, means that the letters of the commandments can be used in order to attain the Agent Intellect.
  46. Compare other expressions of this view discussed in Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 13, 15–16.
  47. Abulafia, *Sheva’ Netivot ha-Torah*, p. 8; Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 86–87, 92–93, 96, 98–99, 103. On the possible importance of this unique status of language as a form of cognition higher than imagination for later developments in the description of man as having the “form of speech,” as in Dante Alighieri, for example, I hope to elaborate elsewhere. See, for the time being, Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, pp. 48–52.
  48. *Metzuyyar ba-sekhel*. On the term *tziyyur* as forming a concept see Harry A. Wolfson, “The Terms *Tasawwur* and *Tasdiq* in Arabic Philosophy and Their Greek, Latin and Hebrew Equivalents,” *Moslem World*, April 1943, pp. 1–15.
  49. Abulafia, *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, fols. 91a–b.
  50. Abulafia, *Sefer ha-’Ot*, p. 79.
  51. Ms. Florence, Laurenziana-Medicea Plut. II, 48, fol. 72a.
  52. Abulafia, *Sefer ‘Otzar ‘Eden Ganuz*, fol. 157b.
  53. On the phrase “the way of prophecy” see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 144 n. 22.
  54. R. Aharon ha-Kohen Perlov of Apta, *’Or ha-Ganuz le-Tzaddiqim* (Zolkiew, 1800), fols. 46a–b. On this book see Hayyim Lieberman, *’Ohel RaHeL* (privately printed, New York, 1980), pp. 8–11 (Hebrew). A partial version of this passage is found in R. Aharon of Apta’s *Sefer Keter Nehora’* (Benei Beraq, 1980), unpaginated introduction, *haqdamah sheniyah*, para. 7.
  55. E.g., R. Aharon ha-Kohen, *’Or ha-Ganuz le-Tzaddiqim*, fols. 17b, 18a.

## CHAPTER 5: ABRAHAM ABULAFIA'S HERMENEUTICS

1. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 5–32; W. Bacher, “L'exégèse biblique dans le Zohar,” *REJ* 22 (1891), pp. 33–46, especially pp. 37–40. See also idem, “Das Merkwort PRDS in der Jüdischen Bibelexegese,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 13 (1893), pp. 294–305; Peretz Sandler, “On the Question of Pardes and the Fourfold Method,” in *Sefer Eliahu Auerbach*, ed. A. Biram (Qiryat Sefer, Jerusalem, 1955), pp. 222–235 (Hebrew). See also A. van der Heide, “Pardes: Methodological Reflections on the Theory of Four Senses,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 34 (1983), pp. 147–159; Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 429–435. Some of the following discussions draw upon this last book, where additional bibliography is found.
2. See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 82–124.
3. See already the interpretation of Hagigah in *Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, fol. 11b.
4. Abraham Abulafia, *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, Ms. Paris, BN 777, fol. 108a.
5. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 387–388.
6. Exegetical techniques were explored in great detail by Ashkenazi Hasidim; see Joseph Dan, “The Ashkenazi Hasidic ‘Gates of Wisdom,’” in *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati (Peeters, Louvain, 1980), pp. 183–189; and Ivan G. Marcus, “Exegesis for the Few and for the Many: Judah he-Hasid's Biblical Commentary,” in *The Age of the Zohar*, ed. J. Dan (Institute of Jewish Studies, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 1–24. In Kabbalah they were adopted in Abulafia's hermeneutics; see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 95–119; and idem, “Abulafia's Secrets of the Guide: A Linguistic Turn,” in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, ed. Alfred Ivri, E. R. Wolfson, and A. Arkush (Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, 1998), pp. 289–329.
7. See Idel, “Maimonides and Kabbalah,” pp. 73–74.
8. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, Ms. Moscow, Guensburg 133, fols. 7b–8a. See a very similar discussion, *ibid.*, fol. 12b; and Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 269–270.
9. Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, fol. 25a. See Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, p. 262.
10. See Daniel Matt, “The Old-New Words: The Aura of Secrecy in the Zohar,” in *Gershon Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism: Fifty Years After*, ed. P. Schaefer and J. Dan (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1993), pp. 200–202.
11. Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, fols. 20a–b; and Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 327–328. See also Abulafia, *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, pp. 3–4, discussed in Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 100–101.
12. Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 80–110.
13. On the interpretations of the forefathers' names in Abulafia see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 127–128.
14. Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, fol. 23b; Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 111.
15. Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, fol. 19b; Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 111.
16. Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, fol. 20a; Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 111.
17. Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, fol. 20a; Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 111.
18. Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, fol. 20a; Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 111.



19. In the original *lefi mishpat*, which regularly means “according to judgment.”
20. Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, fols. 23b–24a.
21. Abraham Abulafia, *Commentary on Sefer ha-‘Edut*, Ms. Rome, Angelica 38, fol. 9a; Ms. Munich 285, fol. 13a; Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 66; and idem, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 127, 140. See also the passages translated and analyzed in Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 71–72, 82–83.
22. Abulafia, *Commentary on Sefer ha-‘Edut*, Ms. Rome, Angelica 38, fols. 14b–15a; Ms. Munich 285, fol. 39b; see also Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 126–127, 199; idem, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 82–83. For more on the context of this passage see chap. 6 of this volume.
23. Abulafia, *Commentary on Sefer ha-‘Edut*, Ms. Munich 285, fol. 39b. For more on the pun *Mosheh/ha-Shem* in the thirteenth century see Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 81–82.
24. Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 127–128.
25. Written in a defective manner, without *Vav*.
26. For other, similar expressions in Abulafia and his followers see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 11–12; idem, “On Symbolic Self-Interpretations in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Writings,” *Hebrew University Studies in Literature and the Arts* 16 (1988), pp. 90–96.
27. Harar, *Sha’arei Tzedeq*, p. 484. This passage should also be read in the context of another quotation from the same book, discussed in Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 17. On this passage see Georges Vajda, who translated it into French in a supplement to his article “Deux chapitres de l’histoire du conflit entre la Kabbale et la philosophie: La polémique anti-intellectualiste de Joseph b. Shalom Ashkenazi,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 31 (1956), pp. 131–132; and Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 332–335.
28. On part of this passage and its possible affinity to a view of Dante’s see Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, pp. 48–50. The possibility of a contact between Dante’s and Abulafia’s views on language is strengthened by the fact that Abulafia’s former teacher, R. Hillel of Verona, spent some years in Forlì, where Dante was exiled. On Dante as a prophet—a self-consciousness reminiscent of Abulafia’s—there are several studies, the most recent of which seems to be that of Raffaello Morghen, *Dante profeta* (Jaca, Milan, 1983), where previous studies are discussed. See also Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1979).
29. On the easy way in ecstatic Kabbalah see Idel, “Defining Kabbalah,” pp. 121–122.

## CHAPTER 6: ESCHATOLOGICAL THEMES AND DIVINE NAMES IN ABULAFIA’S KABBALAH

1. Namely redemption.
2. Or, according to another plausible interpretation, “In the name of.”
3. See Abulafia, *Sefer ha-‘Ot*, p. 76, where a revelation is described as stemming from ‘Adonay, while later in the same book he predicts that the Tetragrammaton will awaken the heart of the shepherd to act as a redeemer.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

5. Ibid., p. 74.
6. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer ha-Melammed*, Ms. Paris, BN 680, fol. 308a. The binary vision of this text, as well as that of R. Nathan Harar in his *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, is seminal in Abulafia's thought, especially in the important topic of the continuous struggle between the faculties of intellect and imagination. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 144–145; idem, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 438–460; and idem, "The Battle of the Urges: Psychomachia in the Prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia," in *Peace and War in Jewish Culture*, ed. Avriel Bar-Levav (Center Zalman Shazar, Jerusalem, 2006), pp. 99–143 (Hebrew). Thus, the historical binary vision reflects the psychological one. Both in history and in psychology, Abulafia prefers a binary vision rather than a triadic one, as found for example in the rabbinic and in Joachim of Fiori's understandings of history as consisting of three major stages. Abulafia also expressed little interest in the division of the six thousand years into three periods of two millennia, widespread in both Jewish and Christian eschatology. See Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, p. 19 and the pertinent footnotes. In my opinion, the first and main impetus for Abulafia's messianism was the belief, widespread among Jews in Europe, that the victories of the Mongols—imagined to be one or more of the ten lost Jewish tribes—meant also the beginning of the redemption of Israel. I have discussed the evidence in *ibid.*, pp. 8, 81, 134, and the pertinent bibliography.
7. See a similar discussion in Joseph Gikatilla's text adduced by Gottlieb, *Studies*, p. 114 n. 41.
8. Abraham Abulafia, *Commentary on Sefer ha-'Edut*, Ms. Munich 285, fol. 37a.
9. See P. R. Biassiotto, *History of the Development of Devotion to the Holy Name* (St. Bonaventure College and Seminary, New York, 1943), pp. 69–71; and Augustin Demski, *Pabst Nicholas III—Eine Monographie* (H. Schöningh, Münster, 1903), p. 17.
10. Biassiotto, *History*, pp. 71–76. In a later period we witness a spiritual phenomenon altogether similar to that of Abulafia, in the person and activity of St. Bernardine of Siena, who dedicated his life to preaching and sermonizing on the theme of the holy name of Jesus. For him, as for Abulafia, the divine name became the essence of religion. See L. McAodha, "The Holy Name in the Preaching of St. Bernardine of Siena," *Franciscan Studies* 29 (1969), pp. 42–58.
11. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, pp. 210–211, 282–284.
12. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1580, fol. 41a.
13. For more on this issue see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 24–27.
14. On the nexus between divine names in the Bible and divine attributes in ancient Judaism see A. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1927), p. 44; N. A. Dahl and A. F. Segal, "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 9 (1978), pp. 1–28; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 128–136. On the importance of theophorism in Jewish thought see Idel, *Ben*.
15. Abulafia, *Sefer ha-'Ot*, p. 76.
16. Ibid.
17. This view may have some affinity to the midrashic vision of the change of the names of the angels by God at the time of the destruction of the Temple, in order to prevent



invocations by Jewish masters, or magicians, who would attempt to oppose the destruction of the Temple.

18. The passage refers to the powers of the names. On the status of the divine names and their powers in Abulafia see Moshe Idel, “Between Magic of Names and Kabbalah of Names: The Critique of Abraham Abulafia,” *Mahanayyim* 14 (2003), pp. 79–95 (Hebrew); and idem, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 76–79 and the bibliography adduced there.
19. This view is similar to that expressed by Abulafia in a passage from *Sefer ha-'Ot*, p. 69.
20. See the earlier quotation from Abulafia, *Sefer ha-'Ot*, p. 79, where the opposition between this name and the Tetragrammaton is also obvious.
21. Harar, *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, p. 472. Significant parallels to some aspects of this passage can be found in *ibid.*, pp. 471 and 475. See more about the background of this passage in Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 17–18.
22. On this “divine name” see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 18, 22, 31; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 113 n. 54.
23. On prophecy and the appearance of the divine name in early-thirteenth-century sources see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 100–101; and Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 181–187. Meanwhile I have good reasons to believe that *Sefer ha-Navon*, whose author I propose is an early-thirteenth-century Ashkenazi figure, R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo the prophet, was known to Abulafia. See Idel, “Some Forlorn Writings.” See also note 6 above, note 56 below, and chap. 7.
24. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, Ms. Paris, BN 777, fol. 109. This passage was printed by Jellinek as an addendum to Abulafia, *Sefer ha-'Ot*, p. 84. For an analysis of the context of this passage see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 15–16; and idem, “Enoch Is Metatron,” *Immanuel* 24/25 (1990), p. 236; and compare to the discussion of a passage from Nathan of Gaza in idem, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 199–200.
25. Cf. 2 Samuel 5:17.
26. Cf. BT, *Sanhedrin*, fol. 38a.
27. Abulafia, *Commentary on Sefer ha-'Edut*, Ms. Rome, Angelica 38, fols. 14b–15a; Ms. Munich 285, fols. 39b–40a. See also Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 126–127, 199; and above, chap. 5, note 21.
28. Compare also Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 140, 382; and Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 126–127, where some other details of this passage are analyzed.
29. On this issue see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 124–125, 134–137.
30. This phrase comes from *Sefer Yetzirah* VI.4, where it designates God as creator in the context of His revelation to Abraham. There can be no doubt that Abulafia uses the first person here because he conceives of himself as a person of as great importance as the forefather.
31. Abulafia, *Ve-Zot Li-Yhudah*, pp. 18–19, corrected according to Ms. New York, JTS 1887.
32. Idel, “Defining Kabbalah,” pp. 97–122.
33. Abulafia, *Ve-Zot Li-Yhudah*, p. 16.
34. Abulafia, *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, fol. 149b.
35. *Ibid.*, fol. 104b.

36. The single manuscript of this untitled treatise, found in Ms. Florence, Laurenziana-Medicea Plut. II, 48, is not so clear here.
37. *ha-Shem ha-Meyuhad*, in *gematria* 418.
38. *Kelei Mashiyah* = 418.
39. Abulafia, untitled fragment, Ms. Florence, Laurenziana-Medicea Plut. II, 48, fol. 90a.
40. Abulafia, *Ve-Zot Li-Yhudah*, p. 18: *Yitpa'er*. Abulafia uses this verb in the context of his own claim to have received a revelation of the date of the end.
41. Abraham Abulafia, *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, Ms. New York, JTS 843, fol. 45b.
42. Abulafia, *Sefer ha-Melammed*, Ms. Paris, BN 680, fol. 297b.
43. On the natural rise of a Jewish state see Shlomo Pines, *Studies in the History of Jewish Philosophy* (Bialik Institute, Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 277–305 (Hebrew).
44. Ms. Florence, Laurenziana-Medicea Plut. II, 48, fol. 21b.
45. Such a calculation occurs also elsewhere in Abulafia as pointing to the mystical experience of the union of man and God by means of comprehension; see the text analyzed in Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 7–8.
46. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, Ms. Munich 408, fol. 46a.
47. Abulafia, *Commentary on Sefer ha-Melitz*, Ms. Rome, Angelica 38, fol. 5a; Ms. Munich 285, fols. 10a–b.
48. See *ibid.*, Ms. Rome, Angelica 38, fol. 7b: “For the spirit comprises Hebrew circumcised powers that instruct truth.”
49. See Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 155.
50. Abulafia, *Commentary on Sefer ha-Melitz*, Ms. Rome, Angelica 38, fol. 5a.
51. Abraham Abulafia, *Matzrefla-Kesef*, Ms. Sassoon 56, fol. 30b. An issue that needs additional investigation is the possible affinity between Abulafia’s interpretation of the term *Yehudy* as confession, and an observation by the early-thirteenth-century Ashkenazi author R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo the prophet. See also Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 18, 22, 31; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 113 n. 54.
52. On the difference between the aims of Abulafia and Nahmanides, see Abraham Berger, “The Messianic Self-Consciousness of Abraham Abulafia: A Tentative Evaluation,” in *Essays on Jewish Life and Thought Presented in Honor of Salo Wittmayer Baron*, ed. Joseph Blau et al. (Columbia University Press, New York, 1959), p. 60.
53. See Moshe Idel, *Chapters in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Akadem, Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 65, 66, 69 (Hebrew).
54. Abulafia, *Sefer ha-'Ot*, p. 80.
55. On the meaning of the term *Yisrael* in Abulafia’s writing, see Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” p. 90.
56. See, e.g., Abulafia, *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, p. 11. See also the important discussion in Abulafia’s commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed* named *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, Ms. Munich 408, fols. 65a–b, translated and analyzed in Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, p. 21, where the combination of four divine names is described as part of Abulafia’s mystical technique.

57. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Paris, BN 774, fol. 162a.
58. Or “according to.”
59. Untitled fragment, Ms. Florence, Laurenziana-Medicea Plut. II, 48, fol. 88b.

# CHAPTER 7: ABRAHAM ABULAFIA AND R. MENAHEM BEN BENJAMIN

1. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1580, fols. 165b–166a; Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, 3: xlii.
2. Sa'adyah Gaon's Commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* is quoted by R. Menahem Recanati; see his Commentary on the Torah, fol. 46c.
3. See Gershom Scholem, *Peraqim le-Toldot Sifrut ha-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1931), p. 93 (Hebrew). On Ibn Ezra and *Sefer Yetzirah* see Naftali ben-Menahem, 'Iniane'i ibn Ezra (Mossad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 270–271 (Hebrew); and Abe Lipshitz, *Ibn Ezra Studies* (Mossad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem, 1982), p. 9 n. 45. See, however, Israel Weinstock, An “Anonymous” Commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* from the Foundation of Abraham Abulafia (Attributed to Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra) (Mosad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 16–19 (Hebrew), who denies the existence of such a commentary written by Ibn Ezra; and more recently the important appendix by Paul Fenton in Georges Vajda, *Le commentaire sur “Le livre de la Création” de Dunas ibn Tamim de Kairouan*, ed. Paul Fenton (Peeters, Paris, 2002), pp. 159–175.
4. On this commentary see Vajda, *Le commentaire sur “Le livre de la Création.”*
5. Namely the commentary of R. Sabbatai Donnolo; on his views in matters of mysticism see more recently Elliot R. Wolfson, “The Theosophy of Sabbetai Donnolo, with Special Emphasis on the Doctrine of Sefirot in His *Sefer Hakhmoni*,” *Jewish History* 6 (1992), pp. 281–316.
6. See Daniel Abrams, “Traces of the Lost Commentary on the Book of Creation by R. Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen,” *Kabbalah* 2 (1997), pp. 311–341 (Hebrew).
7. This commentary is probably lost.
8. On this commentary, usually printed under the name of Nahmanides, see Isaiah Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches*, vol. 1 (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 17–21 (Hebrew).
9. Gershom Scholem, *Kitvei Yad be-Kabbalah* (National Library, Jerusalem, 1930), p. 112 (Hebrew). Compare, however, his earlier and much more suspicious attitude to Abulafia's testimony in his review of Jehuda Wiestinetzki and J. Freimann, eds., *Das Buch der Frommen*, in *Qiryat Sefer* 1 (1924), pp. 205–206 (Hebrew).
10. The meaning is not clear. See Scholem, *Peraqim*, p. 93 n. 1.
11. On the issue of 231 gates see Idel, *Golem*, pp. 10–11, 59, 81–82, 98.
12. Apparently an inhabitant of Béziers; I hope to discuss elsewhere the nature of this commentary and to print the extant fragments that belong to it.
13. Namely Barukh Togarmi, whose commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* has been printed by Gershom Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah ve-shel Abraham Abulafia*, ed. J. ben Shlomo (Akademon, Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 229–239.

14. Abulafia, *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, fol. 16b, printed, with some errors, in Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, 3: xlii–xliii. See also Paul Fenton, in the appendix to Vajda, *Le commentaire sur "Le livre de la Création,"* pp. 160–161.
15. See Abrams, "Traces of the Lost Commentary on the Book of Creation."
16. A detailed description of this manuscript is found in P. Perreau and Moritz Steinschneider, "Hebräische Handschriften in Parma, nach Mittheilungen des Herrn Bibliothekars Abbe R. Perreau," *Yeshurun* 6 (1868), pp. 181–182. See also Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 99–105; and Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 1: 42–46.
17. See Ithamar Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yezira*," *Israel Oriental Studies* 1 (1971), p. 136.
18. See above, note 8.
19. See above, note 9.
20. See above, note 4.
21. See Daniel Abrams, "R. Eleazar ha-Darshan's Commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*," *'Ale Sefer* 19 (2001), pp. 69–87 (Hebrew).
22. See above, note 10.
23. See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 96–97, and p. 114 n. 7 for a list of manuscripts, most of them related to Italy.
24. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 188.
25. See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 92–93.
26. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 176–177; Yehuda Liebes, *Het'o shel 'Elisha'* (Academon, Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 132–137 (Hebrew); and Idel, "Golems and God," pp. 235–243.
27. This issue needs a much more detailed analysis, which cannot be done here.
28. On fols. 6a–8b there is a fragment of R. Asher's *Commentary on the Secret of Shevu'ah*, printed in Daniel Abrams, ed., *R. Asher ben David: His Complete Works and Studies in His Kabbalistic Thought* (Cherub Press, Los Angeles, 1996), p. 39 (Hebrew).
29. See Perreau and Steinschneider, "Hebräische Handschriften in Parma," pp. 181–182. See also Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 99–105.
30. See Abulafia, *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, fols. 164a–b, quoted in chap. 2, sec. 2.
31. See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 76. I hope to demonstrate elsewhere the affinities between these two fragments and the thought of Togarmi.
32. See Moshe Idel, "R. Shlomo ibn Adret and Abraham Abulafia: For the History of a Neglected Polemic," in *Atara L'Haim: Studies in the Talmud and Medieval Rabbinic Literature in Honor of Professor Haim Zalman Dimitrovsky*, ed. D. Boyarin et al. (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2000), pp. 235–251 (Hebrew).
33. For a detailed description of the content see Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 1: 37–40.
34. See Abrams, *R. Asher ben David*, p. 39. R. Asher ben David's *Commentary on the Divine Name* is also found with a book of Abulafia's in Ms. Paris, BN 680, a fact that may attest to a connection between their presence together in the same manuscripts and the possibility that Abulafia brought R. Asher's commentary to Italy.

35. For a detailed description of the correspondences between Ms. Parma 2784, Catalogue de Rossi 1390 (hereafter Ms. Parma, de Rossi 1390), and Ms. New York, JTS 8124, on the one hand, and Ms. Paris, BN 763, and Ms. London, British Library 756, on the other hand, see Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 1: 33–46.
36. See a detailed description in *ibid.*, pp. 40–42.
37. Ms. Paris, BN 763, fol. 61a.
38. *Ibid.*, fol. 64a. See Mauro Zonta, *La filosofia antica nel Medioevo ebraico* (Paideia, Brescia, 1996), pp. 225–226.
39. The treatise appears after the colophon of R. Yehonathan and may date from a later period.
40. Michele Dukan, “Menahem B. Benjamin, scribe et savant juif italien de la fin du XIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle,” *Italia* 9:1–2 (1990), pp. 19–61, especially pp. 36–37.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
42. On this anonymous book see Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 143–156; Idel, *Golem*, pp. 86–91; and Gerold Necker, *Das Buch des Lebens* (Mohr/Siebeck, Tübingen, 2001).
43. Ms. Parma, de Rossi 1390, fols. 29a–64b.
44. See Dukan, “Menahem B. Benjamin,” pp. 32–33.
45. *Ibid.* See also Ms. London, British Library 756, copied by R. Yehonathan ben Aviezer, which starts with excerpts from Nahmanides’ *Commentary on the Pentateuch*. On this figure see Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 1: 50–51.
46. Dukan, “Menahem B. Benjamin,” pp. 27–32.
47. See Abulafia, *Sefer ’Otzar ’Eden Ganuz*, fols. 164a–b, quoted in chap. 2, sec. 2.
48. Dukan is cautious about identifying this Kabbalist with the copyist Menahem ben Benjamin. See “Menahem B. Benjamin,” pp. 36–46.
49. A quotation from Nahmanides’ treatise, without attribution, is found in Recanati’s *Commentary on the Torah*, fol. 68d. See also Scholem, *Peraqim*, pp. 92–97.
50. See, e.g., Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 1: 55, 57–58. Cf. the presentation of my position in Malachi Beit-Arié, “The Identity of the Kabbalist Menahem Recanati,” *Tarbitz* 67 (1998), pp. 573–577 (Hebrew); and, following him, Giulio Busi, “Menahem Finzi of Recanati: The True Name of an Old Acquaintance,” *Materia Giudaica* 8:1 (2003), pp. 213–218. To the best of my knowledge, I have never claimed that Menahem Recanati’s kabbalistic thought was based upon the kabbalistic material extant in the manuscripts described above, but rather that they are the first dated codexes reflecting the arrival of Kabbalah in the Italian peninsula. The claim of Bet-Arié, echoed by Busi, that there were two approximately contemporary Italian Kabbalists who were interested in Kabbalah and in Halakhah, is an interesting suggestion that may help to solve some problems that I cannot discuss here, but it assumes the existence of two Kabbalists with the same name, in a period and region in which almost no other known Kabbalists are documented. I hope to return to this issue elsewhere. Even if Bet Arié is correct and there were two Kabbalists with the same name, the importance of the kabbalistic material found in Ms. Parma, de Rossi 1390, is not diminished: in fact

even Recanati could have read and used it despite the possibility that the copyist had the same name.

51. On this treatise see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 322 n. 250.
52. Ta'amei ha-Mitzwot, fol. 18b; and Recanati, *Commentary on the Torah*, fol. 23c.
53. See the critical edition of Joseph Baruch Sermoneta, *Sefer Tagmulei ha-Nefesh* (Israeli Academy, Jerusalem, 1981); see index, e.g., p. 269, s.v. Ramban.
54. On Zerahyah's critique of Nahmanides see a study by Aviezer Ravitzky in preparation and also chap. 12 of this volume.
55. See Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 88–89.
56. On the contacts between Jewish and Christian scholars in thirteenth-century Italy see the various and important studies of J. B. Sermoneta, e.g., "Jehudah ben Mosheh ben Daniel Romano, traducteur de Saint Thomas," in *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati (Peeters, Louvain, 1980), pp. 235–262; and of Caterina Rigo, e.g., "The Essence of Man and Immortality in the Philosophical Thought of R. Yehudah Romano," in *Joseph Baruch Sermoneta Memorial Volume*, ed. Aviezer Ravitzky (Institute for Jewish Studies, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 181–221 (Hebrew). For a general survey of Jewish culture in Rome in the period under scrutiny here, still valuable is the study by Hermann Vogelstein and Paul Rieger, *Geschichte des Juden in Rom*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1896), pp. 259–299.
57. See Zonta, *La filosofia antica*, pp. 223–224; and Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations," p. 238 n. 177.
58. See Rigo, "The Essence of Man and Immortality," p. 189 n. 25, pointing out that a treatise attributed to Egidio Romano is extant only in a Hebrew translation by Yehudah Romano, preserved in a Florentine manuscript.
59. See Giuseppe Sermoneta, "Rabbi Yehudah and Immanuel of Rome: Rationalism Whose End Is Mystical Belief," in *Sermoneta, Revelation, Faith, Reason* (Bar Ilan University Press, Ramat Gan, 1976) pp. 54–70 (Hebrew); and idem, "Jehudah ben Mosheh ben Daniel Romano," p. 246. The identification between sefirot and ideas, which entails a more static vision of the sefirot than those found in the various forms of theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, remained part of the Italian intellectual tradition; we find similar views in R. David Messer Leon, in a book by Isaac Abravanel written in Italy; in Abraham Yagel; and in Azariah de Rossi. On this issue see Moshe Idel, "Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance," in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. Lenn E. Goodman (SUNY Press, Albany, 1993), pp. 331–338; and Alemanno's passages dealing with sefirot as numbers in chap. 14, sec. 2, of this volume.
60. See Abrams, "R. Eleazar ha-Darshan's Commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*."
61. For descriptions of the content of this manuscript see A. di Capua, *Catalogo dei codici ebraici della Biblioteca Angelica* (Rome, 1878), pp. 95–97. For the use of Heikhalot material in these writings, see the list made by Klaus Herrmann, *Massekhet Hekhalot* (Mohr/Siebeck, Tübingen, 1994), pp. 57–60.
62. Most of the material has been printed and analyzed by Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, pp. 195–238, and translated into English with some discussions in Dan, *The "Unique*

- Cherub" Circle, pp. 241–251. More pertinent material and a more adequate edition of part of the material is found in Daniel Abrams, "The 'Unity of God' of R. Eleazar ha-Darshan," *Qobez 'al Yad* 12 (1994), pp. 149–160 (Hebrew).
63. The text is printed in Joseph Dan, *Studies in Ashkenazi-Hasidic Literature* (Massada, Ramat Gan, 1975), pp. 112–133 (Hebrew); and discussed again in idem, *The "Unique Cherub" Circle*.
  64. See Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, pp. 201, 207.
  65. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, p. 118; idem, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 85–86; idem, *Ben*, pp. 276–506.
  66. For more on these occurrences see Idel, *Ben*, pp. 377–506. For more on the affinities between Abulafia and material related, in my opinion, to R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo as found in Ms. London, British Library 752, see *ibid.*, pp. 350–351 n. 52. I assume that material in that manuscript was also known in Rome in the late 1270s. This view has nothing to do with the theory of Israel Weinstock that the material (which I attribute to R. Nehemiah) originated with Abu Aharon in Babylon, since I assume that the sources reached the copyist of this manuscript from Erfurt and not from Baghdad. See Weinstock, "The Discovery of Abu Aharon of Baghdad's Legacy of Secrets," *Tarbitz* 32 (1963), pp. 153–159 (Hebrew); Gershom Scholem, "Has Abu Aharon's Legacy of Secrets Been Discovered?," *ibid.*, pp. 252–265 (Hebrew); and the rejoinder of Weinstock, "The Treasury of 'Secrets' of Abu Aharon—Imagination or Reality?," *Sinai* 54 (1964), pp. 226–259. See also below, note 71.
  67. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 100–101.
  68. See the untitled text printed in Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, p. 222; and Abulafia's similar views. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 169.
  69. See above, chap. 6, note 23.
  70. For more on this issue see Idel, *Ben*, pp. 276–506.
  71. See Abrams, "The 'Unity of God' of R. Eleazar ha-Darshan," pp. 152–153. Whether this student was R. Jacob ha-Levi of Ozenburg, a student of R. Eleazar himself, cannot be ascertained; see *ibid.*, p. 152 n. 18. The question is whether this student was the copyist of Ms. London, British Library 752, which contains material from R. Moshe Azriel. See Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, p. 207; and note 66 above.
  72. Abrams, "The 'Unity of God' of R. Eleazar ha-Darshan," pp. 153–154.
  73. See Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 1: 221–222. For another Ashkenazi figure, R. Yehi'el, involved in selling manuscripts to R. Menahem ben Benjamin, see *ibid.*, p. 119. See also *ibid.*, pp. 116–117. See also Idel, *Golem*, p. 280 n. 7, about the arrival of material on the Golem from the Ashkenazi lands via Venice; and chap. 20 of this volume.
  74. See also other Ashkenazi material found in Italian manuscripts connected to Recanati, described in Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 1: 72–75.
  75. See chap. 12, sec. 2, and the end of chap. 22 on the similarity between Rome in this period and Florence at the end of the fifteenth century.
  76. See, e.g., the story by Immanuel of Rome about the arrival of scores of books from Toledo, discussed in Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 1: 59–60.



77. See Miguel Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana en la Divina commedia*, 2nd ed. (Hisperion, Madrid, 1984); E. Cerulli, *Il “Libro” de la scalla” e la questione delle fonti arabo-spagnole della Divina commedia* (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City, 1949); idem, *Nuove ricerche sul “Libro della Scalla” e la cognoscenza dell’Islam in occidente* (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City, 1972), especially pp. 12–13; Carlo Saccone, “Il ‘Mi’raj’ di Maometto: Una leggenda tra Oriente e Occidente,” in *Il libro della Scala di Maometto*, ed. and trans. Roberto R. Testa (Mondadori, Milan, 1991); and Geo Widengren, *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and His Ascension* (Lundequistska bokhandeln Uppsala, Wiesbaden, 1955), pp. 11–112. See also Robert Klein, *Form and Meaning: Writings on the Renaissance and Modern Art*, trans. Madeline Jay and Leon Wieseltier (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1979), pp. 62–85.
78. On the possibility that Jewish material stemming from Heikhalot literature influenced *Libro della scala*, see Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 8 (Columbia University Press, New York, 1958), p. 285 n. 23; and Ioan P. Couliano, *Expériences de l’extase: Extase, ascension et récit visionnaire de l’Hellenisme au Moyen Age* (Payot, Paris, 1984), pp. 164–172. See also David J. Halperin, “Hekhalot and Mi’raj: Observations on the Heavenly Journey in Judaism and Islam,” in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (SUNY Press, Albany, 1995), pp. 269–288; Idel, “The Concept of the Torah,” pp. 46–47 n. 68; and idem, *Ascensions on High*, p. 132.
79. See Herrmann, *Massekhet Hekhalot*. For the extensive acquaintance with the Heikhalot literature apparent in R. Menahem Recanati’s books see Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, I: 119–120.
80. On the kabbalistic epistle and the type of kabbalistic literature to which it belongs see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 309–364 and especially pp. 349–352 for the content of the epistle.
81. From here to the end of the passage the language shifts from Hebrew to Aramaic.
82. Ms. Jerusalem, National and University Library 1959, fol. 207a. See also the much later eighteenth-century Moroccan codex New York, JTS 1805, which contains this version, as mediated by another Moroccan book, R. Joseph al-Ashqar’s *Tzafnat Pa’aneah*. On a different version of this passage, which does not mention the Moroccan sage, see Amos Goldreich, ed., “R. Isaac of Acre’s Me’irat ‘Einayyim” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 56 and 402–403 (Hebrew). For other attributions of kabbalistic material to R. Hai Gaon see Elliot R. Wolfson, “Hai Gaon’s Letter and Commentary on ‘Aleynu’: Further Evidence of Moses de León’s Pseudepigraphic Activity,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 81 (1991), pp. 365–409. For the role of astronomy in early Kabbalah see Ronald Kiener, “Astrology in Jewish Mysticism from Sefer Yezira to the Zohar,” in *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe*, ed. J. Dan (Institute for Jewish Studies, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 1–42.
83. See Idel, “Maimonides’ Guide of the Perplexed,” pp. 197–199.
84. See Benjamin Richler, “The Dispersion of Medieval Jewish Manuscripts and Its Significance for Understanding the Phenomenon of Hebrew membra disiecta,” in “*Fragmenta ne pereant*”: *Recupero e studio dei frammenti di manoscritti medievali e rinascimentali*



riutilizzati in *legature*, ed. Mauro Perani and Cesarino Ruini (Longo Editore, Ravenna, 2000), pp. 75–83.

# CHAPTER 8: R. MENAHEM BEN BENJAMIN RECANATI

1. On the term “Kabbalah” see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 3–7; Idel, “Defining Kabbalah” and “On the Meanings of the Term ‘Kabbalah,’” pp. 69–73.
2. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 13.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11. This triad reflects Franz Rosenzweig’s three major religious events in his book *Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 2005).
4. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, Joseph Karo, *Lawyer and Mystic* (JPS, Philadelphia, 1977), p. 40; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 158–159.
5. Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1: 236.
6. See, e.g., Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 98–100; *idem*, *Kabbalah*, pp. 122–128; and Isaiah Tishby, *The Doctrine of Evil in the Lurianic Doctrine* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1942), p. 16 (Hebrew).
7. See Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalot R. Ya’akov ve-Yitzhaq ha-Kohen* (Ha-Madpis, Jerusalem, 1927), p. 31.
8. Tishby, *The Doctrine of Evil*, p. 16.
9. *Idem*, “Gnostic Doctrines in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 6 (1955), p. 146.
10. On this issue see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 260–264; and *idem*, “On the Theologization of Kabbalah in Modern Scholarship,” in *Religious Apologetics: Philosophical Argumentation*, ed. Y. Schwartz and V. Krech (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 2004), pp. 123–174.
11. See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 73–90.
12. For a detailed analysis of the two quotations see Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 1: 66–68.
13. See Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1: 13–18.
14. See Daniel Ch. Matt, *The Book of Mirrors: Sefer Mar’ot ha-Zove’ot* by R. David ben Yehudah ha-Hasid (Brown Judaic Studies, Scholars Press, Chico, Calif., 1982), pp. 13–17.
15. See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 213, 236; Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1: 21, 23. On the early reception of the Zohar see now Boaz Huss, “Like the Radiance of the Sky”: Chapters in the Reception History of the Zohar and the Construction of Its Symbolic Value (Ben Zvi Institute and Bialik Institute, Jerusalem, 2008) (Hebrew).
16. For Recanati’s use of Castilian sources see Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 1: 95–107.
17. See chap. 10 for an analysis of Recanati’s discussion of the correspondence between the sefirotic realm and the human body.
18. The first edition is Venice 1523.
19. See Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 2: chap. 23.
20. See Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 20–56, 62–64, 156–159, 204–208.
21. Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 2: chap. 23.
22. For a description of this book see *ibid.*, 1: 72–73.

23. Ibid., p. 79.
24. See *ibid.*, pp. 73–78.
25. See *ibid.*, pp. 69–70.
26. See *ibid.*, pp. 80–81.
27. See the detailed discussion in *ibid.*, app. 5.
28. See, e.g., Recanati, *Commentary on the Torah*, fol. 24a.
29. Or “understood this.”
30. R. Menahem Recanati, *Sefer Ta’amei ha-Mitzvot*, Ms. Paris, BN 825, fol. 45a, printed in Hayyat, *Minhat Yehudah*, fol. 33b.
31. Ms. Paris, BN 825, fols. 37b–38a.
32. See Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 151–153.
33. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 4.
34. Recanati, *Sefer Ta’amei ha-Mitzvot*, Ms. Paris, BN 825, fol. 54b.
35. Recanati, *Commentary on the Torah*, fol. 38b.
36. On this issue see Georges Vajda, *Recherches sur la philosophie et la Kabbale dans la pensée juive du Moyen Age* (Mouton, Paris, 1962), pp. 371–378; and Moshe Idel, “Nishmat ’Eloha: On the Divinity of the Soul in Nahmanides and His Schools,” in *Life as a Midrash: Perspectives in Jewish Psychology*, ed. S. Arzy, M. Fachler, and B. Kahana (Yediy’ot Aharonot, Tel Aviv, 2004), pp. 343–345 (Hebrew).
37. See Recanati, *Commentary on the Torah*, fols. 38b and 77c.
38. See R. Ezra, *Perush ha’Aggadot*, printed in *Liqqutei Shikehah u-Fe’ah* (Ferrara, 1556), fols. 7b–8a; and R. Azriel’s *Perush ha’Aggadot*, ed. I. Tishby (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1945), p. 40.
39. Recanati’s discussions on this point are influenced by R. Yehudah Hayyat’s *Minhat Yehudah*, fols. 95a–96b.
40. On Abulafia, *devequt*, and the kiss of death see chap. 4.
41. Namely before their eyes. Compare also Recanati, *Commentary on the Torah*, fols. 37d, 38b.
42. Ibid., fol. 37d, drawing upon the sources cited in note 38 above. This passage already appears with minor variations in Recanati’s *Ta’amei ha-Mitzvot*, Ms. Vatican 209, fol. 28a. On this passage and its background see Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 296–301, who offers a somewhat different interpretation.
43. For more on this passage, its sources and their analysis, see Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 128–133. Recently this passage was analyzed by Haviva Pedaya, who claims to detect in it Sufi influences, and understands it as a description of an ecstatic experience. See her “Ahuzim be-Dibbur: For the Clarification of a Prophetic-Ecstatic Type in Early Kabbalah,” *Tarbitz* 65 (1996), pp. 565–636 (Hebrew). I hope to do a more detailed analysis elsewhere. See meanwhile a different view of this text in Idel, “The Kabbalistic Interpretations of the Secret of ‘Arayyot in Early Kabbalah,” *Kabbalah* 12 (2004), p. 106 n. 89 (Hebrew).
44. For more on this model see Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 95–102.
45. See Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 2: chap. 22.

46. See Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 153–160; Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, pp. 155–156; François Secret, *Les Kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Arma Artis, Neuilly sur Seine, 1985), pp. 39–40; B. C. Novak, “Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Johanan Alemanno,” *JWCI* 45 (1982), pp. 140–144.
47. See the untitled text in Ms. Rome, Casanatense 179, fol. 134a; and Ms. Vatican 295, fol. 107a. Recanati cites the passage without attribution in *Commentary on the Torah*, fol. 90c, and from that source R. Yehudah Hayyat copied it in his *Minhat Yehudah*, fols. 95b–96a.

## CHAPTER 9: MENAHEM RECANATI AS A THEOSOPHICAL-THEURGICAL KABBALIST

1. See Moshe Idel, “Nahmanides: Kabbalah, Halakhah, and Spiritual Leadership,” *Tarbitz* 64 (1995), p. 545 n. 43 (Hebrew); for an English-language version of this study see M. Idel and M. Ostow, eds., *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership* (Jason Aronson, Northvale, N.J., 1998), pp. 15–96. On the early kabbalistic theosophies see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*. On Yitzhaq Sagi Nahor see Haviva Pedaya, *Name and Sanctuary in the Teaching of R. Isaac the Blind* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2001) (Hebrew).
2. Moshe Idel, “Sefirot above Sefirot,” *Tarbitz* 51 (1982), pp. 278–280 (Hebrew).
3. On this author see J. B. Sermoneta, “Il neo-platonismo nel pensiero dei nuclei ebraici stanziati nell’Occidente latino (riflessioni sul ‘Commento al Libro della Creazione’ di Rabbi Sabbetai Donnolo),” *Gli Ebrei nell’alto Medioevo* 2 (1980), pp. 867–935.
4. Elliot R. Wolfson, “The Theosophy of Shabbetai Donnolo, with Special Emphasis on the Doctrine of Sefirot in His *Sefer Hakhmoni*,” *Jewish History* 6 (1992), pp. 281–316.
5. See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 431–444. For another historical description of the emergence of the kabbalistic term for Infinity, see Moshe Idel, “On the Doctrine of Divinity at the Beginning of Kabbalah,” in *Shefa Tal: Studies in Jewish Thought and Culture, Presented to Bracha Sack*, ed. Z. Gries, Ch. Kreisel, and B. Huss (Ben Gurion University Press, Beer Sheva, 2004), pp. 131–148 (Hebrew).
6. R. Azriel, *Perush ha’Aggadot*, ed. I. Tishby (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1945), p. 83. For more on this concept see Moshe Idel, “Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. Lenn E. Goodman (SUNY Press, Albany, 1993), pp. 326–327.
7. Azriel, *Perush ha’Aggadot*, pp. 82–83.
8. See Alexander Altmann, “Isaac Israeli’s ‘Chapter on the Elements’ (Ms. Mantua),” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 7 (1956), pp. 31–57.
9. See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 418, 436–439. The emergence of the theory of the divine will as the highest divine manifestation in the works of these two Kabbalists, and to a lesser degree in those of R. Asher ben David, the nephew of R. Isaac the Blind, preceded a similar phenomenon in the writings of R. Isaac ben Abraham ibn Latif, who seems to have been influenced not only by Neoplatonic sources, such as Ibn Gabirol, but also by early kabbalistic views and by Ismailism.
10. See R. Azriel’s *Sha’ar ha-Sho’el*, in Meir ibn Gabbai’s *Derekh ’Emunah* (Berlin, 1850), fol. 3a. On the early kabbalistic views of the spiritual worlds see Scholem’s important

- essay “The Development of the Doctrine of the Worlds in the Early Kabbalists,” *Tarbitz* 2 (1931), pp. 415–442; *ibid.*, 3 (1932), pp. 33–66 (Hebrew).
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 416–417.
12. See R. Azriel, *Sha’ar ha-Sho’el*, Ms. Parma, de Rossi 1390, fols. 8b–14b; and Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 90–92.
13. For details on the manuscripts and different versions see Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 195–209.
14. On this form of theosophy see Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1: 239–246.
15. See, e.g., Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 93–94, 147–148.
16. See Moshe Idel, “On the Concept of Zimzum in Kabbalah and Its Research,” in *Lurianic Kabbalah*, ed. Rachel Elior and Yehuda Liebes (Jewish National Library, Jerusalem, 1992), pp. 65–66 (Hebrew).
17. The systems that were inclined to an essentialist view of the sefirot were concerned more with intradivine processes: the unification between the sefirot or the separation between them. However, in the instrumental concepts, the divine nature of the sefirot had been substantially attenuated, and in addition to the intradivine processes the drawing down of the influx from the sefirotic world to the subsefirotic ones became part of explicit discussions. This religious purpose will preoccupy us much more in the following chapters, as it represents the third major kabbalistic model, the magical or talismanic one.
18. See Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 187–188.
19. See above, chap. 3, sec. 3.
20. Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutation of All Heresies*, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, vol. 6 (Edinburgh, 1968), p. 320. For more on the issue of commandments and knowledge of the supernal world see the next chapter.
21. *Pesiqta’ Rabbati*, ed. M. Friedmann (1880; reprint, Tel Aviv, 1963), fols. 608a–b; *Midrash Tadshe’*, in Abraham Epstein, *Kadmoniyot ha-Yehudim* (Mossad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem, 1957), pp. 147–148, 155; Azriel, *‘Arugat ha-Bosem*, 1: 219 n. 10.
22. Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutation of All Heresies*, p. 319: “And it [tittle] comprises in itself whatever things the man also possesses [who is] the Father of the Son of Man.” Hence the tittle, which is the Son, contains whatever is found in his source, wherefore also his decadic nature. For more on Monoimos see Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 241–245; and *idem*, *Ben*, pp. 15, 31, 121.
23. C. A. Baynes, ed., *A Coptic Gnostic Treatise* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1933), p. 17.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
25. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 365 n. 89; M. Idel, “The Image of Man above the Sefirot: R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s Doctrine of the Supernal Sefirot [Tzahtzahot] and Its Evolution,” *Da’at* 4 (1980), pp. 46–47 (Hebrew); Arthur Green, *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1997), pp. 30–31.
26. *muskkalot ha-kelulim be-mitzvot*. On the use of the term *muskkalot* in a theosophical context see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 115–118.

27. R. Shlomo ibn Adret, *Seder Amran Gaon*, ed. Arie Leib Fromkin (S. Tsukerman, Jerusalem, 1912), p. 79. For more on Merkavah see chap. 10 of this volume.
28. Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot, fols. 2a–b.
29. Ibid., fol. 2b.
30. See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 80; Isaiah Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy* (Massada, Ramat Gan, 1964), p. 25 (Hebrew); idem, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 2: 684; Gottlieb, *Studies*, p. 29. For an analysis of theurgy in rabbinic sources see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 161, 357; Lorberbaum, *Image of God*, pp. 156–169; and Garb, *Manifestations of Power*, pp. 28–46.
31. Mircea Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions* (Payot, Paris, 1949), p. 22; idem, “Methodological Remarks on the Study of Religious Symbolism,” in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, ed. Eliade and J. M. Kitagawa (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1959), p. 98; Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions*, ed. J. M. Kitagawa (Columbia University Press, New York, 1961), p. 63.
32. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (Pantheon, New York, 1982), pp. 11–12.
33. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 156–199; Charles Mopsik, *Les grands textes de la Kabbale* (Verdier, Lagrasse, 1993); Lorberbaum, *Image of God*, pp. 156–169; and Garb, *Manifestations of Power*, passim.
34. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. xiii–xiv.
35. BT, Sotah, fol. 3b. The fuller text, including the bracketed material, is Isaiah 58:8.
36. See R. Ezra, *Commentary on Taryag Mizvot*, printed at the end of the *Commentary on Songs of Songs*, attributed to Nahmanides, in *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, ed. H. D. Chavel, vol. 2 (Mossad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem, 1964), p. 524. For more on this text see M. Idel, “In the Light of Life,” in *Qeddushat ha-Hayyim*, ed. Y. Gafni and A. Ravitzky (Merkaz Shazar, Jerusalem, 1993), pp. 191–211, especially pp. 193–194 and the notes there (Hebrew). For more on the ontologization of the commandments, prayer, the divine name, and the Torah see Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, passim.
37. The Hebrew phrase is 'Or ha-Hayyim; Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3: 1158, quotes this text and adds here, in parentheses, the phrase “of the divine sefirah,” projecting by this addition, in my opinion both unnecessary and misleadingly, the importance of the performance from here below on the supernal realm. This superfluous addition stems from Tishby's assumption of the unique importance of the theosophical-symbolic interpretation. For the importance of performance in Recanati see also chap. 10 of this volume.
38. Recanati, *Commentary on the Torah*, fol. 23c. This passage is found in the passage from R. Ezra of Gerona copied in Ms. Parma, de Rossi 1390, fol. 4b, described in chap. 7, and it may be that Recanati copied it from there. For more on Recanati's theurgy see Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 2: chaps. 12–13; Mopsik, *Les grands textes de la Kabbale*, pp. 278–287, 368–371, 590–592; and Garb, *Manifestations of Power*, pp. 117–121.
39. Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot, fol. 13c.
40. Ibid., fol. 18a.
41. Recanati, *Commentary on the Torah*, fol. 51b.

42. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 186.
43. Recanati, *Commentary on the Torah*, fol. 69c.
44. *Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot*, fol. 65a.
45. On the supernal *Demut*, namely image, in ancient Jewish texts, see Abraham J. Heschel, *Theology of Ancient Judaism*, vol. 1 (Soncino, London, 1965), pp. 155, 220–223; Lorberbaum, *Image of God*, pp. 293–294, 301–314.
46. Introduction to Recanati's *Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot*, fol. 3c. See also Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 124–125.
47. Recanati, *Commentary on the Torah*, fols. 23b–c, discussed in Idel, “The Concept of the Torah,” pp. 68–70. Compare Recanati, *ibid.*, fol. 43c, where, following the *Bahir*, he asserts: “all the commandments are comprised in God.”
48. Recanati, *Commentary on the Torah*, fol. 51b.
49. *Ibid.*, fols. 71d–72a.
50. *Ibid.*, fol. 43c. For more on prayer and theurgy in Recanati see Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 2: chap. 13.
51. See Daniel Abrams, “‘The Secret of Secrets’: The Concept of the Divine Glory and the Intention of Prayer in the Writings of R. Eleazar of Worms,” *Da'at* 34 (1994), pp. 61–81 (Hebrew).
52. See Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 221–222. Abulafia, Recanati, and Alemanno had substantial knowledge of Ashkenazi literature, as part of the penetration of Ashkenazi culture into the peninsula.
53. See M. Idel, “Ashkenazi Esotericism and Kabbalah in Barcelona,” *Hispania Judaica* 5 (2007), pp. 69–113.

## CHAPTER 10: MENAHEM RECANATI'S HERMENEUTICS

1. *Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot*, fol. 2a. See also Daniel Matt, “The Mystic and the Mitzvot,” in *Jewish Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Green, vol. 1 (Crossroad, New York, 1986), p. 392.
2. I ignore here the existence of the school of Abulafia in Sicily, because Recanati certainly did not study there.
3. Isaiah Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy* (Massada, Ramat Gan, 1964), p. 14 (Hebrew).
4. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 2.
5. *Ibid.* See also another assertion to this effect: “The magnitude of the messianic idea corresponds to the endless powerlessness in Jewish history during all the centuries of exile”; *idem*, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* (Schocken, New York, 1971), p. 35; and *ibid.*, p. 7; as well as his *Major Trends*, pp. 287–288.
6. See Avraham Elqayam, “Between Referentialism and Performativism: Two Approaches to the Understanding of the Symbol in *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*,” *Da'at* 24 (1990), pp. 29–37 (Hebrew); Boaz Huss, “R. Joseph Gikatilla's Definition of Symbolism and Its Versions in Kabbalistic Literature,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 12 (1996), pp. 157–176 (Hebrew).
7. On primary and secondary symbols see Peter Slater, *The Dynamics of Religion* (Harper and Row, New York, 1978), pp. 29 ff.

8. For a bibliography on ancient views of God as rider see Moshe Weinfeld, “‘Rider of the Clouds’ and ‘Gatherer of the Clouds,’” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 5 (1973), pp. 421–426. On ancient traditions describing the first chapter of Ezekiel as an esoteric topic see N. R. M. de Lange, *Origen and the Jews* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976), p. 60. On the Merkavah in Jewish mysticism see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 8–21; Lawrence Schiffman, “Merkavah Speculation at Qumran: The 4Q Serekh Shirot ‘Olat ha-Shabbat,” in *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians: Essays in Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann*, ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Daniel Swetschinski with Kalman P. Bland (Duke University Press, Durham, 1982), pp. 34–45; Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Brill, Leiden, 1980), pp. 73–97; Peter Schaefer, *Hekhalot Studien* (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1988), pp. 17–49; Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 14–16; Michael Lieb, *The Visionary Mode: Biblical Prophecy, Hermeneutics, and Cultural Changes* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1991); David Halperin, *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature* (American Oriental Society, New Haven, 1980); idem, *The Faces of the Chariot* (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1988). On the Mesopotamian background of Ma’aseh Merkavah as represented by the first chapter of Ezekiel see Moshe Weinfeld, “Divine Intervention in War in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East,” in *History, Historiography, and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures*, ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 142–143 n. 119; and Moshe Greenberg, “Ezekiel’s Vision: Literary and Iconographic Aspects,” *ibid.*, pp. 159–168.
9. Ta’amei ha-Mitzvot, printed in Hayyat, Minhat Yehudah, fol. 35a.
10. R. Menahem Recanati, *Commentary on Prayer*, Ms. New York, JTS 1887, fol. 156b.
11. *Ibid.*, fol. 157a.
12. See Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3: 549–621. On the Account of the Chariot in early Kabbalah see the very important and comprehensive study by Asi Farber-Ginat, “The Concept of the Merkavah in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Esotericism” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1986) (Hebrew); Elliot Wolfson, “Mystical-Theurgical Dimensions of Prayer in Sefer ha-Rimmon,” in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. D. R. Blumenthal, vol. 3 (Scholars Press, Atlanta, 1988), p. 74 n. 131. The further development of kabbalistic theosophy, which implicitly means also the understanding of the Merkavah as a very complex system, especially in the Lurianic Kabbalah, has led modern scholars to see the Kabbalists as being more involved with speculations concerning the nature of the Chariot while ignoring the rider of the Chariot; see Sabbatai Sevi’s description of the Lurianic Kabbalah according to Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, p. 904; and Yehuda Liebes, “The Attitude of Sabbatai Zevi to His Conversion,” *Sefunot*, n.s. 2 (= vol. 17, ed. J. Hacker [Makhon ben Tzvi, Jerusalem]) (1983), p. 290 (Hebrew).
13. On this theory of the emergence of the historical Kabbalah in general see Idel, “Maimonides and Kabbalah,” pp. 32–50.
14. See Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 205–206.
15. On these two kinds of relation see Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1979), pp. 183–187, 217–260. On how Eco’s views lead to better



- understanding of kabbalistic scriptural symbolism see Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 280–289.
16. See Gershom Scholem, “The Name of God and the Linguistic of the Kabbalah,” *Diogenes* 79 (1972), pp. 60, 62, 165, 193; idem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 36; Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy*, pp. 11–22. For more on Scholem’s view of the kabbalistic symbol see Susan A. Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991), pp. 83–84, 93–114; and Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 200–234. For the possible Renaissance sources of Scholem’s pansymbolic approach see my introduction to Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, pp. xv–xvi. Both Scholem and Ernst Cassirer, who contributed so much to the modern understanding of symbolism, emphasized the role of the symbolic aspect of language more than the magical aspect. One wonders if their preference for the symbolic mode reflects their Hegelian stance.
  17. The original *devarim* means, literally, “things.”
  18. Ta’amei ha-Mitzwot, fol. 2b. See also the quotation from *ibid.*, fol. 3a, later in this chapter.
  19. *Ibid.*, fol. 2a.
  20. *Ibid.*, fol. 21b.
  21. *Ibid.*, fol. 61c.
  22. *Ibid.*, fol. 4c.
  23. See R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon’s *Sefer Keter Shem Tov*, Ms. Paris, BN 774, fols. 76a–b. See also Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 88–93.
  24. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 331–332 n. 45.
  25. Moshe Idel, “The World of Angels in Human Shape,” in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought = Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy, and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby*, ed. Joseph Dan and Joseph Hacker (Institute for Jewish Studies, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1986), p. 31 (Hebrew); and now Idel, *The Angelic World*, p. 26.
  26. For details on this view of Gikatilla, which is copied by Recanati, see Huss, “R. Joseph Gikatilla’s Definition of Symbolism.”
  27. See the important study of Alexander Altmann, “The Delphic Maxim in Medieval Islam and Judaism,” in his *Von der Mittelalterlichen zur Modernen Aufklärung: Studien zur Jüdischen Geistgeschichte* (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1987), pp. 1–33.
  28. Despite the more formalist, isomorphic, and thus anthropomorphic correspondences between limbs, as seen in this and the previous chapters, Recanati shares Gikatilla’s view that the names of limbs should be understood as pointing to their function rather than to their forms. For details on this trend see Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 2: chap. 18.
  29. See Tzvetan Todorov, *Symbolisme et interpretation* (Seuil, Paris 1978), pp. 128–131.
  30. Ta’amei ha-Mitzwot, fol. 3a.
  31. See *ibid.*, fols. 2a–b; I have improved this version on the basis of the one found in Ms. Paris, BN 825, fols. 1b–2a. On this quotation see Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 44.
  32. Gershom Scholem, available in English as “The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism,” *Diogenes* 14 (1955), pp. 1–16; *ibid.*, 15 (1956), pp. 2–40. For an easily



- available reprint of the French translation see idem, *Le nom et les symboles de Dieu dans la mystique juive*, trans. M. R. Hayoun and G. Vajda (Le Cerf, Paris, 1983), p. III.
33. Scholem, *Le nom et les symboles de Dieu*, p. III. For further references to this quotation see Charles Mopsik, *Les grands textes de la Kabbale* (Verdier, Lagrasse, 1993), p. 279; Idel, “The Concept of the Torah,” pp. 58–62; idem, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 244–247; Barbara A. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1996), pp. 200–201, 492, p. 334.
  34. Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 87–88.
  35. Jacques Derrida, *De grammatologie* (Le Minuit, Paris, 1967), pp. 233, 227; translated by G. C. Spivak as *Of Grammatology* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976), pp. 163, 158.
  36. See Gershom Scholem, “New Remnants from the Writings of R. Azriel of Gerona,” in *Gulak and Klein Memorial Volume*, ed. Simha Assaf and Gershom Scholem (Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1942), p. 207: ‘Ein davar hutz mimmenu. This phrase is characteristic of R. Azriel’s terminology, although it was more often related to the divine will than to God. Derrida could have read either the German version in Scholem’s fuller description of the beginnings of Kabbalah, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, printed in Berlin in 1962, or in the French translation, titled *Les origines de la Kabbale*, trans. Jean Loewenson (Aubier-Montaigne, Paris, 1966), p. 447: “rien n’existe hormis Lui.” See also the English version in *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 423–424: “Nothing exists outside of Him.”
  37. In Recanati’s writings, unlike those of R. Azriel, the concept of the divine will does not play an important role.

## CHAPTER 11: ECSTATIC KABBALAH FROM THE FOURTEENTH THROUGH MID-FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

1. See Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 2: app. 6. Interestingly, no Italian Kabbalists in the period under scrutiny here wrote a commentary on Recanati’s kabbalistic writings, although they commented upon a Spanish treatise that expounded a theosophy different from Recanati’s.
2. See Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 69–74.
3. This treatise is extant in a single manuscript, Ms. Munich 10. On its authorship see Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 72–74.
4. The treatise is found in two versions and in many manuscripts. See Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 69–72.
5. See Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 220–221, 233–234; Fabrizio Lelli, “Pico tra filosofia ebraica e ‘Qabbala,’” in *Pico, Poliziano e l’umanesimo di fine Quattrocento*, ed. Paolo Viti (Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1994), pp. 207–208.
6. See M. Idel, “Transmission in the Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah,” in *Transmitting Jewish Traditions: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion*, ed. Yaakov Elman and Israel Gershoni (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000), pp. 138–164.
7. See above, chap. 2, sec. 2.

8. Qabbalah sikhlit. This view, characteristic of some of the innovative Kabbalists, was reiterated by several Kabbalists, especially in the Renaissance and later.
9. *Sefer ha-Tzeruf*, Ms. Paris, BN 770, fol. 175b.
10. See Harar, *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, pp. 418–420.
11. BT, *Hagigah*, fol. 14a.
12. The anonymous passage is found in Ms. Vatican 283, fol. 71b. This manuscript is the only one in which the text has been preserved. For more on this passage see I. Tishby in his preface to R. Azriel's *Perush ha-'Aggadot*, ed. Tishby (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1945), p. 19; and Moshe Idel, "An Interpretation of the Entrance into the *Pardes* at the Beginning of Kabbalah," *Mahanayyim* 6 (1994), pp. 32–49 (Hebrew); and idem, "Universalization and Integration: Two Conceptions of Mystical Union in Jewish Mysticism," in *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith: An Ecumenical Dialogue*, ed. M. Idel and B. McGinn (Continuum, New York, 1989), pp. 35–37.
13. This is the third of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, trans. Alexander Altmann and Samuel Stern, in *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1958), p. 186.
14. Ms. Vatican, Urbino 31, fol. 164a; Ms. New York, JTS 839, fol. 5b. On the writings of this circle see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 309–364.
15. R. Isaac ibn Latif, *Tzeror ha-Mor*, chap. 6, printed by Aharon (Adolph) Jellinek in *Kerem Hemed* 9 (1856), p. 157. Ibn Latif's stand influenced R. Yohanan Alemanno, *Sha'ar ha-Hesheq* (Livorno, 1790), fols. 35a–b; and idem, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 187a.
16. The *Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect by Ibn Rushd with the Commentary of Moses Narboni*, ed. Kalman P. Bland (JTS, New York, 1982), p. 96. In his *Collectanea*, fol. 30a, Alemanno cites Narboni.
17. See Recanati's discussion of the topic in chap. 8, sec. 3.
18. *Sefer ha-Tzeruf*, Ms. Munich 22, fol. 187a; Ms. New York, JTS 839, fols. 105b–106a. For a shorter version of this passage see Ms. Paris, BN 770, fol. 167b.
19. *Sefer ha-Tzeruf*, Ms. Paris, BN 774, fol. 2b; the anonymous author of *Sefer ha-Tzeruf* uses the image of the circle on fols. 2a, 6b. For a combination of the image of the ladder with that of the circle—some form of mandala—see a passage found in a prophetic book by Abulafia, *Sefer ha-Melitz*, translated and analyzed in Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 108–111.
20. On the relationship between the two concepts, see Colette Sirat, *Mar'ot 'Elohim le-Rabbi Hanokh ben Shelomo al-Qonstantini* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 16–17; and the talmudic discussion of the light concealed for the righteous in BT, *Hagigah*, fol. 12a.
21. The anonymous *Sefer ha-Peliyah* (Koretz, 1788), fol. 106b.
22. See Moshe Idel, "Sefirot above Sefirot," *Tarbitz* 51 (1982), pp. 260–262 (Hebrew).
23. Ms. Vatican 441, fol. 34b in the margin. The various materials found in this miscellaneous manuscript are an important source for understanding the extent of the knowledge of Kabbalah in Italy.

24. Published by Gershom Scholem in *Kitvei Yad be-Kabbalah* (National Library, Jerusalem, 1930), p. 228.
25. Numbers 33:38; Deuteronomy 34:5.
26. Ms. Jerusalem 8° 1303, fol. 53b; Ms. Vatican 295, fol. 6b.
27. *Sefer ha-Malmed*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1649, fol. 204a.
28. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 102–103, 115.
29. *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*, Ms. Munich 10, fol. 167b.
30. Anonymous Commentary on the Pentateuch, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1920, fol. 26a.
31. The inner war that takes place in human thought corresponds to the appellation *Mahashavah*, which is related to the first sefirah in theosophical Kabbalah. See also Abulafia's *Ve-Zot li-Yhudah*, p. 21; and Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 138–139.
32. *Moladetah*. On the symbolism of the tree, branches, and fruit in Abulafia's Kabbalah see *Gan Na'ul*, Ms. London, British Library, OR. 13136, fols. 3a–b, which has been copied in *Sefer ha-Peliyah*, pt. 1, fol. 73a.
33. A hint at the second sefirah, *Hokhmah*, which is also conceived as relating to human spiritual activity. For the psychologization of the theosophical system in Abulafia see Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 227–232.
34. BT, *Sanhedrin*, fol. 106b; and Rashi ad loc.
35. *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*, Ms. Munich 10, fol. 130b. On the spiritual war as a major theme in Abulafia's mysticism see M. Idel, "Milhemet ha-Yetzarim: Psychomachia in Abraham Abulafia's Ecstatic Kabbalah," in *Peace and War in Jewish Culture*, ed. Avriel Bar Levav (Merkaz Shazar, Jerusalem, 2006), pp. 99–143 (Hebrew); and above, chap. 6, note 6.
36. R. Isaac ibn Latif, *Sefer Tzurat ha-'Olam*, ed. Z. Stern (Vienna, 1860), p. 5. Compare the texts of R. Eleazar of Worms, cited in Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, p. 97; and in Idel, "Sefirot above Sefirot," pp. 261 n. 110, 278–279.
37. Ibn Latif, *Sefer Tzurat ha-'Olam*, pp. 25 and 29. See also *ibid.*, p. 18.
38. *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Vatican 441, fol. 112a. On this treatise see Idel, "Sefirot above Sefirot," pp. 260–262.
39. *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*, Ms. Munich 10, fols. 155b–156a.
40. *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Vatican 441, fol. 156a.
41. See M. Idel, "The Image of Man above the Sefirot: R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid's Doctrine of the Supernal Sefirot [Tzahtzahot] and Its Evolution," *Da'at* 4 (1980), pp. 41–54 (Hebrew).
42. Literally, "world, year, and soul," an expression found in *Sefer Yetzirah*. See *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*, Ms. Munich 10, fol. 156a. On the "sefirot of the soul," see *ibid.*, fol. 130a.
43. Heller Wilensky, "Isaac ibn Latif—Philosopher or Kabbalist?," pp. 202–203.
44. See Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Re'ayon*, Ms. Oxford 1658, fol. 61a; *idem*, *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, Ms. New York, JTS 1801, fol. 10a.
45. R. Joseph Gikatilla, *Perush le-Sefer Moreh Nevokhim* (Venice, 1574), fol. 30c; *idem*, *Ginnat 'Egoz* (Hanau, 1614), fols. 52d, 54b, 66c–d, 67c. Some hints at the immanence of the sefirot in the world occur in *Ginnat 'Egoz*, fols. 52d, 53b.

46. *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*, Ms. Munich 10, fol. 156a.
47. For an immanentist stand of R. Yitzhaq of Acre, another follower of ecstatic Kabbalah, although he belongs also to the theosophical-theurgical form, see Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, p. 171.
48. Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 357–369.
49. See Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, p. 194 n. 31.
50. See Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 357–369.
51. On this early-fourteenth-century theosophical treatise see the publication of the Hebrew text and its Latin translation in *The Great Parchment: Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, ed. Giulio Busi with Simonetta M. Bondoni and Saverio Campanini (Nino Aragno Editore, Turin, 2004). Busi assumes that the Kabbalist who wrote the *Great Parchment* did so in the early fourteenth century and was influenced by or perhaps a student of Menahem Recanati.
52. Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 368–369.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 361–362.
54. On the view of the sefirot in this book see *ibid.*, pp. 293–302, 315–324; Avraham Elkayam, “On the Architectonic Structure of *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*,” *Qiryat Sefer* 64 (1992–93), pp. 289–304 (Hebrew); *idem*, “Between Referentialism and Performativism: Two Approaches to the Understanding of the Symbol in *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*,” *Da'at* 24 (1990), pp. 29–37 (Hebrew).
55. See Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 359–360. For more on this figure see Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 2: app. 6.
56. This angel is connected, according to some Muslim philosophical sources, to the Agent Intellect, and this is also the case, though rarely, in Abulafia's writings. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, p. 89; *idem*, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 78; and Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 144.
57. BT, *Sotah*, fol. 36a.
58. Abraham Abulafia, *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*, Ms. Paris, BN 768, fol. 2a. For an edition of this book, but one which attempts to claim that the author wanted to attribute it to R. Abraham ibn Ezra—quite a strange assumption in my opinion—see Israel Weinstock, *An Anonymous Commentary by Rabbi Abraham Abulafia* (Mossad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 2–3 (Hebrew).
59. R. Reuven Tzarfati, *Commentary on Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*, Ms. Cambridge, Trinity College 108, fol. 123b.
60. See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 143–144 n. 55.
61. See app. 2.
62. See also chap. 12, sec. 2.
63. *Sefer Toledot 'Adam*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 836, fol. 180b. For more on Saturn in Alemanno's thought see chap. 14 of this volume.
64. On the importance of the age of forty for advanced study in philosophy and more especially in Kabbalah see M. Idel, “On the History of the Interdiction against the Study of Kabbalah before the Age of Forty,” *AJS Review* 5 (1980) (Hebrew Section), pp. 1–20.

65. *Sefer Toledot 'Adam*, fol. 162b.
66. Abraham Abulafia, *Introduction to Prophetic Books*, Ms. Rome, Angelica 38, fol. 2a. For Raziel as a name of Abulafia see also Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, p. 140.
67. Isaac ibn Latif, introduction to Sha'ar 3 of Sha'ar ha-Shamayyim, a text found still in manuscripts, especially Ms. Vatican 335.
68. Idem, *Tzurat ha-'Olam* (Maqor, Jerusalem, 1970), chap. 5.
69. *Sefer Toledot 'Adam*, fol. 143a. The source in Ibn Latif is his introduction to *Ginzei ha-Melekh*, ed. Aharon Jellinek (Vienna, 1862), which reads: "And by reason of my choosing eternal, true life, my soul has longed and yearned . . . to leave its temporary dwelling, which is Kiryat Arba, and to ascend to the city of heroes, the city of the great king, which is its permanent abode."
70. See Heller Wilensky, "Isaac ibn Latif—Philosopher or Kabbalist?," p. 186 n. 11.
71. See especially Ibn Latif, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayyim*, Ms. Vatican 335.
72. See, e.g., *Sefer Toledot 'Adam*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 836, fols. 147a, 156a, 159a, 159b. For additional views related to combinations of letters in mostly Italian kabbalistic sources see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 136–137.
73. Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 836, fol. 184a. On this phenomenon see M. Idel, "Abulafia's Secrets of the Guide: A Linguistic Turn," in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, ed. Alfred Ivri, E. R. Wolfson, and A. Arkush (Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, 1998), pp. 300–304; and idem, "Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed," pp. 212–216.
74. See Heller Wilensky, "Isaac ibn Latif—Philosopher or Kabbalist?," p. 186.
75. See M. Idel, "The Throne and the Seven-Branded Candlestick: Pico della Mirandola's Hebrew Source," *JWCI* 40 (1977), pp. 290–292.
76. See Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, p. 86; idem, *The Occult Philosophy*, p. 190. See also chap. 14, sec. 3. For more on this issue see M. Idel, "Kabbalah and Hermeticism in Dame Frances A. Yates's Renaissance," in *Esotérisme, gnosés et imaginaire symbolique: Mélanges offerts à Antoine Faivre*, ed. R. Caron, J. Godwin, W. J. Hanegraaff, and J.-L. Vieillard-Baron (Peeters, Louvain, 2001), pp. 71–90.

## CHAPTER 12: THE KABBALISTIC-PHILOSOPHICAL-MAGICAL EXCHANGES IN ITALY

1. This is only a part of a much longer passage; see the translation in Ivan Marcus, *Piety and Society* (Brill, Leiden, 1981), p. 67. See also the version printed in Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, p. 203.
2. See Moshe Idel, "The Evil Thought of the Deity," *Tarbitz* 49 (1980), pp. 356–364 (Hebrew); and Robert Bonfil, "Between Eretz Israel and Babylonia," in *Shalem*, ed. J. Hacker, vol. 5 (Makhon Ben Tzvi, Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 1–30 (Hebrew).
3. See Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 14–16; Avraham Grossman, *The Early Sages of Ashkenaz: Their Lives, Leadership, and Works (900–1096)* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 29–35 (Hebrew); Bonfil, "Between Eretz Israel and Babylonia"; and Moshe Gil, "Between Two Worlds: The Connections between Babylonia and the Communities in Christian

- Europe in the Gaonite Period,” in *Shlomo Simonsohn Jubilee Volume*, ed. Daniel Carpi and Aharon Oppenheimer (Tel Aviv University Press, Tel Aviv, 1993), p. 51 n. 4 (Hebrew).
4. For the importance of the median place of Italy between Jewish cultural centers I follow the seminal observations of Robert Bonfil.
5. See chap. 14 near note 13.
6. See Giuseppe Sermoneta, “Jehuda ben Moshe Daniel Romano, traducteur de Saint Thomas,” in *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati (Peeters, Louvain, 1980), p. 246.
7. Shlomo Pines, “Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb? Some Jewish and Arabic Sources of Leone Ebreo’s Doctrines,” in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. B. D. Cooperman (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p. 390.
8. Georges Vajda, “Un chapitre de l’histoire du conflit entre la Kabbale et la philosophie: La polémique anti-intellectualiste de Joseph b. Shalom Ashkenazi,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 31 (1956), pp. 131–132; idem, *Recherches sur la philosophie et la Kabbale dans la pensée juive du Moyen Age* (Mouton, Paris, 1962); idem, “Comment le philosophe juif Moïse de Narbonne comprenait-il les paroles extatiques des soufies?,” in *Actas del primer congreso de estudios arabes e islamicos* (Comite Permanente del Congreso de Estudios Arabes e Islamicos, Madrid, 1964), pp. 129–135; idem, “Recherches sur la synthèse philosophico-Kabbalistique de Samuel ibn Motot,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Ages* 27 (1960), pp. 29–63; Alexander Altmann, “Moses Narboni’s Epistle on Shi’ur Qomah,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. Altmann (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 242–244.
9. See Alemanno’s *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fols. 97a, 102a; and his untitled treatise, Ms. Paris, BN 849, fols. 91b–92a, 94b.
10. R. Jacob Anatoli, *Sefer Malmad ha-Talmidim* (Lyck, 1866), introduction (unpaginated). See also Klaus Herrmann, “Die Gottesnamen KWZW und MTzPTz in der Heikhalot-Literatur,” *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 16 (1988), pp. 75–80.
11. See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 50–52.
12. Printed in the journal *’Otzar Nehmad*, ed. Raphael Kircheim, vol. 2 (1857; reprint, Jerusalem, 1967), p. 133. See Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” p. 40 n. 28; and Ravitzky, *History and Faith*, p. 265, offering a different translation of this text.
13. See, e.g., the contemporaneous discussion by R. Abraham of Esqira in his *Sefer Yesod ’Olam*, Ms. Moscow, Guensburg 607, fol. 179a; and more in chap. 21 of this volume.
14. Abulafia, *Sheva’ Netivot ha-Torah*, p. 22.
15. See Ravitzky, *History and Faith*, p. 265.
16. See Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 129–133.
17. Printed in *Hemdah Genuzah*, ed. Z. Edelman (Königsberg, 1856), pp. 42–45. On this spurious epistle see Moshe Idel, “Astral Dreams in Judaism: Twelfth to Fourteenth Centuries,” in *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, ed. David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa (Oxford University Press, New York, 1999), pp. 239–245. I assume that the text was forged in Catalonia in the 1270s or 1280s.

18. Unfortunately, we have no evidence about the literary activity of any of Abulafia's four students in Capua.
19. Edelmann, *Hemdah Genuzah*, p. 45.
20. Ravitzky, *History and Faith*, pp. 262–263.
21. On this term see the seminal study by Pines, "On the Term *Ruhaniyyut*"; Idel, *Hasidism*; and app. 3 of this volume.
22. See Moshe Idel, "Abulafia's Secrets of the Guide: A Linguistic Turn," in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, ed. Alfred Ivry, E. R. Wolfson, and A. Arkush (Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, 1998), pp. 269–272.
23. See Abulafia, *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, pp. 14–15, 20.
24. This interpretation is the subject of a future study, in which I shall analyze some new manuscript material of Abulafia's and passages from Gikatilla's early writings. See also later material adduced in Altmann, "Moses Narboni's Epistle on *Shi'ur Qomah*," pp. 242–244.
25. See Mordecai Margalioth, ed., *Sefer Ha-Razim* (Yediy'ot 'Aharonot, Jerusalem, 1966), pp. 29–46.
26. See Abulafia, *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, p. 21, where he mentions *Sefer Raziel* in a list of older magical-mystical texts and mentions divine names that he learned from it; and again, p. 2, where he quotes a gematria from this book as part of a tradition. I did not find this gematria in the various extant versions of *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*. A book with the name *Sefer Raziel* was quoted by R. Abraham ibn Ezra in the twelfth century and by R. Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen in Castile in the thirteenth. See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 152; and, apparently also in this milieu, a kabbalistic text attributed to R. Meshullam Tzarfati, namely Meshullam the Frenchman: Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 123, fols. 70b–71a. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, p. 105; Mark Verman, *The Book of Contemplation* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1992), p. 205.
27. See chap. 16, sec. 2.
28. Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations," pp. 218–219.
29. On del Medigo as an Averroistic thinker see Arie L. Motzkin, "Elijah del Medigo, Averroës, and Averroism," *Italia* 6 (1987), pp. 7–19; Alfred Ivry, "Remnants of Jewish Averroism in the Renaissance," in Cooperman, *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 250–261; Jacob Ross, preface to R. Elijah del Medigo, *Sefer Behinat ha-Dat*, ed. Ross (Tel Aviv University Press, Tel Aviv, 1984), pp. 44–54 (Hebrew); Naomi Vogelmann Goldfeld, "Elia del Medigo e l'Averroismo Ebraico," in *La cultura ebraica all'epoca di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, ed. Dora Liscia Bemporad and Ida Zatelli (Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1998), pp. 41–47; and Harvey J. Hames, "Elijah del Medigo: An Archetype of Halakhic Man?," in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004), pp. 39–53. Del Medigo's attitude to Kabbalah can be compared to that of Maimonides' approach to the concept of *Sitrei Torah*: the Great Eagle was at least ready to apply the Aristotelian topics to *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* despite the aura of



- esotericism that rabbinic thought bestowed upon the secrets of the Torah. See Idel, “Maimonides and Kabbalah,” pp. 31–35. I wonder whether del Medigo respected Kabbalah’s esotericism even more than Maimonides did and refrained from offering his vision of its pure meaning. See also Kalman P. Bland, “Elijah del Medigo’s Averroistic Response to the Kabbalahs of the Fifteenth-Century Jewry and Pico della Mirandola,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (1991), pp. 34 and 35 n. 27.
30. Bland, “Elijah del Medigo’s Averroistic Response,” pp. 32–53.
  31. Del Medigo, *Sefer Behinat ha-Dat*, p. 92; Bland, “Elijah del Medigo’s Averroistic Response,” p. 46.
  32. Del Medigo, *Sefer Behinat ha-Dat*, p. 91.
  33. See Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, “Sefirot as the Essence of God in the Writings of David Messer Leon,” *AJS Review* 7–8 (1982–83), pp. 409–425; and idem, *Between Worlds*, pp. 186–187, 213–218. At the beginning of the sixteenth century R. Abraham ben Me’ir de Balmes also offered an Aristotelian interpretation of the ten sefirot in his *’Iggeret ha-’Asiriyah*, a topic that requires detailed analysis. See the edition of R. Cohen (privately printed, Jerusalem, 1998).
  34. On this controversy see Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 385–396; and Ravitzky, *History and Faith*, pp. 115–153.
  35. Del Medigo, *Sefer Behinat ha-Dat*, p. 99.
  36. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
  37. See also *ibid.*, p. 91.
  38. Chap. 4. Compare Alemanno’s use of the same treatise in a similar context; below, chap. 15, note 37.
  39. Namely cosmic cycles. On this concept in Jewish mysticism see Haviva Pedaya, *Nahmanides: Cyclical Time and Holy Text* (‘Am ‘Oved, Tel Aviv, 2003) (Hebrew); Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 460–474; and M. Idel, “The Jubilee in Jewish Mysticism,” in *Millenarismi nella cultura contemporanea*, ed. Enrico Rambaldi (FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2001), pp. 209–232.
  40. R. Elijah del Medigo, *Commentary on De Substantia Orbis*, Ms. Paris, BN 968, fols. 41a–b.
  41. On these Kabbalists see chaps. 13 and 18.
  42. See Bohdan Kieszowski, “Les rapports entre Elie del Medigo et Pic de la Mirandole,” *Rinascimento* 4 (1964), pp. 58–61; Bland, “Elijah del Medigo’s Averroistic Response,” pp. 23–53; and Ross, preface to del Medigo, *Sefer Behinat ha-Dat*, pp. 30–33.
  43. See the historical and philological critiques formulated in Renaissance Italy and later, and addressed to the mystical and magical texts conceived of as ancient, Pseudo-Dionysius and the Hermetic literature, during the Renaissance. Cf. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, pp. 398–433.
  44. Idel, “Differing Conceptions,” pp. 155–174.
  45. For a more detailed account of the Jewish Kabbalists’ reactions to the emergence of Christian Kabbalah see Moshe Idel, “Jewish Thinkers versus Christian Kabbalah,” in *Christliche Kabbala*, ed. W. Schmidt-Biggemann (Jan Thorbecke Verlag, Ostfildern, 2003), pp. 49–65.



## CHAPTER 13: PRISCA THEOLOGIA

1. See, e.g., Daniel R. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Duckworth, London, 1972); Charles Schmidt, "Prisca theologia e philosophia perennis: Due temi del rinascimento italiano e loro fortuna," in *Il pensiero Italiano del Rinascimento e il tempo nostro*, ed. G. Tarugi (Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1970), pp. 21–236; Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, p. 198 n. 41; Moshe Idel, "Kabbalah and Ancient Philosophy in R. Isaac and Jehudah Abravanel," in *The Philosophy of Leone Ebreo*, ed. M. Dorman-Z. Levy (Hakibbutz Hameuchad, Tel Aviv, 1985), pp. 73–112 (Hebrew); and Fabrizio Lelli, "Jews, Humanists, and the Reappraisal of Pagan Wisdom Associated with the Ideal of the Dignitas Hominis," in *Hebraica Veritas?: Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey Shoulson (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004), pp. 49–70; as well as note 4 below.
2. Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 1 (Basel, 1576), p. 386. On this text see now Brian Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth: Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah* (Brill, Leiden, 2009), p. 245.
3. I restrict my bibliography to a few studies in English: Seymour Feldman, "1492: A House Divided," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (Columbia University Press, New York, 1997), pp. 38–58; idem, *Philosophy in a Time of Crisis: Don Isaac Abravanel, Defender of the Faith* (Routledge, London, 2002); Ben Zion Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman and Philosopher* (Jewish Publications Society, Philadelphia, 1972); A. J. Reines, *Maimonides and Abravanel on Prophecy* (Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 1970); Menahem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought: From Maimonides to Abravanel* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, Oxford, 1986), pp. 179–195; idem, *Isaac Abravanel: Principles of Faith* (Littman Library, London, 1982). However, many aspects of Abravanel's philosophical thought still await detailed analysis. For the messianic views of Abravanel see Eric Lawee, "'Israel Has No Messiah' in Late Medieval Spain," *Journal of Jewish and Philosophy* 5 (1996), pp. 245–279; and his more recent important monograph, *Isaac Abravanel's Stance toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue* (SUNY Press, Albany, 2001); as well as Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, pp. 102–138.
4. For more on this topic see Idel, "Kabbalah and Ancient Philosophy"; idem, "Kabbalah, Platonism and Prisca Theologia: The Case of Menashe ben Israel," in *Menashe ben Israel and His World*, ed. Y. Kaplan, H. Meshoulam, and R. Popkin (Brill, Leiden, 1989), pp. 207–219; idem, "Prisca Theologia in Marsilio Ficino and in Some Jewish Treatments," in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. M. J. B. Allen and Valery Rees (Brill, Leiden, 2001), pp. 137–158; Fabrizio Lelli, "Prisca Philosophia and Docta Religio: The Boundaries of Rational Knowledge in Jewish and Christian Humanist Thought," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 91 (2000), pp. 53–100; Lelli's remarks in his edition of Genazzano's *La lettera preziosa*; and Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, pp. 244–245.
5. See, e.g., the deep influence of an Arabic treatise on the thought of Abravanel and his son, as discussed in chap. 16, sec. 2.

6. Isaac Abravanel, *Sefer 'Ateret Zeqenim* (Warsaw, 1894), fols. 41b–42a.
7. See M. Idel, “The Magical and Theurgical Interpretation of Music in Jewish Texts: Renaissance to Hasidism,” *Yuval* 4 (1982), pp. 42–45 (Hebrew).
8. Namely Enoch, a figure related to Hermes. See Idel, “Hermeticism and Judaism,” pp. 59–60.
9. Isaac Abravanel, *Mif'alot 'Elohim* (Lemberg, 1863), fols. 59a–b. See also Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, pp. 106–107.
10. *ha-philosophim ha-rishonim*. This phrase seems to point to the pre-Socratic philosophers.
11. Isaac Abravanel, *Yeshu'ot Meshiho* (Königsberg, 1881), fol. 9b. See Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, pp. 106–107.
12. As expressed in BT, *Niddah*, fol. 13b.
13. Indeed, the existence of such a view in the Hermetic corpus is not easy to explain, and scholars have already pointed out that there may be a Jewish influence here. However, what is indeed important is the occurrence of a view of transmigration as a punishment for refraining from efforts to procreate or for failing to procreate, which is reminiscent of kabbalistic texts. I hope to elaborate on this issue elsewhere. See, for the time being, A. J. Festugière, *Hermétisme et mystique païenne* (Aubier-Montaigne, Paris, 1967), pp. 113–120.
14. *tziyyur*. This verb occurs in many contexts. The Geronese Kabbalists used it in similar contexts, but whereas the earlier Kabbalists were concerned with the content of the second sefirah conceived as the divine thought, the philosopher envisions the whole sefirotic realm as the content of the divine mind. See also above, chap. 4, note 48.
15. *The Answers of R. Isaac Abravanel to R. Shaul ha-Kohen* (Venice, 1574), fol. 12d. On the comparison of the third sefirah, Binah, to Platonic ideas see Abravanel's *Mif'alot 'Elohim*, fol. 58d. Compare also the later stand of a thinker deeply interested in kabbalistic issues, R. David Messer Leon, who also posits the sefirot as ideas in the divine mind; cf. Hava Tirosch-Rothschild, “Sefirot as the Essence of God in the Writings of David Messer Leon,” *AJS Review* 7–8 (1982–83), pp. 413–425.
16. See Idel, “Kabbalah and Ancient Philosophy,” pp. 77–79.
17. Abravanel, *Mif'alot 'Elohim*, fol. 58d.
18. *Ibid.*, fols. 59d–60a.
19. Isaac Abravanel, *Nevi'im Rishonim* (Jerusalem, 1949), p. 305. On the theft of philosophy see Norman Roth, “‘Theft of Philosophy’ by the Greeks from the Jews,” *Classical Folia* 32 (1978), pp. 53–67.
20. Shlomo Pines, “Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb?: Some Jewish and Arabic Sources of Leone Ebreo's Doctrines,” in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. B. D. Cooperman (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1983), pp. 365–398.
21. Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, ed. Carl Gebhardt (Winter, Heidelberg, 1929), pt. 3, p. 125b.
22. Already a generation before Ficino, Leonardo Bruni, the famous translator of the Platonic dialogues, contended in his preface to the *Phaedo* that Plato studied with

- Jeremiah in Egypt. See Raymond Marcel, *Marsile Ficin (1433–1499)* (Belles Lettres, Paris, 1958), p. 621 n. 2.
23. Isaac Abravanel, *Commentary on the Pentateuch at Deuteronomy 25:5* (Warsaw, 1862), fol. 40a.
  24. On the view that Pythagoras studied with the prophets see, among many other sources, Muhammad ibn Abu Karim Al-Shaharastani, *Religionnsparteien und Philosophen-Schule*, ed. Theodor Haarbruecker, vol. 2 (A. Schwetschke, Halle, 1851), p. 90.
  25. Abravanel, *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, fol. 49b; Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, pp. 105–106.
  26. Abravanel, *Mif'alot 'Elohim*, fols. 3a–b; compare *ibid.*, fols. 3c–d, 43a.
  27. *Sefer Berit Menuhah* (Jerusalem, 1959), fol. 2a. One of the first authors to mention Berit Menuhah was a contemporary of the unknown writer, Yohanan Alemanno, who at the time was living in the same area where Abravanel wrote his book. On the Adamite origin of the Kabbalah see also R. Meir ibn Gabbai, *Sefer 'Avodat ha-Qodesh*, pt. III (Jerusalem, 1973), chap. 21, fol. 83b; and Menahem Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 19 (1960), pp. 360–362 (Hebrew).
  28. R. Shem Tov ben Shem Tov, *Sefer ha-'Emunot* (Ferrara, 1556), fols. 20b–21a.
  29. Abravanel, *Mif'alot 'Elohim*, fol. 2b.
  30. R. Shem Tov Falaquera, *Sefer ha-Ma'alot*, ed. Ludwik Venetianer (Berlin, 1894), p. 12.
  31. See, e.g., Ficino's commentary on Plato's *Meno*: "Zoroaster Bactrianis Persique leges tradens, in Horomasim. Trismegistus Aegyptys, in Mercurium. Moyses Iudaeis rectissime in patrem totius naturae deorum. Minos Cretensibus, in Ionem. . . . Plato noster Magnesys et Siculus, in Iovem et Apollinem"; Marsilio Ficino, *Omnia Divini Platonis Opera* (Basel, 1539), p. 49. See also Ficino's letter to some lawyers, *Letters*, vol. 1 (Spring Publications, Dallas, 1975), p. 13: "all lawgivers have partly like apes copied Moses, the truest author of divine laws. Partly compelled by truth, I know not how, they affirmed that they received the laws from God in various guises: Osiris, the giver of the laws to the Egyptians, from Mercurius; Zoroaster of the Arimaspians, from a good spirit; Zamolxis of the Scythians, from Vesta; Minos of Crete and Solon of Athens, from Jove . . . Mohammed, King of the Arabs, from the angel Gabriel. Our own Plato took the framework of his books on law from God, whom he declared to be the universal author of all laws."
  32. See Ficino, *Letters*, p. 170: "Therefore, Braccesi, you owe your poetry not so much to your diligence, which is considerable, as to the inspiration of the Muses. And from now on . . . I beg you to forget mortal men and, since your song is God-inspired, to sing to God. For not only Moses and David but the other Hebrew prophets clearly warned us to do this by their religious songs, as also did Zoroaster, Linus, Orpheus, Museus, Moses, Empedocles, Parmenides, Heraclitus and Xenophanes."
  33. See Richard H. Popkin, "The Pre-Adamite Theory in the Renaissance," in *Philosophy and Humanism: Renaissance Essays in Honor of P. O. Kristeller*, ed. E. P. Mahoney (Brill, Leiden, 1976), pp. 50–69.
  34. Marsilio Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary*, ed. and trans. Michael J. B. Allen (1975; reprint, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001), pp. 142–144. See also *ibid.*, pp. 270–272.

35. On this Kabbalist see Lelli, *La lettera preziosa*; Roland Goetschel, “Elie Hayyim de Genazzano et la Kabbale,” *REJ* 142 (1983), pp. 91–108; Alexander Altmann, “Beyond the Realm of Philosophy: R. Elijah ben Benjamin of Gennazano,” in Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, ed. Moshe Idel, Zeev W. Harvey, and E. Schweid, vol. 1 (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 61–101 (Hebrew); Meir Benayahu, “The Polemic between Kabbalah and Halakhah,” *Da’at* 5 (1980), pp. 78–79 (Hebrew); Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, pp. 163–183; and now Eric Lawee, “Abravanel in Italy: The Critique of the Kabbalist Elijah Hayyim Genazzano,” *Jewish History* 23 (2009), pp. 223–253.
36. On Orlandus see Idel, “Differing Conceptions,” pp. 158–161; Lelli, *La lettera preziosa*, pp. 75–76; and Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, pp. 177–178.
37. On Numenius’s belief in metempsychosis into animal bodies see Lelli, *La lettera preziosa*, pp. 44, 74, 77; and above, Introduction, note 75.
38. I.e., R. Joseph Albo’s *Sefer ha-‘Iqqarim*, pt. IV, chap. 29.
39. The concept of transmigration of the soul into animal bodies apparently occurs only in the works of the Kabbalists who wrote after the late thirteenth century. They are mentioned and quoted by R. Menahem Recanati as “the later Kabbalists.” See Alexander Altmann, “*Sefer Ta’amei ha-Mizvot* Attributed to R. Isaac ibn Farhi and Its Author,” *Qiryat Sefer* 40 (1965), pp. 256–257 (Hebrew); Gottlieb, *Studies*, p. 380.
40. Lelli, *La lettera preziosa*, p. 153. On this passage see more details at *ibid.*, nn. 108–109; Idel, “Differing Conceptions,” pp. 158–161; and now Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, p. 176.
41. Compare Pico’s opposite view that Abraham brought the Chaldaean doctrines from their region of origin. For a possible source of this view see Joseph Bidez and Franz Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d’après la tradition grecque* (Société d’éditions “Les Belles lettres,” Paris, 1938), 2: 21. On Zoroaster as Abraham’s student see *ibid.*, 1: 41 and 2: 48. On the Hebrew sources for such a stand see Michah J. bin Gorion, *Die Sagen der Juden* (Schocken, Berlin, 1935), p. 219.
42. Lelli, *La lettera preziosa*, p. 152. On this passage see *ibid.*, pp. 74–75; Idel, “Differing Conceptions,” pp. 158–159; Altmann, “Beyond the Realm of Philosophy,” pp. 80–81; and Goetschel, “Elie Hayyim de Genazzano,” p. 98, especially n. 28.
43. Lelli, *La lettera preziosa*, p. 152.
44. Or astronomy, in Hebrew ‘Iztageninut. On Abraham as the inventor of astronomy in a context in which Zoroaster is also mentioned as living immediately after the patriarch see Bidez and Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés*, 2: 48.
45. *Sefer ha-‘Avodah ha-Nabbatit*. On this voluminous book of magic, written in the Middle Ages and extant in an Arabic translation, see Toufic Fahd, ed., *L’agriculture Nabatéene, traduction en Arabe attribué à Abu Bakr Ahmad b. ‘Ali al-Kasdani, connu sous le nom d’Ibn Wahshiyya*, 2 vols. (Damascus, 1995). It is implausible that Genazzano had seen this book, since it had not been translated into Hebrew. There are only scanty quotations from this book in the writings of Jewish authors in the Middle Ages. See chap. 20 of this volume, where a quotation from this book is discussed.

46. Lelli, *La lettera preziosa*, p. 237.
47. See Idel, “Differing Conceptions,” p. 158 n. 100.
48. Ficino, *De religione Christiana*, in *Opera* (Basel, 1561), 1: 29.
49. *Ibid.*
50. There was also a Persian-Arab tradition to the effect that Zoroaster was a pupil of Jeremiah; see James Darmesteter, “Textes Pehlvis relatifs au Judaïsme,” *REJ* 19 (1889), p. 56. This may be an elaboration on the earlier view that Plato studied with this prophet.
51. See Marcel, Marsile Ficin, pp. 325–371.
52. The two sets of pillars are related to a tradition that there were two types of flood, one of water and one of fire, and that the sciences were engraved on two different materials in order to ensure that they survived either kind of flood. On this theme see Idel, “Hermeticism and Judaism,” p. 71 n. 13; and John Scarborough, “Hermetic and Related Texts in Classical Antiquity,” in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, ed. I. Merkel and Allen G. Debus (Folger Books, Washington, D.C., 1988), p. 23.
53. See R. Abraham Yagel, *Beit Ya’ar ha-Levanon*, translated and discussed by Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science*, p. 143; and Yehiya’s *Shalshet ha-Qabbalah* (Hotsa’at ha-dorot ha-rishonim ve-ḥorotom, Jerusalem, 1962), p. 218.
54. See Ficino’s *De religione Christiana*, quoted and discussed by Trinkaus, *In Our Likeness and Image*, 2: 741–742. On Zoroaster as Ham see Bidez and Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés*, 2: 49–50, 54–55.
55. See Yagel, *Beit Ya’ar ha-Levanon*, translated and discussed by David B. Ruderman, “On Divine Justice, Metempsychosis, and Purgatory: Ruminations of a Sixteenth-Century Italian Jew,” *Jewish History* 1 (1986), p. 16.
56. See Idel, “Differing Conceptions,” pp. 140–141; Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science*, pp. 159–160.

#### CHAPTER 14: R. YOHANAN BEN YITZHAQ ALEMANNŌ

1. See Umberto Cassuto, *The Jews in Florence in the Renaissance Period*, trans. Menahem Hartum (Makhon ben Zvi, Jerusalem, 1967) (Hebrew); Avraham Melamed, “The Hebrew Encyclopedias of the Renaissance,” in *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Steven Harvey (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 2000), pp. 441–464; *idem*, “The Hebrew ‘laudatio’ of Yohanan Alemanno—in Praise of Lorenzo il Magnifico and the Florentine Constitution,” in *Studies on the History of Jews in Italy—100th Anniversary of the Birth of M. D. U. Cassuto*, ed. Chaim Beinart (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 1–34; *idem*, “Yohanan Alemanno and the Development of Human Society,” in *World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. 8 (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 85–93 (Hebrew); *idem*, *The Philosopher-King in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought*, ed. Lenn E. Goodman (SUNY Press, Albany, 2003); Hiram Pflaum, *Die Idee der Liebe* (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1926), pp. 67–70; Idel, “The Study Program”; *idem*, “Hermeticism and Judaism”; *idem*, “The Throne and the Seven-Branched Candlestick: Pico della Mirandola’s Hebrew Source,” *JWCI* 40 (1977), pp. 290–292. See also the

important studies of Fabrizio Lelli: "Retorica, poetica e linguistica nel Hay ha-'Olamim di Yohanan Alemanno" (Ph.D. diss., University of Turin, 1990-91); "Pico tra filosofia ebraica e 'Qabbala,'" in *Pico, Poliziano e l'umanesimo di fine Quattrocento*, ed. Paolo Viti (Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1994), pp. 193-223; "Biography and Autobiography in Yohanan Alemanno's Literary Perception," in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004), pp. 25-38; "Jews, Humanists, and the Reappraisal of Pagan Wisdom Associated with the Ideal of the *Dignitas Hominis*," in *Hebraica Veritas?: Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey Shoulson (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004), pp. 49-70; "L'educazione ebraica nella seconda metà del '400, Poetica e scienze naturale nel '400: Poetica e scienze naturali nel Hay Ha-'Olamim di Yohanan Alemanno," *Rinascimento*, 2nd ser. 36 (1996), pp. 75-136; and "Umanesimo Laurenziano nell'opera di Yohanan Alemanno," in *La cultura ebraica all'epoca di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, ed. Dora Liscia Bemporad and Ida Zatelli (Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1998), pp. 49-67; Giuseppe Sermoneta, "L'incontro culturale tra ebrei e cristiani nel Medioevo e nel Rinascimento," in *Atti del VI Congresso internazionale dell'AISG*, ed. Michele Luzzati, Michele Olivari, and Alessandra Veronese (Carruci, Rome, 1988), pp. 183-207; Hava Tirosch-Samuelson, *Happiness in Premodern Judaism: Virtue, Knowledge, and Well-Being* (Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 2003), pp. 412-423. On Alemanno and Pico see also B. C. Novak, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Yohanan Alemanno," *JWCI* 45 (1982), pp. 125-147. For more studies on these figures see notes 3-7, 60, 61, 63, and 64 below.

2. I shall analyze in another study the documents corroborating this summary.
3. See Daniel Carpi, *Between Renaissance and Ghetto* (University Publishing Project, Tel Aviv, 1989), pp. 70-72 (Hebrew).
4. For documents related to Alemanno's stay and activity in Florence see Michele Luzzatti, "Documenti inediti su Yohanan Alemanno a Firenze (1481 e 1492-1493)," in Bemporad and Zatelli, *La cultura ebraica*, pp. 71-84. In the introduction to his *Hesheq Shlomo*, Alemanno pointed out the affinity between his first name, Yohanan, and Pico's, Giovanni.
5. See the letter written in Jerusalem by the Spanish Kabbalist R. Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi to R. Abraham of Perugia, extant in Ms. Florence, Laurenziana-Medicea Plut. II, 35, fols. 30b-31b, printed and discussed by Abraham David, "A Jerusalemite Epistle from the Beginning of the Ottoman Rule over the Land of Israel," in *Chapters in the History of Jerusalem at the Beginning of the Ottoman Ages*, ed. Yehudah ben Porat (Yad ben Zvi, Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 39-60 (Hebrew); and Lelli, "Biography and Autobiography," pp. 35-36. On hakham kolel or uomo universale see also Lelli, "Umanesimo Laurenziano," pp. 50 n. 3, 58 n. 26.
6. Yohanan Alemanno, *Sefer Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Berlin, Or. Qu. 832. See Arthur Lesley, "The 'Song of Solomon's Ascents': Love and Human Perfection according to a Jewish

Associate of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1976).

7. For the description and bibliography regarding this book see Fabrizio Lelli, Yohanan Alemanno, *Hay Ha-'Olamim (L'Immortale)* (Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1995); idem, “L’educazione ebraica”; and Michael Reuveni, “The Physical Worlds of Jochanan Alemanno in ‘Hai ‘Olamim” (Ph.D. diss., Haifa University, 2004), 2 vols. (Hebrew).
8. The identification of Alemanno as the author of Ms. Paris, BN 849, was established by Gershom Scholem, *Peraqim le-Toldot Sifrut ha-Qabbalah* (ha-Madpis, Jerusalem, 1931), pp. 54–58 (Hebrew).
9. Yohanan Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234 (Reggio 23).
10. For more on this issue see chap. 15.
11. This is a passage from an otherwise unknown Hebrew translation of *Liber de Causis*, as adduced already by Abraham Abulafia. On this work of Abulafia’s, his quotation from *Liber de Causis*, and the latter’s reverberations see Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” pp. 216–217, 220–221, 223, and the pertinent notes there. Neoplatonic influences are more dominant in theosophic-theurgical Kabbalah than in ecstatic Kabbalah. In the latter, some Neoplatonic motifs came to the fore in the second stage of the development of this school, in the works of R. Yitzhaq of Acre and in R. Nathan Harar’s *Sha’arei Tzedeq*, whereas they are negligible in the writings of Abulafia, where the Aristotelian influence is predominant. See more in chap. 11.
12. ‘Imrei Shefer is Abulafia’s last work, composed in Sicily in 1291. The passage is found in Ms. Munich 285, fols. 3a–b.
13. Alemanno, *Sefer Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Berlin, Or. Qu. 832, fols. 83a–b. See also chap. 15, sec. 4.
14. See Idel, “The Study Program,” pp. 325, 331–332, and nn. 55, 56.
15. Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 159a.
16. Similar views are found in Menahem Recanati. See above, chap. 10.
17. R. Yehi’el Nissim of Pisa, *Commentary on the Ten Sefirot*, Ms. New York, JTS Rab. 1586, fol. 126b. This text was copied in the various versions of the *Commentary on the Ten Sefirot* composed by R. Yehi’el Nissim and those in his circle; see, e.g., Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” p. 227 and n. 233. The fact that the prophets are mentioned is reminiscent of the theory of the tradition that Plato studied with Jeremiah. On this issue see more in chap. 13.
18. On this Zoharic view see M. Idel, “The Journey to Paradise: The Metamorphosis of a Motif from a Greek Myth into Judaism,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore* 2 (1982), pp. 12–13 (Hebrew).
19. *Minhat Qena’ot*, ed. David Kaufmann (Berlin, 1898), p. 84; see also *ibid.*, pp. 49 and 53.
20. Yohanan Alemanno, *Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1535, fol. 162b. For more on the issue of *prisca theologia* among his Jewish contemporaries see chap. 13.
21. On this model see further Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 65–81.



22. Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 164a. On talismans and Alemanno see also the text printed by Lelli, “L’educazione ebraica,” pp. 118, 121–122.
23. Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 164a.
24. Takhlit-he-Hakham, Ms. Munich 214, fol. 51a. On this book see chap. 16, sec. 2.
25. Alemanno, untitled treatise, Ms. Paris, BN 849, fol. 62a. See also *ibid.*, fol. 6b.
26. See Idel, “The Concept of the Torah,” pp. 49–53.
27. Alemanno, untitled treatise, Ms. Paris, BN 849, fol. 7b.
28. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Opera Omnia* (Venice, 1557), p. 181; Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, p. 97.
29. See above, chap. 12, note 21; and below, note 49.
30. Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 2b. For the medieval Jewish sources that influenced Alemanno see Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 482–492.
31. Pico, *Opera Omnia*, p. 113: “Sicut vera Astrologia docet nos legere in libro Dei, ita Cabbala docet nos legere in libro legis.”
32. This view is found in Gikatilla’s *Sha’arei ’Orah* and in Recanati’s writings.
33. Alemanno, *Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1535, fols. 104b–105a.
34. Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 8b.
35. See John G. Gager, *Moses in Graeco-Roman Paganism* (Abington Press, Nashville, 1972), pp. 134–160.
36. R. Yohanan Alemanno, *Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Moscow, Guensburg 140, fol. 287a.
37. Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 22b.
38. *Ibid.*, fol. 127a.
39. See Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” pp. 204–205 and the notes there.
40. Cf. L. Smolar and M. Aberback, “The Golden Calf Episode in Postbiblical Literature,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 39 (1968), pp. 91–116.
41. See Giordano Bruno, *De Imaginum, Signorum et Idearum Compositione*, in *Opera Latine Conscripta*, vol. 2, pt. III (Stuttgart, 1962), p. 102: “Cabalistarum doctrina confirmat et exemplum Mosis qui interdum, atque Jovis favorem comparandilm vitulum aurem erexit ad Martis item temperandum simul atque Saturni violentem aeneum serpentem adorandum efficit.” On the concept of the making of the Golden Calf as a technique to cause the descent of spiritual forces, see also Yohanan Alemanno, *Sha’ar ha-Hesheq* (Livorno, 1790), fol. 17b; and R. Shlomo Franco’s untitled commentary on Abraham ibn Ezra, Ms. Munich 15, fols. 268a–b.
42. Alemanno, *Sha’ar ha-Hesheq*, fol. 41b.
43. Alemanno, *Sefer Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1535, fol. 15a.
44. Yitzhaq ben Yehi’el of Pisa(?), *Commentary on the Ten Sefirot*, Ms. London, Montefiore 316, fol. 28b.
45. See Idel, “The Study Program,” pp. 310–312.
46. On Jews, Saturn, and Sabbath see A. Bouché-Leclercq, *L’astrologie greque* (Paris, 1899), pp. 318, 371, 478; Yohanan H. Levi, *Studies in Jewish Hellenism* (Mossad Bialik, Jerusalem, 1978), pp. 100–101.



- 1969), pp. 122, 143 (Hebrew); Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, trans. John Bowden, vol. 2 (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1974), p. 176 n. 47; Eric Zafran, "Saturn and the Jews," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 42 (1979), pp. 16–27; Jacques Halbronn, *Le monde juif et l'astrologie: Histoire d'un vieux couple* (Arche, Milan, 1979), pp. 84–87; Shlomo Sela, "Abraham ibn Ezra's Appropriation of Saturn," *Kabbalah* 10 (2004), pp. 21–53; Elliot K. Ginsburg, *Sod ha-Shabbat: The Mystery of Sabbath* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1989), pp. 163–167; and Haviva Pedaya, "Sabbath, Sabbatai, and the Diminution of Moon—The Holy Conjunction, Sign and Image," in *Myth in Judaism*, ed. Pedaya (Ben Gurion University, Beer Sheva, 1996 = *Eshel Beer-Sheva* 4 [1996], pp. 150–153 [Hebrew]).
47. This angel was conceived of as presiding over the people of Israel. On the nexus between Michael and Saturn see Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004), p. 251.
  48. See also Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 125b. See already R. Shmuel ibn Motot, *Megillat Setarim* (Venice, 1554), fol. 6b. On Ibn Motot see Georges Vajda, "Recherches sur la synthèse philosophico-kabbalistique de Samuel ibn Motot," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Ages* 27 (1960), p. 59 n. 112.
  49. On this term as pointing to astral magic see Pines, "On the Term *Ruhaniyyut*"; idem, "Shi'ite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), pp. 165–251, especially pp. 243–247; idem, "Le *Sefer ha-Tamar* et les *Maggidim* des Kabbalists," in *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati (Peeters, Louvain, 1980), pp. 333–363. On a late, Christian understanding of Kabbalah as a pact with the devil see Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews* (JPS, Philadelphia, 1983), p. 86.
  50. For this nexus see already R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi's *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah* (Epstein, Jerusalem, 1961), fols. 51b–52a.
  51. This understanding of sorcery as related to Saturn stems, in Jewish sources, from R. Abraham ibn Ezra, *Reshit Hokhmah*, chap. 4. I combined the version found in a passage of this book as explicitly quoted in R. Joseph Bonfils, *Tzafnat Pa'aneah*, ed. David Herzog, vol. 1 (Kraków, 1912), p. 49, with the commonly used edition of the book (cited just below). See also *ibid.*, p. 270. The common version of this passage, as edited and translated by Raphael Levi and Francisco Cantera, *The Beginning of Wisdom: An Astrological Treatise by Abraham ibn Ezra* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore; Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1939), pp. xlii–xliv, does not contain the reference to incantation and sorcery.
  52. These are terms for cosmical cycles according to Kabbalists, which interpreted biblical practices of cessation of agricultural works. The nexus between these two practices and Saturn is manifest already in the passage of Abraham Abulafia and even more in R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi's influential *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*. See Moshe Idel, "Saturn and Sabbatai Tzevi: A New Approach to Sabbateanism," in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. Peter Schaefer and Mark Cohen (Brill, Leiden, 1998), pp. 179–180. See also above, chap. 12, note 39.
  53. On this issue see Idel, "Saturn and Sabbatai Tzevi," pp. 167–168.

54. On Saturn and melancholy see the important study by Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturne et la mélancholie*, trans. L. Evrard (Gallimard, Paris, 1989).
55. Apparently hemiplegia.
56. Alemanno, untitled treatise, Ms. Paris, BN 849, fols. 94b–95a, which is part of a passage dealing with the sefirah of Binah. See also Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” p. 209.
57. See M. Idel, “The Epistle of R. Isaac of Pisa(?) in Its Three Versions,” in Qovetz ‘Al Yad, n.s. 10 (1982), pp. 166–167, 187 n. 141, 213–214 (Hebrew). I have my doubts, based on a new manuscript of this epistle, whether the author of the three versions of this epistle is Yitzhaq da Pisa or another Kabbalist. I hope to return to this topic elsewhere.
58. See Eugenio Garin, *Astrology in the Renaissance: The Zodiac of Life* (Arkana, London, 1983), pp. 20–21, 41, 59, 69, 111. As I showed in a short note some years ago, Alemanno translated, or perhaps only copied, an astrological passage written by a Christian author, dealing with his conversion in 1484 as a result of the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter. See M. Idel, “On R. Yohanan Alemanno and Ma’amar Hoze,” *Qiryat Sefer* 54 (1979), pp. 825–826 (Hebrew).
59. On this issue see Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 65–81.
60. See Idel, “The Study Program,” p. 309. This does not mean that I assume that the magical and even some forms of talismanic views are absent in those two earlier Kabbalists, who informed Alemanno’s views, but that the magical-talismanic elements are marginal in their systems but become central in Alemanno’s.
61. For more on this issue see Idel, “Between.”
62. See Raphael Patai, *Jewish Alchemists* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995), pp. 27, 100, 293–297; and Idel, “The Study Program,” p. 308.
63. Erwin Rosenthal, “Yohanan Alemanno and Occult Science,” in *Prismata, Naturwissenschaftsgeschichtliche Studien: Festschrift für Willy Hartner*, ed. Y. Maeyama and W. G. Saltzer (Wiesbaden, 1977), pp. 349–361.
64. M. Idel, “The Anthropology of Yohanan Alemanno: Sources and Influences,” *Topoi* 7 (1988), p. 201–210; reprinted in *Annali di storia dell’esegesi* 7 (1990), pp. 93–112; and the medieval material analyzed in idem, “Man as the ‘Possible’ Entity in Some Jewish and Renaissance Sources,” in Coudert and Shoulson, *Hebraica Veritas?*, pp. 33–47.
65. Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 17a.
66. Alemanno, *Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1535, fol. 20a.
67. Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 10a. On the divine nature of the soul in Kabbalah see M. Idel, “Nishmat ‘Eloha: On the Divinity of the Soul in Nahmanides and His School,” in *Life as a Midrash: Perspectives in Jewish Psychology*, ed. S. Arzi, M. Fachler, and B. Kahana (Yediy’ot ‘Aharonot, Tel Aviv, 2004), pp. 338–380 (Hebrew).
68. On the impact of Italian literature on Renaissance Jewish authors see Giulio Busi, “Influssi italiani nella letteratura ebraica dell’età del Rinascimento,” in *Correnti culturali e movimenti religiosi del Giudaismo: Atti del V Congresso internazionale dell’AISG*, ed. Bruno Chiesa (Carucci, Rome, 1987), pp. 257–271.

CHAPTER 15: JEWISH MYSTICAL THOUGHT IN LORENZO IL  
MAGNIFICO'S FLORENCE

1. The latest comprehensive survey of translations and translators in Toledo seems to be that of Simon Hayek, "Transmisión de la cultura arabe al occidente cristiano," in *Las tres culturas en la corona de Castilla y los Sefardies* (Junta de Castilla y Leon, Salamanca, 1990), pp. 221–241.
2. See Colette Sirat, *La philosophie juive médiévale en pays de chrétienté* (Presses du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1988), pp. 21–23, 33–34.
3. See Wirzubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, passim. I do not intend to address here the many sixteenth-century translations, in the field of philosophy or Kabbalah, done by Jews or converts.
4. See now Averroë, *parafrasi della "Repubblica" nella traduzione latina di Elia del Medigo*, ed. A. Coviello and Paolo Edoardo Forniciari (Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1992).
5. See Giuseppe Sermoneta, "L'incontro culturale tra ebrei e cristiani nel Medioevo e nel Rinascimento," in *Atti del VI Congresso internazionale dell'AISG*, ed. Michele Luzzati, Michele Olivari, and Alessandra Veronese (Carrucci, Rome, 1988), pp. 183–207. Important contributions to an understanding of the processes taking place within Italian Renaissance Jewry and its interaction with the Italian culture are found in the following surveys: Robert Bonfil, "The Historian's Perception of the Jews in the Italian Renaissance: Towards a Reappraisal," *REJ* 143 (1984), pp. 59–82; David B. Ruderman, "Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought," in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, ed. Albert Rabil Jr., vol. 1 (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1988), pp. 382–433; idem, in his introduction to *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. D. B. Ruderman (New York University Press, New York, 1992), pp. 1–39; and Bonfil's "How Golden Was the Age of the Renaissance in Jewish Historiography?," *ibid.*, pp. 219–250; Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, "Jewish Culture in Renaissance Italy: A Methodological Survey," *Italia* 9 (1990), pp. 63–96; Arthur M. Lesley, "Jewish Adaption of Humanistic Concepts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Italy," in Ruderman, *Essential Papers*, pp. 45–62. See also Paul O. Kristeller, "Jewish Contribution to Italian Renaissance Culture," *Italia* 4 (1985), pp. 7–20; and Isaac E. Barzilai, *Between Reason and Faith: Anti-Rationalism in Jewish Italian Thought, 1250–1650* (Mouton, The Hague, 1967), pp. 61–149.
6. See, e.g., Paul O. Kristeller, *La tradizione classica nel pensiero del Rinascimento* (La Nuova Italia Editrice, Florence, 1975).
7. Wirzubski, *Pico della Mirandola*. Wirzubski's demonstration of the paramount importance of the medieval kabbalistic sources for Giovanni Pico's own formulations should be seen as part of what has been called the "revolt of the medievalists," an approach that emphasizes the centrality of some medieval texts for Renaissance thought. This attitude is characteristic also of many of Sermoneta's and Tirosh-Rothschild's studies, as well as my own general approach. See Tirosh-Rothschild, "Jewish Culture in Renaissance Italy," pp. 73–74.

8. See Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 69–76, 106–118.
9. Bohdan Kieszkowski, “Les rapports entre Elie del Medigo et Pic de la Mirandola,” *Il Rinascimento* 15 (1964), pp. 41–91. See also Kalman P. Bland, “Elijah del Medigo’s Averroistic Response to the Kabbalahs of the Fifteenth-Century Jewry and Pico della Mirandola,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (1991), pp. 23–53.
10. Cf. Idel, “The Study Program,” pp. 303–330; and Fabrizio Lelli, “Retorica, poetica e linguistica nel Hay ha-Olamim di Yohanan Alemanno” (Ph.D. diss., University of Turin, 1990–91), pp. 305–318.
11. See Idel, “The Throne and the Seven-Branched Candlestick: Pico della Mirandola’s Hebrew Source,” *JWCI* 40 (1977), pp. 290–292. For more on Alemanno and Pico see B. C. Novak, “Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Jochanan Alemanno,” *ibid.*, 45 (1982), pp. 125–147.
12. See David B. Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol* (Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 1991).
13. See Umberto Cassuto, “Un rabbino fiorentino del secolo XV,” *Rivista israelita* 3 (1906), pp. 116–128, 156–161, 224–228; and *ibid.*, 4 (1907), 33–37, 226–229; and the interesting analysis by Avraham Melamed, “Natural, Human, Divine: Classification of the Law among Some 15th- and 16th-Century Italian Jewish Thinkers,” *Italia* 4 (1985), pp. 63–81.
14. See Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 10–65.
15. For one important example to this effect see below, chap. 16, note 9.
16. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*; *idem*, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*.
17. For different versions of these phenomena in Italy see Giuseppe Sermoneta, “R. Yehudah and Immanuel of Rome: Rationalism Whose End Is Mystical Belief,” in *Revelation, Faith, Reason*, ed. Moshe Hallamish and Moshe Schwartz (Bar Ilan University Press, Ramat Gan, 1976), pp. 54–70 (Hebrew); Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 137–138. See also chap. 16, note 16.
18. See chap. 16, sec. 2; and app. 3.
19. See Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds*, pp. 26, 41–42.
20. See Daniel Carpi, *Between Renaissance and Ghetto* (University Publishing Project, Tel Aviv, 1989), pp. 70–72 (Hebrew).
21. Cf. Idel, “Jewish Magic from the Renaissance,” pp. 86–90.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 94–99.
23. For details on this Kabbalist see Joseph R. Hacker, “A Collection of Epistles on the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Sicily and on the Fate of the Exiles,” in *Studies in the History of Jewish Society in the Middle Ages and in the Modern Period Presented to Professor Jacob Katz*, ed. Immanuel Etkes and Joseph Salmon (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 64–70 (Hebrew).
24. See Idel, “Particularism and Universalism,” pp. 324–344.
25. See the numerous discussions of Aristotelianism in Charles Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler, and Jill Kraye, eds., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988).

26. Cf. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 316–320, 327–330, 363–364, 389–390; and Idel, “Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism.”
27. For Alemanno see Idel, “The Study Program,” pp. 310–311 n. 68. For Pico and Abulafia see Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, index, s.v. Abulafia, Abraham; and Bachelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*, p. 14.
28. Emblematic of this approach is the epithet *Comes Concordiae*, the prince of Concord, a pun upon Pico’s being in search of concord and being the prince of Concordia, invented by Ficino in order to describe Pico; see Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, pp. 72–73.
29. See R. Yohanan Alemanno, *Sha’ar ha-Hesheq* (Halberstadt, 1860), fol. 30b.
30. I borrow the term from Louis Gardet, *Études de philosophie et de mystique comparées* (J. Vrin, Paris, 1972), pp. 268–270.
31. On the relations between philosophy and Kabbalah in general see Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 23–24; and Ravitzky, *History and Faith*, pp. 115–153.
32. See Idel, “Between,” p. 95; idem, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” pp. 219–223 and the pertinent footnotes.
33. In Hebrew *sefirot*, a term that can be understood in *Sefer Yetzirah*, the book in which this term first occurs, also as numbers. See also Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” p. 223. For a more Pythagorean interpretation of the *sefirot* as numbers, different from the theosophical understanding of this term as dealing with divine powers, as the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists did, see already Abraham ibn Ezra and Abraham Abulafia, who presumably influenced Alemanno. Cf. Idel, “On the Meanings of the Term ‘Kabbalah,’” pp. 49–51. This Pythagorean emphasis on numbers in the context of Kabbalah is reminiscent of the Pythagorean turn found in Reuchlin’s understanding of Kabbalah as the source of the mostly lost Pythagorean philosophy. See my introduction to Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, pp. xi–xvi.
34. The unique status of the Infinite is viewed as transcending the realm of ideal numbers, understood as *sefirot*.
35. *Yode’i hen* means literally “the knowers of the occult lore.”
36. *’Eikhut ha-Devequt*. This is the name given to the introduction to Abu Bakr ibn Tufayl’s *Hayy bin Yoqtan*. See Idel, “The Study Program,” p. 307 n. 36; and app. 3 in this volume.
37. This is Averroës’ famous book, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*. See also the text in Fabrizio Lelli, *Yohanan Alemanno, Hay Ha-’Olamim (L’Immortale)* (Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1995), p. 46.
38. Yohanan Alemanno, *Sefer Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Berlin, Or. Qu. 832, fol. 83b, printed in Idel, “Between,” p. 92.
39. Yohanan Alemanno, untitled treatise, Ms. Paris, BN 849, fol. 136a.

## CHAPTER 16: OTHER MYSTICAL AND MAGICAL LITERATURES IN RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

1. See Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 24–28.
2. See Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 119–121; and chap. 7, sec. 2, of this volume.
3. See chap. 12, sec. 1.

4. See, e.g., R. Yohanan Alemanno, untitled treatise, Ms. Paris, BN 849, fols. 110a–115b, which contains a shorter version of the treatise known as the *Hebrew Enoch*; *ibid.*, fols. 115b–117a, containing the treatise called *Ma'aseh Merkavah*; *ibid.*, fols. 117b–119b, containing a part of *Heikhalot Rabbati*; and Klaus Herrmann, “The Reception of *Heikhalot Literature* in Yohanan Alemanno’s Autograph MS Paris 849,” in *Studies in Jewish Manuscripts*, ed. J. Dan and K. Hermann (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1999), pp. 9–88. This literature is also mentioned in Yohanan Alemanno, *Sefer ‘Einei ha-Edah*, Ms. Jerusalem, NUL 8° 598, fols. 54a, 100a, 117b. Long passages from this literature were known and already quoted by R. Menahem Recanati; see Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, I: 119–121. See also chap. 12 above about Abraham Abulafia’s knowledge of ancient texts close to this literature.
5. See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 54–80.
6. See Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 74–76, 219–222.
7. See, e.g., Idel, *Golem*, pp. 54–80, 96–118, 127–163.
8. See Robert Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization and Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990), pp. 298–316; and now Ariel Toaff, “Migrazioni di Ebrei Tedeschi attraverso i territori triestini e friulani fra XIV e XV secolo,” in *Il mondo ebraico: Gli ebrei tra Italia nord-orientale e Impero Asburgico dal Medioevo all’età contemporanea*, ed. Giacomo Todeschini and P. C. Y. Zorattini (Pordenone, Tesi, 1991), pp. 5–29.
9. See Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 11–12, 16, 18, 232. A fifteenth-century Hebrew manuscript of this text is extant in Florence, Laurenziana-Medicea Plut. I, 44.
10. Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 22–23, 59–60.
11. Idel, “The Study Program,” p. 310 n. 67.
12. R. Yohanan Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 164b.
13. See Alemanno, *Sefer ‘Einei ha-Edah*, Ms. Jerusalem, NUL 8° 598, fol. 103b. On this medieval book and the mystical circle to which it belongs see Yosef Dan, *Studies in Ashkenazi-Hasidic Literature* (Massada, Ramat Gan, 1975), pp. 89–111 (Hebrew).
14. Alemanno was a very erudite scholar even by comparison with his very learned Renaissance Christian contemporaries. For a list of the most important sources of Alemanno’s thought see Idel, “The Study Program”; and app. 3 of this volume.
15. Tracing the huge impact of this book on subsequent medieval and Renaissance Jewish literature is an important desideratum. See, for the time being, Idel, *Golem*, pp. 164, 174, 187, 190. Compare also the analysis of political views in Avraham Melamed, “Natural, Human, Divine: Classification of the Law among Some 15th- and 16th-Century Italian Jewish Thinkers,” *Italia* 4 (1985), pp. 63–81; and *idem*, *The Philosopher-King in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought*, ed. Lenn E. Goodman (SUNY Press, Albany, 2003), especially pp. 53–54, 58–60, 213–214 nn. 98–99.
16. See Shaul Regev, “Theology and Rational Mysticism in the Writings of R. Joseph ben Shem Tov” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1983), p. 71 (Hebrew).
17. See Allan Lazaroff, *The Theology of Abraham Bibago* (University of Alabama Press, University, 1981), p. 91 n. 227.

18. See, e.g., Isaac Abravanel, *Tzurot ha-Yesodot*, printed together with his 'Ateret Zeqenim (Warsaw, 1894), fol. 54b.
19. See Idel, "The Study Program," pp. 307 n. 36 and 313 nn. 78–79; Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds*, pp. 84, 128–129; and Salomon Schechter, "Notes sur Messer David Leon," REJ 24 (1892), p. 123.
20. On Alemanno's view on this topic see Georges Vajda, *L'amour de Dieu dans la théologie juive du Moyen Age* (J. Vrin, Paris, 1957), pp. 280–285; M. Idel, "The Sources of the Circle Images in *Dialoghi d'Amore*," *Iyyun* 28 (1978), pp. 162–166 (Hebrew).
21. See Yohanan Alemanno, *Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Moscow, Guensburg 140, fol. 3a.
22. Umberto Cassuto, *Gli ebrei a Firenze nell'eta del Rinascimento* (Makhon ben Zvi, Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 329–330 (Hebrew version).
23. Idel, "The Study Program," p. 313 n. 79.
24. See François Secret, "Aegidiana Hebraica," REJ 121 (1962), p. 412 n. 2.
25. This case is comparable to the strong Sufi influence on the descendants of Maimonides. See Paul Fenton's important introduction to Ovadia Maimonide and David Maimonide, *Deux traités de mystique juive* (Verdier, Lagrasse, 1987), pp. 13–111.
26. For an interesting analysis focusing on the mystical elements in this book see Sami S. Hawi, *Islamic Naturalism and Mysticism: A Philosophical Study of Ibn Tufayl's Hayy bin Yaqzan* (Brill, Leiden, 1974).
27. See Idel, "The Study Program," pp. 313–318; and idem, "The Anthropology of Yohanan Alemanno: Sources and Influences," *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 7 (1990), pp. 93–112.
28. See idem, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations," p. 238 nn. 168, 169; and idem, "The Sources of the Circle Images."
29. Idem, "The Anthropology of Yohanan Alemanno."
30. Idem, *Ascensions on High*, pp. 167–203.
31. Idem, "The Sources of the Circle Images."
32. For a recent attempt to attribute both Pico's and Leone Ebreo's discussions of the circle images to Ficino, minimizing the importance of Al-Bataliyusi's book, which was quoted repeatedly and explicitly by their mentors, see Shoshanah Gershenzon, "The Circle Metaphor in Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'Amore*," *Da'at* 29 (1992), pp. v–xvii. I am not convinced by her arguments, and I hope to return to this topic in a later study.
33. See Trinkaus, *In Our Likeness and Image*, 1: 34.
34. See Idel, "Hermeticism and Judaism"; and app. 4 in this volume.
35. See R. Yohanan Alemanno, *Sha'ar ha-Hesheq* (Halberstadt, 1860), fols. 8a–b. I hope to deal with the vestiges of this magical book in a separate study.
36. Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations," p. 231 n. 36.
37. See Walker's pioneering study, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*. F. A. Yates added much to Walker's treatment in confirming the literary importance of Picatrix during the Renaissance in her *Giordano Bruno*. See also the important studies of Eugenio Garin, "La diffusione di un manuale di magia," *La Cultura filosofica del rinascimento italiano*, (Florence, 1961), pp. 159–165; idem, "Astrologia e magia: Picatrix," *Lo Zodiaco della vita* (Laterza, 1976), pp. 33–60; and "Postille sul Ermetismo del rinascimento," *Rinascimento*



- 16 (1976), pp. 245–246. On the influence of paganism on *Picatrix* see Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1972). On the Hermetic sources of *Picatrix* see H. and R. Kahane and Angela Pietrangle, “*Picatrix* and the Talismans,” *Romance Philology* 19 (1965–66), pp. 574–93; and David Pingree, “Some Sources of the *Ghayat al-Hakim*,” *JWCI* 43 (1980), pp. 1–15. For more on Hermeticism in the Renaissance see Paola Zambelli, *L’ambigua natura della magia* (Marsilio, Venice, 1996), pp. 251–327. All the manuscripts of the Latin translation of *Picatrix* date from the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. See Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, p. 15 n. 3. For the existence of another Hermetic treatise in Florence, which was quoted in toto by Alemanno, see Fabrizio Lelli, “Le versioni ebraiche di un testo ermetico: Il *Sefer Ha-Levanah*,” *Henoch* 12 (1990), pp. 147–163. See also now Reimund Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica* (Mohr/Siebeck, Tübingen, 2007), pp. 300–306.
38. See Idel, “The Study Program,” p. 311; and app. 3 in this volume. In his *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 121a, Alemanno includes a passage from *Sefer Megalleh ‘Amuqot*, by R. Shlomo ben Hanokh al-Constantini, who had seen the work in the Arabic original. Alemanno’s quotation parallels what is said in the text of *Sefer Megalleh ‘Amuqot*, Ms. Vatican 59, fol. 6a.
39. This subject has not been discussed in the scholarly literature. Studies of the topic have dealt for the most part with popular superstitions and magical practices but have not considered the place of magic in the intellectual framework of the Renaissance. See Moses A. Shulwass, *The Jews in the World of the Renaissance* (Brill, Leiden, 1973), pp. 328–32; Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1959), pp. 59–63.
40. In his book *Ma’aseh ‘Efod*, Profiat Duran refers to this work by this name. Alemanno knew Duran’s book; see Idel, “The Study Program,” p. 304 n. 6. A detailed description of Ms. Munich 214 is to be found in Moritz Steinschneider, *Zur Pseudepigraphischen Literatur* (Berlin, 1862), pp. 28–31. This translation contains some variants on the original Arabic text; one of these was discussed by Martin Plessner, “A Medieval Definition of a Scientific Experiment in the Hebrew *Picatrix*,” *JWCI* 36 (1973), pp. 358–359. See now Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica*, pp. 316–322.
41. See François Secret, “Sur quelques traductions du *Sefer Raziel*,” *REJ* 128 (1969), pp. 223–245. More recently Alejandro García Aviles has shown that the work was translated in Toledo and was one of the first books of Jewish esotericism to be translated into a European language; “Alfonso X y el *Liber Raziel*: Imágenes de la magia astral judía en el scriptorium alfonsí,” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 74 (1997), pp. 21–39. See also Idel, “The Study Program,” pp. 310–311; chap. 12 and app. 3 of this volume; and now Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica*, pp. 187–294.
42. Ms. New York, JTS 8117, fol. 59a.
43. See, e.g., the Scholastic sources pointed out in Giuseppe Sermoneta’s edition of Hillel ben Shemu’el of Verona, *Sefer Tagmule ha-Nefesh* (Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem, 1981); idem, “Jehudah ben Mosheh ben Daniel Romano,



- traducteur de Saint Thomas,” in *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati (Peeters, Louvain, 1980), pp. 235–262; and now Caterina Rigo, “Un’antologia filosofica di Yehuda b. Mosheh Romano,” *Italia* 10 (1993), pp. 73–104.
44. In some philosophical and kabbalistic writings in the Middle Ages several forms of magic were regarded as legitimate, notably the Avicennan view that by the cleaving of the soul to the supernal spiritual entities someone can influence processes taking place here below. See, e.g., Idel, “Jewish Magic from the Renaissance.”
  45. See Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, p. 156.
  46. See Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” pp. 216–218.
  47. See Stéphane Toussaint, “Ficino’s Orphic Magic or Jewish Astrology and Oriental Philosophy?: A Note on Spiritus, the Three Books on Life, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Zarza,” *Accademia* 2 (2000), pp. 19–33; Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*, pp. 15, 21–30, 100–102; and chap. 21 and app. 3 of this volume.
  48. Cf. Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 41–43.

#### CHAPTER 17: SPANISH KABBALISTS IN ITALY AFTER THE EXPULSION

1. See, e.g., Cecil Roth, “The Spanish Exiles of 1492 in Italy,” in *Homenaje a Millas-Vallcrosa*, vol. 2 (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Barcelona, 1956), pp. 293–302; Renata Segre, “Sephardic Settlements in Sixteenth-Century Italy: A Historical and Geographical Survey,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 6 (1992), pp. 11–127. On the cultural environment in Italy in this period see David B. Ruderman, “The Italian Renaissance and Jewish Thought,” in *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, ed. Albert Rabil, vol. 1 (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1988), pp. 382–433; and Robert Bonfil’s important study, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization and Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990); as well as Sarah Heller Wilensky, *The Philosophy of Isaac Arama* (Bialik Institute, Jerusalem, 1956) (Hebrew).
2. The single piece of evidence about the presence of this Kabbalist in Italy is a hint by R. Yitzhaq ben Hayyim ha-Kohen, Ms. Oxford, Heb. f. 16, Catalogue Neubauer, no. 2770, fol. 48b.
3. See Gershom Scholem and Malachi Beit-Arié, *Sefer Meshareh Qitrin* (Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, 1978) (Hebrew), which presents the most important bibliography on this Kabbalist in the introduction.
4. Ms. Oxford, Heb. f. 16, Catalogue Neubauer, no. 2770, fol. 25a, indicates that Hayyim ha-Kohen visited Ferrara. See M. Idel, “Chronicle of an Exile: R. Isaac ben Hayyim ha-Kohen of Jativa,” in *Jews and Conversos at the Time of the Expulsion*, ed. Y. Assis and Y. Kaplan (Merkaz Shazar Center, Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 259–271 (Hebrew).
5. Cf. Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 422–425. On this figure see now Michal Oron, “Autobiographical Elements in the Writings of Kabbalists from the Generation of the Expulsion,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 6 (1991), pp. 102–106.
6. Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 404–422.

7. The reactions of Sephardic Jews in Italy are more evident in the Ferrara edition, whose introduction is a bit longer, containing details not included in the Mantuan edition. Both of them were printed in 1558. On the various commentaries on *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha'Elohut* see Gershom Scholem, "On the Questions Related to *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha'Elohut* and Its Commentators," *Qiryat Sefer* 21 (1944), pp. 284–295 (Hebrew).
8. Though not a full-fledged Kabbalist, Yavetz was sympathetic to this lore but very critical toward Jewish philosophy; this attitude certainly created an affinity between the two expellees. Although I assume that Hayyat and Yavetz did not meet before their encounter in Mantua, their trajectory after the expulsion is similar. On Yavetz see Isaac E. Barzilay, *Between Reason and Faith: Anti-Rationalism in Jewish Italian Thought, 1250–1650* (Mouton, The Hague, 1967), pp. 133–149; Gedaliah Nigal, "The Opinions of R. Joseph Yavetz on Philosophy and Philosophers, Torah and Commandments," *Eshel Beer-Sheva* 1 (1976), pp. 258–287 (Hebrew); Ira Robinson, "Halakha, Kabbala, and Philosophy in the Thought of Joseph Jabez," *Sciences religieuses/Studies in Religion* 11:4 (1982), pp. 389–402.
9. Cf. Psalms 27:4. Barzilay correctly mentions Yavetz's basically positive attitude toward Kabbalah; *Between Reason and Faith*, p. 143. Scholem's assessment that Yavetz's attitude to Kabbalah, "like that toward the philosophy of Maimonides, is one of extreme reserve," is unfounded; *Sabbatai Sevi*, p. 21. In his 'Or ha-Hayyim, quoted by Scholem, *ibid.*, Yavetz criticizes only the study of Kabbalah by people who are not prepared to encounter this esoteric lore. Yavetz's reservations may be understood in the context of the development of the study of Kabbalah in Italy, where relatively young persons, such as Alemanno and David Messer Leon, started to study Kabbalah.
10. As Gottlieb has shown, the author was an Italian Kabbalist named Reuven Tzarfati; see his *Studies*, pp. 357–369; and chap. 11 of this volume.
11. Despite Hayyat's criticisms of this commentary, many parts of it were printed in the 1558 Mantuan edition of *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha'Elohut*, as well as those copied by Hayyat himself in his *Minhat Yehudah*. As the printer of this edition, R. Immanuel of Benivento, acknowledged, Hayyat was not ready to leave out the views of the anonymous Kabbalist even though he had reservations about some of them.
12. Compare also the description of R. Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim regarding the dispersion and fragmentation of the *Zohar*. This issue merits a detailed discussion that cannot be pursued here.
13. Hayyat quoted long and numerous passages from the latter layer of the Zoharic literature, *Tiqqunei Zohar*. The assumption that the preoccupation with the later layers of the *Zohar* saved the lives of the Kabbalists recurs in another contemporary document; see Meir Benayahu, "A Source about the Exiles from Spain in Portugal and Their Departure to Saloniki after the Decree of 1506," *Sefunot* 11 (1971–1978), p. 261. Therefore, the assumption that the *Zohar* was canonized "consequent upon the expulsion" (Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1: 25) is erroneous, at least insofar as the Spanish Kabbalists are concerned. On the canonization of the *Zohar* see Boaz Huss, "'Sefer ha-Zohar' as a Canonical, Sacred, and Holy Text: Changing Perspectives of the

Book of Splendor between the Thirteenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7 (1997), pp. 257–307.

14. See Hayyat, *Minhat Yehudah*, fol. 165b.
15. On the basis of detecting Yohanan Alemanno’s extensive quotations from Hayyat’s work, in his *Collectanea* and in his untitled treatise extant in Ms. Paris, BN 849, which was written in 1498, I propose dating the composition of *Minhat Yehudah* to between 1495 and 1498. See Idel, “The Study Program,” p. 330. G. Scholem dated the commentary to 1494–1500; “On the Questions,” p. 292. However, the earlier date is impossible because in 1494 Hayyat was in Naples, and he mentions the conquest of the city by the French during this year. The later date is improbable because Alemanno quoted the book already in 1498.
16. On this issue see Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, p. 138.
17. See, e. g., Rachel Elior, “Messianic Expectations and Spiritualization of Religious Life in the Sixteenth Century,” *REJ* 145, nos. 1–2 (1986), p. 36 and n. 4, where she refers to Hayyat in the context of her claim that he is representative of those who expressed “various degrees of detachment from mundane life while striving to attain cultural segregation and a comprehensive spiritualization of all Jewish life.” Since no specific page of a pertinent discussion is mentioned in the article, my perusal of the two editions of *Minhat Yehudah* was not helpful in detecting these discussions or new formulations or particular emphasis. Perhaps in new manuscripts of Hayyat’s writings someone will be able to detect such a shift.
18. Hayyat, *Minhat Yehudah*, fol. 155b.
19. See *ibid.*, fol. 177b, where he writes: “as I have been compelled, according to the [view of] the Zohar” (*kefi she-hekhrahti mi-Sefer ha-Zohar*).
20. See *ibid.*, fols. 94a–b: “If the view of the rabbi is that the ‘Atarah [namely the last sefirah] is not a recipient of damage because of the sins of Israel, let this view stand alone [*kevodo bi-meqomo munah*], since it is a philosophical speculation [*Iyyun filosofi*], but not a true view, [representative of] the wisdom of Kabbalah.” Thus, perceptively detecting the philosophical background of some passages in *Sefer Ma’arekhet ha-’Elohut*, Hayyat does not hesitate to refute them in the name of what he considers to be the true, namely mythical, stand of theosophical Kabbalah.
21. On the antimythical attitude of this book see Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 317–343.
22. See Hayyat, *Minhat Yehudah*, fols. 41a–b, 42b, 44b.
23. Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 399, 430 n. 25.
24. Only a very short passage of his, a pseudo-Zoharic eschatological passage written in Spain before the expulsion and transmitted by Ibn Shraga, was printed in *Liqqutei Shikhehah u-feah* (Ferrara, 1556).
25. The bibliography on this Kabbalist is very limited, the most important discussion being Tishby’s printing and analysis of his short messianic treatise; see Tishby, *Messianism*, pp. 87–97 and 131–149 and nn. 111–112. Although the important text published by Tishby regarding the four stages of redemption reflects an explicit messianism, in Ibn Shraga’s *Commentary on the Liturgy*, Ms. Jerusalem, 8° 3921, fols. 80a–b,

he discusses the same topic without even hinting at any actual meaning of this theme. Just as in the case of Hayyat, his kabbalistic writings, which were also well known if we are to judge from the number of extant manuscripts, do not betray a substantial interest in messianism. Compare above, note 17.

26. See Ms. London, British Library, Add. 27034, fol. 374a. Cf. Gershom Scholem, "The Real Author of the Forged Text, in the Language of the Zohar in the Lifetime of Rabbi Abraham ha-Levi: Rabbi Joseph ibn Shraga or Rabbi David of Argiento," *Qiryat Sefer* 8 (1931), pp. 262–265 (Hebrew), where the question of the place named Agrigento is addressed. As in the case of the two other Kabbalists discussed above, the Sephardi Kabbalist is writing for an Italian audience.
27. See the quotation, without attribution, of a Zoharic passage from *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, copied already in a manuscript at the beginning of the fourteenth century, in Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1663, fols. 134a–136a, printed in M. Idel, "An Unknown Text from *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*," in *The Age of the Zohar*, ed. J. Dan (Institute for Jewish Studies, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 73–87, especially p. 78 (Hebrew).
28. See Alexander Marx, "Le faux Messie Ascher Lemlein," *REJ* 61 (1911), pp. 135–138; Kupfer, "Visions," pp. 390–392, 396–397, 407–423; Tishby, *Messianism*, p. 91 n. 285. Marx's text is corrupted, and although the topic dealt with may be relevant to some issues related to the dominant situation in the generation of the expulsion, the scholars who have dealt with these issues did not read the pertinent material extant in manuscripts.
29. Shortly before this controversy over metempsychosis, an even larger controversy over the same issue erupted in Candia, in Crete; see Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 370–395; Brian Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth: Reincarnation in Early Modern Italian Kabbalah* (Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2009), pp. 41–101; and chap. 12 of this volume.
30. See Kupfer, "Visions," p. 407.
31. Lemlein's list of sources includes only one book recommended by Hayyat, *Sefer Yetzirah*, but praises highly Abulafia's *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, which Hayyat had criticized. See Kupfer, "Visions," p. 412.
32. On the tensions between Ashkenazis and Sephardis in this period in general see Hayyim Hillel ben Sasson, "Exile and Redemption through the Eyes of the Spanish Exiles," in *Yitzhak F. Baer Jubilee Volume*, ed. S. W. Baron, B. Dinur, S. Ettinger, and I. Halpern (Historical Society of Israel, Jerusalem, 1960), pp. 221–222 (Hebrew).
33. R. Asher Lemlein, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1663, fol. 129b; Ms. Cambridge, Add. 6517, fol. 13a.
34. BT, *Babba Batra*, fol. 10b.
35. Lemlein, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1663, fols. 129b, 130b, 132b.
36. For more on these issues see Idel, "Particularism and Universalism." On the different functions of Kabbalah in Italy, though in a later period, see also Robert Bonfil, "Changes in the Cultural Patterns of a Jewish Society in Crisis: Italian Jewry at the Close of the Sixteenth Century," *Jewish History* 3:2 (1988), pp. 11–30; M. Idel, "Judah Muscato: A Late Renaissance Jewish Preacher," in *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto*, ed. David B. Ruderman (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992), pp. 41–66.

CHAPTER 18: TWO DIVERGING TYPES OF  
KABBALAH IN LATE-FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY

1. Hayyat, *Minhat Yehudah*, fols. 3b–4a. The list of recommended kabbalistic books faithfully reflects the kabbalistic sources that informed most of the discussions in both R. Yehudah Hayyat and R. Joseph Alqastiel. See the titles quoted in the various pages of this important kabbalistic text, edited by Gershom Scholem in “To the Knowledge of Kabbalah in the Eve of the Expulsion,” *Tarbitz* 24 (1955), pp. 167–206 (Hebrew). Likewise, see the mention of three commentaries on Nahmanides’ kabbalistic secrets and some folios from the book of the *Zohar* in an epistle from R. Yitzhaq Mor Hayyim, a Sephardic Kabbalist, to R. Yitzhaq of Pisa. The context makes clear that the Italian Kabbalist did not possess these writings. See Ya’el Nadav, “An Epistle of the Qabbalist R. Isaac Mar Hayyim Concerning the Doctrine of ‘Supernal Lights,’” *Tarbitz* 26 (1957), p. 458 (Hebrew). For an analysis of this text as related to a certain type of memory technique see Moshe Idel, “*Memento Dei*—Remarks on Remembering in Judaism,” in *Il senso della memoria: Atti dei convegni Lincei, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, vol. 195 (Rome, 2003), pp. 169–171.
2. Hayyat, *Minhat Yehudah*, fol. 3a.
3. *Ibid.*, fol. 3b. It seems that Hayyat, like R. Jacob Yavetz, who also arrived in Mantua after the expulsion, was concerned about the dissemination of Kabbalah in larger circles.
4. The word *sha’ar* does not occur in the two editions of *Minhat Yehudah*, but I have no doubt that it is a mistake by Hayyat.
5. The words *ve-ha-‘olam* stand, in my opinion, for another book by Isaac ibn Latif, which is not mentioned in the Mantuan edition of *Minhat Yehudah*. On Ibn Latif’s books and views see Heller Wilensky, “Isaac ibn Latif—Philosopher or Kabbalist?”
6. The word *rabim*, “many,” occurs only in the Ferrara edition (1558), but there is no reason to doubt that it is authentic, since it also occurs in Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1639, fol. 3b.
7. See, e.g., Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1639, fol. 3b.
8. This epithet occurs only in the Ferrara edition.
9. There were Kabbalists in this generation who, despite their general opposition to philosophy, were very positive toward Maimonides’ thought, understood as an attempt to answer the spiritual needs of his generation by offering a Jewish response to alien philosophy. See, e.g., R. Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi’s stand, elaborated in Idel, *Maimonides et la mystique juive*, pp. 55–56; English version, pp. 75–76.
10. *Match Resha’*, a pun on the name Motot. On his thought see Georges Vajda, “Recherches sur la synthèse philosophico-kabbalistique de Samuel ibn Motot,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Ages* 27 (1960), pp. 29–63.
11. R. Yohanan Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 64b; Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” pp. 215–229; and *idem*, “The Study Program,” p. 309.

12. The various anonymous quotations from Hayyat's book found in Alemanno's manuscripts are described in Idel, "The Study Program," pp. 330–331.
13. Alemanno's *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, which contains quotations from a huge variety of sources, mentions the Zohar only a few times at the end, between fols. 135a and 165a, and only as part of Hayyat's *Minhat Yehudah*, which is however never named. Thus we may conclude that he did not have a copy of the Zohar. In Alemanno's earlier composition, *Sefer Hesheq Shlomo*, he refers to the Zohar only twice, and in both cases it is reasonable to assume that he took his material from Recanati's *Commentary on the Torah*. In his later books there are several quotations from the Zohar, mostly in Hebrew versions. There is thus a significant shift between his earlier ignorance of the Zohar and the much greater acquaintance with it discernible in his last, incomplete commentary on Genesis, *'Einei ha-'Edah*.
14. See Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of Kabbalah"; idem, "Jewish Magic from the Renaissance," pp. 82–117; idem, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 256.
15. See Moshe Idel, "Inquiries into the Doctrine of *Sefer ha-Meshiv*," *Sefunot*, n.s. 2 (= vol. 17, ed. J. Hacker [Makhon ben Tzvi, Jerusalem]) (1983), pp. 232–242 (Hebrew).
16. For details on the whereabouts of this Kabbalist see Joseph R. Hacker, "A Collection of Epistles on the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Sicily and on the Fate of the Exiles," in *Studies in the History of Jewish Society in the Middle Ages and in the Modern Period Presented to Professor Jacob Katz*, ed. Immanuel Etkes and Joseph Salmon (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 64–70 (Hebrew).
17. M. Idel, "Between the Conceptions of the Sefirot as Essence and Instruments in the Renaissance Period," *Italia* 3:1–2 (1982), pp. 89–90 (Hebrew).
18. Published by Yael Nadav, "The Epistle of R. Isaac Mor Hayyim on the Doctrine of the Zahzahot," *Tarbitz* 26 (1957), pp. 448–449 (Hebrew).
19. *Ibid.*, p. 458.
20. See A. W. Greenup, "A Kabbalistic Epistle by R. Isaac ben Samuel b. Hayyim Sephardi," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, n.s. 21 (1931), p. 370. Later, on p. 374, he describes the kabbalistic theosophy as dealing with profound matters, concerning which "the absence of inquiry is better than its existence." See also Nadav, "Epistle," pp. 448, 455, 456.
21. De Balmes's apparently single kabbalistic treatise, an Aristotelian commentary on the ten sefirot, *'Iggeret ha-'Asiriyah*, is extant in a unique manuscript, and has been printed recently by Raphael Cohen (Jerusalem, 1998). I hope to analyze it elsewhere. See for the time being Esther Goldenberg's important remark in her "Medieval Linguistics and Good Hebrew," *Leshonenu* 54 (1990), pp. 203–205 (Hebrew); and Fabrizio Lelli, "Cabbalà e aristotelismo in Italia tra XV e XVI secolo: Le 'radici' nell' 'Iggèret ha-'asirya' ('Lettera della decade') di Avraham ben Me'ir de Balmes," in *Aristotle and the Aristotelian Tradition*, ed. Ennio de Bellis (Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2008), pp. 209–222.
22. See Moshe Idel, "The Epistle of R. Isaac of Pisa(?) in Its Three Versions," *Qovetz 'Al Yad*, n.s. 10 (1982), pp. 172–173, 181–184 (Hebrew).
23. See Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds*, pp. 211–218, 231–236; idem, "Sefirot as the Essence of God in the Writings of David Messer Leon," *AJS Review* 7–8 (1982–83),

- pp. 409–425. Despite his openness to general philosophical views in his more speculative thought, David Messer Leon was deeply influenced by the particularist Ashkenazi approach to Halakhah. Although I do not wish to generate another simplistic dichotomy between Sephardic particularism and Italian universalism, at least insofar as Kabbalah is concerned, such an opposition seems to me significant. Compare Robert Bonfil, “The Historical Perception of the Jews in the Italian Renaissance: Towards a Reappraisal,” *REJ* 143 (1984), pp. 75–79. In other fields, such as philosophy, Sephardi authors such as Yehudah Abravanel, better known as Leone Ebreo, were much more open-minded than their Kabbalist contemporaries.
24. See Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 136–152; Idel, “The Epistle of R. Isaac of Pisa(?),” pp. 182–183 n. 118.
  25. See Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, pp. 39–40. Some discussions of Kabbalah and Pythagoreanism are found already in Pico; see Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 122, 187, 197–199; and G. Lloyd Jones’s introduction to Reuchlin’s *De Arte Cabalistica*, pp. 19–20. On the nexus between Pico’s view of mystical mathematics and that of Reuchlin see Ernst Cassirer, “Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: A Study in the History of Renaissance Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3 (1942), p. 143.
  26. Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, pp. 39–40. Interestingly, some Jewish traditions about the transmission of ancient Jewish mysticism cited Italy as a major station on the westward trajectory of this mystical lore. These traditions are also found in Hasidei Ashkenaz literature, which is replete with numerological speculations. See Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 14–17; Ivan Marcus, *Piety and Society* (Brill, Leiden, 1981), pp. 67–68. Since some of the speculative writings of the Jewish German masters were translated by Flavius Mithridates (see Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 11–12, 16, 18), and since this lore was generally known in Italy, maybe Reuchlin was influenced by these traditions. However, there is no attribution of any role to Pythagoras in the Jewish Ashkenazi traditions, although this figure was related during the Renaissance to other aspects of Kabbalah, especially metempsychosis. See Idel, “Differing Conceptions,” pp. 158–160; Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science*, index, s.v. Pythagoras.
  27. Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, p. 39. See also *ibid.*, p. 43.
  28. See also Idel, “Jewish Magic from the Renaissance,” pp. 82–90.
  29. See his statement in Nadav, “Epistle,” p. 456.
  30. *Ibid.*
  31. On Recanati’s position see Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 308–310; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 143–144.
  32. Nadav, “Epistle,” p. 458.
  33. See Greenup, “A Kabbalistic Epistle,” p. 375; Nadav, “Epistle,” pp. 447, 458.
  34. In fact Mor Hayyim intended to write a more comprehensive critique of Recanati’s stand—see Nadav, “Epistle,” p. 458—but we do not know whether he realized this plan.
  35. For the text and analysis of the manuscript version of Alemanno’s *Hesheq Shlomo* in Ms. Moscow, Guensburg 140, see Idel, “Between,” pp. 90–95.



36. R. Yohanan Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 64b; and Idel, “The Study Program,” pp. 329–330.
37. Kupfer, “Visions,” p. 397
38. Greenup, “A Kabbalistic Epistle,” p. 370.
39. See the passage from *Sefer Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Moscow, Guensburg 140, in Idel, “Between,” p. 91. The term *meyuhas*, used here to refer to the linkage between the *Zohar* and its traditionally accepted author, R. Shimeon bar Yohai, is ambiguous in Alemanno’s formulation. It may betray some doubt about the correctness of the attribution.
40. A meticulous list of the translated kabbalistic books and a detailed analysis of these translations can be found in Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, *passim*. The significance of Mithridates’ choice of texts to translate in order to promote a better understanding of the history of the Jewish kabbalistic literature still requires detailed research.
41. The first to observe that the *Zohar* was not known—despite the quotations of it that were available through Menahem Recanati’s writings—by the first two important Christian Kabbalists active in Italy was François Secret, *Le Zohar chez les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Durlacher, Paris, 1958), p. 25. See also Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, pp. 55, 253. Compare, however, Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1: 33. See also the important remarks of Jordan S. Penkower, “A New Inquiry into R. Eliahu Levita’s *Massoret ha-Massoret*: The Belatedness of the Vowel Signs and the Critique of the *Zohar*,” *Italia* 8 (1989), pp. 7–73 (Hebrew), who pointed out that the “evidence” on the “ancient” existence of the vowel signs, found in the allegedly ancient *Zohar*, was not accepted by Levita.
42. See Secret, *Le Zohar chez les kabbalistes chrétiens*, pp. 25–26. On the possibility that an Aramaic text, quoted by Christian Kabbalists in Spain and attributed to the *Zoharic* literature but fraught with Christian implications, may stem from a lost, though genuine, fragment of the *Zohar*, see Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, pp. 140–145.

## CHAPTER 19: JEWISH KABBALAH IN CHRISTIAN GARB

1. On problems related to tracing the origins of complex religious phenomena, see M. Idel, “On Binary ‘Beginnings’ in Kabbalah-Scholarship,” *Aporemata: Kritische Studien zur Philologiegeschichte* 5 (2001), pp. 313–337.
2. See Idel, “Defining Kabbalah.”
3. See Beatrice Hirsch-Reich, “Joachim von Fiore und das Judentum,” in *Miscellanea Medievalia*, vol. 4: *Judentum im Mittelalter*, ed. P. Wilpert (Berlin, 1966), pp. 228–263; Marjorie Reeves and B. Hirsch-Reich, *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1972), pp. 40–43. See also Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” p. 134. On the possible Jewish background of Joachim see Robert E. Lerner, *Feast of Saint Abraham: Medieval Millenarians and the Jews* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2000). See also now Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder*.



4. Joaquin Carreras Artau, "La 'Allocutio super Tetragrammaton' de Arnaldo de Vilanova," *Sefarad* 9 (1949), pp. 75–105; J. M. Millas-Vallicrosa, "Nota bibliografica acerca de las relaciones entre Arnaldo de Vilanova y la cultura judaica," *Sefarad* 12 (1956), pp. 149–153; and Harold Lee, "Scrutami Scripturas: Joachimist Themes and *Figurae* in the Early Religious Writing of Arnold of Vilanova," *JWCI* 37 (1974), pp. 33–56.
5. See Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, pp. 151–152.
6. See Moshe Idel, "Ramón Lull and Ecstatic Kabbalah: A Preliminary Observation," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 51 (1988), pp. 170–174; idem, "Dignitates and Kavod: Two Theological Concepts in Catalan Mysticism," *Studia Lulliana* 36 (1996), pp. 69–78; and Harvey J. Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (Brill, Leiden, 2000). I wonder whether hints found in two epistles belonging to Abulafia's late writings—*Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, p. 3; and *Ve-Zot li-Yhudah*, p. 28—reflect his awareness of the existence of scholars whom he would call non-Jewish Kabbalists. I hope to return to this issue in another study.
7. *Libro de la caza*, ed. J. Gutierrez de la Vega, in *Biblioteca venatoria*, 5 vols. (M. Tello, Madrid, 1877–99), 3: 4; and Norman Roth, "Jewish Collaborators in Alfonso's Scientific Work," in *Alfonso X the Learned of Castile and His Thirteenth-Century Renaissance*, ed. Robert I. Burns, S.J. (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1991), pp. 60, 225 n. 7.
8. J. L. Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabalah in the Renaissance* (Kennicat Press, New York, 1944).
9. Secret's most comprehensive studies on Christian Kabbalah are *Le Zohar chez les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Librairie Durlacher, Paris, 1958) and *Les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance* (Dunod, Paris, 1964).
10. See especially Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, pp. 84–143, 257–274. For a critique of the paramount importance Yates attributed to Hermetic thought for the intellectual physiognomy of the Renaissance see Brian Copenhaver, "Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus, and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance," in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, ed. I. Merkel and Allen G. Debus (Folger Books, Washington, D.C., 1988), pp. 79–110.
11. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy*, pp. 189–190. For more on her position see Concluding Remarks in this volume.
12. See Wirszubski's classic *Pico della Mirandola* and a collection of his studies, mostly in Hebrew, titled *Bein ha-Shitin* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1990). See more recently Paola Zambelli, "Pico, la cabala e l'Osservanza francescana. Un inedito commento all' <Tesi> di Pico scampato all' Sacco di Roma," *Archivio storico Italiano* 152 (1994), pp. 735–765, reprinted in her *L'apprendista stregone: Astrologia, cabala e arte lulliana in Pico della Mirandola e seguaci* (Saggi Masilio, Venice, 1995), pp. 173–200; S. A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486)* (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Tempe, 1998); Brian P. Copenhaver, "The Secret of Pico's Oratio: Cabala and Renaissance Philosophy," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 26 (2002), pp. 56–81; and idem, "Magic and Dignity of Man, De-Kanting Pico's Oration," in *The*

- Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century, ed. A. J. Grieco, M. Rocke, and P. F. Superbi (Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 2002), pp. 295–320.
13. *The Great Parchment: Flavius Mithridates' Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, ed. Giulio Busi with Simonetta M. Bondoni and Saverio Campanini (Nino Aragno Editore, Turin, 2004).
  14. Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*.
  15. See Paul Oscar Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1956), pp. 221–247; David B. Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol* (Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 1991), pp. 35–40; idem, “Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio’s Appearance in Italy as Seen through the Eyes of an Italian Jew,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 28 (1975), pp. 309–322; Idel, “Hermeticism and Judaism,” pp. 69–70; Wouter Hanegraaff, “Sympathy or the Devil: Renaissance Magic and the Ambivalence of Idols,” *Esoterica* 2 (2000), pp. 1–43; his introduction in Hanegraaff-Bouthoorn, *Lodovico Lazzarelli*, pp. 32 ff.; and Busi, *The Great Parchment*, pp. 96–97.
  16. I see here an attempt by Pico to establish for himself a singular contribution parallel to Ficino’s.
  17. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus, or Discourse on the Seven Days of Creation*, trans. J. Brewer McGawn (Philosophical Library, New York, 1977), introduction to part III, pp. 51–52.
  18. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, p. 523. For more on Pico and Judaism see Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*, pp. 63–69.
  19. See the introduction by Nicolas le Fèvre de la Boderie to the French translation of Francesco Giorgio’s *De Harmonia Mundi* (Paris, 1579) by his brother, Guy le Fèvre de la Boderie.
  20. See Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” pp. 190–191. A similar combination of Kabbalah with other types of speculative literature is visible in the writings of some Jewish authors during the Renaissance and later. For more on Kabbalah and Neoplatonism in the Renaissance see idem, “Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. Lenn E. Goodman (SUNY Press, Albany, 1993), pp. 322–324, 331–344.
  21. Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” pp. 188, 219–220, 226–227.
  22. *Ibid.*, pp. 223–228. For more on Christian Kabbalah see the important study of Bernard McGinn, “Cabalists and Christians: Reflections on Cabala in Medieval and Renaissance Thought,” in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews*, ed. R. H. Popkin and G. M. Weiner (Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, 1994), pp. 11–34; and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggeman, ed., *Christliche Kabbala* (J. Thorbecke, Ostfildern, 2003).
  23. See Moshe Idel, “Italy in Safed, Safed in Italy: Toward an Interactive History of Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah,” in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004), pp. 248–252.
  24. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 424.

25. See Yates, *The Occult Philosophy*, pp. 23–49; Chaim Wirszubski, “Francesco Giorgio’s Commentary on Giovanni Pico’s Kabbalistic Theses,” *JWCI* 32 (1969), pp. 171–199; and Giulio Busi, “Francesco Zorzi, a Methodical Dreamer,” in *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters*, ed. Joseph Dan (Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Mass., 1997), pp. 97–125.
26. See the monumental contributions of Wirszubski, *Sermo de Passione Domini* and *Pico della Mirandola*.
27. The attempt by Catherine Swietlicki to argue that kabbalistic elements are to be found in the writings of some Renaissance Spanish figures seems to me to be an exaggeration; see her *Spanish Christian Kabbalah* (University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1986) and my review of this book in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 78 (1988), pp. 310–313.

## CHAPTER 20: ANTHROPOIDS FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO RENAISSANCE ITALY

1. Yehuda Liebes, “Golem in Gematriah Hokhmah,” *Qiryat Sefer* 63 (1991), pp. 1305–1322, especially p. 1305 (Hebrew).
2. See Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, pp. 50–51, 57–58, etc.
3. Idel, *Golem*, pp. 54–95.
4. On this issue see more in sec. 9. On the centrality of language and reflections about its nature in Italian Kabbalah see also app. 2. Abulafia and Alemanno evince a much greater interest in language than in performance of the commandments as found in theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, including Recanati. See also Moshe Idel, “The Kabbalistic Interpretations of the Secret of ‘Arayyot in Early Kabbalah,” *Kabbalah* 12 (2004), pp. 89–199 (Hebrew).
5. See Edward L. Greenstein, “God’s Golem: The Creation of the Human in Genesis 2,” in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Henning G. Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 2002), pp. 219–239; and Idel, “Golems and God,” pp. 225–228.
6. See, e.g., M. Idel, “The Image of Man above the Sefirot: R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s Doctrine of the Supernal Sefirot [Tzahtzahot] and Its Evolution,” *Da’at* 4 (1980), pp. 41–55 (Hebrew).
7. See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 134–143.
8. Ms. Parma, de Rossi 1390.
9. On this issue see Idel, *Golem*, pp. 96–104.
10. Ms. Cambridge, Add. 647, fol. 19a.
11. *Ibid.*, fol. 19b.
12. See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 149–150, where I analyze a unique manuscript found in Moscow that in my opinion should be added to the material belonging to R. Moshe Azriel or his circle, such as the student who copied R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, Ms. Rome, Angelica 46. This manuscript material was ignored in the recent analysis by Dan, *The “Unique Cherub” Circle*.

13. Namely the third letter of the third unit of three letters.
14. This term is used in some cases in order to point to a Golem. See Idel, *Golem*, p. 114 n. 13.
15. This instruction reflects the importance of solitude in Abulafia's mystical technique. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 9, 38; idem, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 108–111.
16. Ms. Parma, de Rossi 1390, fols. 91a–92b; Ms. Milan, Ambrosiana 52, fols. 111a–118b; Ms. Paris, BN 763, fols. 26a–28a; Ms. Paris, BN 776, fol. 163a. The last source is part of Abulafia's *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'* and thus constitutes a linkage to Abulafia.
17. This issue demands a separate study. In my book on the Golem I did not pay due attention to it.
18. Genesis 12:5 occurs in several instances in the context of creating a Golem, especially in R. Eleazar of Worms's *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*. See Idel, *Golem*, p. 56.
19. Abraham Abulafia, *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1582, fols. 5a–b, in the edition of Amnon Gross (Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 50–51.
20. See the translation of Eleazar of Worms's recipe in Idel, *Golem*, p. 56. See chap. 7, sec. 1, where Abulafia lists Eleazar's commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah* among those he studied in Barcelona in 1270–71.
21. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Paris, BN 774, fol. 155b. See also Idel, *Golem*, p. 98.
22. See also Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, p. 211 n. 36.
23. See Ms. Parma, de Rossi 1390, fols. 94b–95a. See translation and analysis in Idel, *Golem*, pp. 97–98.
24. Abulafia, *Sefer ha-'Ot*, p. 81.
25. On this issue see Idel, *Ben*, pp. 277–376.
26. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 195–203.
27. Abulafia, *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1582, fols. 80a–b.
28. See Ms. Paris, BN 763, fols. 31a–b; Ms. Parma, de Rossi 1390, fols. 94b–95a; Ms. Parma, Perreau 92/8, fol. 117b; Ms. Hamburg, Levi 151, fol. 23b; Ms. Vatican 528, fol. 71b; Ms. Munich 341, fol. 183b; Ms. Cambridge, Add. 647, fol. 18b; Ms. Bar Ilan 286, fol. 82a.
29. *Sefer Ner 'Elohim*, Ms. Munich 10, fols. 172b–173a. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 188. Scholem considers Abulafia to be the author of this anonymous treatise, although no evidence for this assumption is to be found in the unique manuscript; see Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 72–74.
30. Cf. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 188.
31. For the formula “divine man” see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 146 n. 35 and 151 n. 63.
32. Amos Goldreich, ed., “R. Isaac of Acre's *Me'irat 'Einayyim*” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1984), p. 223 (Hebrew).
33. See Harar, *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, p. 111.
34. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, ed. R. Margolioth (Mossad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem, 1978), p. 62.

35. For another instance in which a theme strongly close to the mental Golem was discussed by a group of Kabbalists, perhaps related to R. Yitzhaq of Acre, see Idel, *Golem*, pp. 112–113.
36. This is how R. Yitzhaq referred to himself even when he was old, deliberately pointing to his modesty. See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 87–88 n. 43.
37. Instead of R. Ze'ira in the famous passage in BT, *Sanhedrin*, fol. 65b, dealing with the creation of the artificial man.
38. Unfortunately, I have not found such a discussion in the extant manuscripts of 'Otzar Hayyim.
39. Yod is the first letter of Yetzirah, namely formation.
40. Bet is the first letter of Beriy'ah, creation.
41. On the kabbalistic source that was used by R. Yitzhaq see sec. 9.
42. R. Yitzhaq of Acre, Ms. Sassoon 919, p. 217; Ms. Cambridge, Genizah Taylor-Schechter K 12.4, p. 22. For more on this passage see Idel, *Golem*, pp. 108–111.
43. See Gershom Scholem, "Hitpatehut Torat ha-'Olamot be-Qabbalat ha-Rishonim," *Tarbitz* 2 (1931), pp. 415–442; *ibid.*, 3 (1932), pp. 33–66 (Hebrew); Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 88 n. 47.
44. Goldreich, "R. Isaac of Acre's Me'irat 'Einayyim," p. 20.
45. See Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," p. 71.
46. R. Yitzhaq of Acre, 'Otzar Hayyim, Ms. Moscow, Guensburg 775, fol. 22a.
47. See *idem*, 'Otzar Hayyim, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1911, fol. 150b.
48. The numerical value of the consonants of these two nouns amounts in gematria to Ma'aseh Merkavah. See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 151–153.
49. R. Yitzhaq of Acre, 'Otzar Hayyim, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1911, fol. 150b.
50. See the text of R. Yitzhaq of Acre, 'Otzar Hayyim, Ms. Moscow, Guensburg 775, fol. 129a, translated and analyzed in Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 449–460.
51. Cf. Psalms 89:3. *Hesed* is numerically equivalent to 72, a clear hint at the divine name of seventy-two letters.
52. On man as the most compounded of all the beings in Abulafia and his sources, see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 9.
53. R. Reuven Tzarfati, *Commentary on Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*, Ms. Cambridge, Add. 505.7, fol. 25b.
54. See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 104–105.
55. See Alemanno's untitled treatise, Ms. Paris, BN 849, fols. 69a–70a.
56. Alemanno was deeply influenced by Abu Bakr ibn Tufayl's *Hayy bin Yaqtan*, as interpreted by a mid-fourteenth-century Provençal Jewish commentator, R. Moshe Narboni, whose commentary he possessed. There the human being learns all the sciences by himself. This topic warrants a separate study; meanwhile see Idel, "The Study Program," pp. 307 n. 36 and 313 nn. 78–79. On this work see Maurice R. Hayoun, "Le commentaire de Moïse de Narbonne (1300–1362) sur le Hayy ibn Yaqzân d'Ibn Tufayl," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 55 (1988), pp. 23–98. Alemanno respected Ibn Tufayl so deeply that

- he compared the relationship between him and all the other sages to the relationship between Moses and all the other prophets. See Idel, “The Study Program,” p. 313 n. 79.
57. Alemanno, untitled treatise, Ms. Paris, BN 849, fol. 79a.
  58. This term comes from the Hebrew translation of Ibn Tufayl’s *Hayy bin Yoqtan*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1337, fol. 102b. See also Maurice R. Hayoun, *La philosophie et la théologie de Moïse de Narbonne* (Mohr/Siebeck, Tübingen 1989), pp. 210–214; and, in this volume, Concluding Remarks and app. 4, note 13.
  59. Compare the text from *Hesheq Shlomo*, quoted later in this chapter, which regards the wisdom of creating an artificial anthropoid as a prophetic lore. Compare also the text of R. Abraham Bibago, quoted in Idel, *Golem*, pp. 165–167. It is possible that Alemanno was acquainted with his work, although it is also probable that they were influenced by common sources, such as R. Moses Narboni’s commentary on Ibn Tufayl’s *Hayy bin Yoqtan*. See chap. 16, sec. 2, in this volume. For the searches for prophecy in Alemanno’s Christian entourage see Stéphane Toussaint, “L’individuo estatico: Tecniche profetiche in Marsilio Ficino e Giovanni Pico della Mirandola,” *Bruniana & Campanelliana: Ricerche filosofiche e materiali storico-testuali* 6:2 (2000), pp. 352–353, quoting an early-sixteenth-century testimony of Girolamo Benivieni concerning Giovanni Pico and Ficino as striving for prophetic and magical experience. For other associations of Pico with prophecy see Toussaint, *ibid.*, pp. 356–357; and also Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*, pp. 74–75. See also Toussaint’s article “Prophetare alla fine del Quattrocento,” in *Studi Savonaroliani verso il V centenario*, ed. G. C. Garfagnini (Edizioni del Galluzzo, Florence, 1996), pp. 167–181; and Lelli, *La lettera preziosa*, pp. 18–19 n. 33. For another similarity between ecstatic Kabbalah and Ficino see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 54–55. See also Concluding Remarks, sec. 1, in this volume.
  60. *Harkavat ’otam ha-shorashi[m]*. For the understanding of the account of the chariot, which is in my opinion dealt with here, and the coalescence of the letters, see already Abraham Abulafia’s view, discussed in Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 50–52; and the view of R. Yehudah ha-Levi, discussed in Idel, *Golem*, p. 87. Yehudah ha-Levi, though comparing the movement of the spheres with the combinations of letters and the preparation of the matter to receive form from God, does not explicitly mention the creation of an anthropoid. For the use of the term *shorashim* see also app. 3, note 39, in this volume.
  61. On this term see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 38–41.
  62. This mistaken attribution differs from the talmudic discussion but may have an earlier source, since it occurs also in other authors. See Idel, *Golem*, p. 188 n. 18.
  63. Namely Bezalel. Cf. BT, *Berakhot*, fol. 55a.
  64. R. Yohanan Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 17a, in the margin beside a quotation from Abraham Abulafia’s commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, titled *Sitrei Torah*.
  65. Compare the discussion earlier, in sec. 5, of R. Yitzhaq of Acre’s understanding of creation of the Golem as connected to the highest realm in the universe. Although it is unlikely that Alemanno was acquainted with the earlier Kabbalist’s text, the possibility cannot be entirely excluded.

66. See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 106–108. On *devequt* as conjunction as a relatively advanced ideal see app. 3 of this volume.
67. See Stéphane Toussaint, “Ficino’s Orphic Magic or Jewish Astrology and Oriental Philosophy?: A Note on Spiritus, the Three Books on Life, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Zarza,” *Accademia* 2 (2000), pp. 19–21.
68. See also Toussaint, “L’individuo estatico,” pp. 351–379.
69. See Klaus Herrmann, “Golemtraditionen bei Johanan Alemanno,” in *An der Schwelle zur Moderne: Juden in der Renaissance*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and Annette Winkelmann (Brill, Leiden, 2003), pp. 129–154, especially pp. 153–154 for the Hebrew texts. However, there is nothing new in Alemanno’s citation, since he simply relies on a fuller version of R. Eleazar of Worms, unlike the deficient version in the printed *Commentary* on *Sefer Yetzirah* and in some manuscripts.
70. *Qarqa’ betulah* occurs also in R. Eleazar’s original recipe. In the version by Lazzarelli, to be discussed later in the chapter, the word is ‘Adama, “earth.” On the mountain and virgin soil see also Pseudo-Sa’adyah, *Commentary* on *Sefer Yetzirah*, Ms. Munich 40, fol. 56a. I assume that the two recipes are independent of each other but reflect an earlier common source, similar to what we find in *Shimushei Tehilim*, on Psalm 10, where the dust is taken from virgin earth that has not been plowed, and upon it names are written; but this magical rite is performed for another purpose.
71. In Alemanno *va-yigalgel*, “turned over”; in R. Eleazar’s version it is *va-ygbal*, “he kneaded,” which is better. For the occurrence of the root GBL in earlier sources dealing with the creation of Adam see Idel, *Golem*, pp. 34–35.
72. For this type of combination, found also in R. Eleazar of Worms’s *Sefer ha-Shem*, see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, p. 23; and idem, *Golem*, pp. 57–58.
73. Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 95b. This version is quite similar to what is found in the earliest extant manuscript of R. Eleazar of Worms, copied in 1344, in Ms. Jerusalem, Fischel, fol. 18a.
74. Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 95b. See the Hebrew translation by Qalonymos ben Qalonymos, done at the beginning of the fourteenth century in Italy, found in Ms. Paris, BN 1055, fol. 54b. For an earlier quotation of this passage by R. Jacob ben Solomon, a fourteenth-century Provençal author acquainted with Kabbalah, see Dov Schwartz, *Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, trans. D. Loubish and B. Stein (Brill, Leiden, 2005), p. 235. On the book *Sefer ha-Peri* and its commentary in Hebrew translation see *ibid.*, pp. 235–236, 249–250 n. 75. Alemanno uses the two books several times in his works.
75. *tzelamim*. Thus it seems that Alemanno does not doubt the efficacy of idolatrous astromagic.
76. Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 95b.
77. The phrase “world of the letters” is characteristic of Alemanno’s thought, and it stands for a world lower than that of the sefirot and higher than that of the angels. See Moshe Idel, “The Epistle of Rabbi Yitzhaq of Pisa(?) in Its Three Versions,” *Qovetz ‘Al Yad*, n.s. 10 (1982), p. 177 n. 89 (Hebrew). It reflects the influence of R. Jacob ben Jacob



ha-Kohen, Abraham Abulafia, and Reuven Tzarfati. See also chap. 11 in this volume. This reification of language is part of the structure of thought that seeks to attribute magical powers to language, and is part of Alemanno's elevation of magic over mental contemplation.

78. Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 95b.
79. See *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, Ms. Parma, de Rossi 1390, fols. 118a–137a; and Idel, *Golem*, pp. 86–91.
80. Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 22b.
81. Ibid. For the context of this view and its possible influence on Bruno see Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” pp. 203–204; and chap. 14 of this volume.
82. Cf. Exodus 31:3, 35:31. The term *melakh'ah* occurs in the context of the creation of the Golem in R. Eleazar's *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*, Ms. Jerusalem, Fischel, fols. 17b–18a. The sequence of operations in the Bible fits with the emphasis on action rather than mental operations.
83. BT, *Berakhot*, fol. 55b.
84. The relationship between combinations of letters and prophecy is characteristic of the prophetic, namely ecstatic, Kabbalah of R. Abraham Abulafia, whose influence on the views of Alemanno was significant. See also Concluding Remarks, sec. 1.
85. The spiritual forces are part of the forces manipulated by the intellectual medieval magic of both Arabs and Jews; see Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” pp. 201–202.
86. It seems that Alemanno approximates here an understanding of the letters as elements, or *stoicheia*, similar to that in *Sefer Yetzirah*.
87. This conflation of the creative acts in just one person conflicts with the talmudic story.
88. This view, too, seems to be influenced by Abraham Abulafia's view of *Sefer Yetzirah*, understood on its exoteric level as dealing with the creation of the world; see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 52.
89. BT, *Hagigah*, fol. 11b. The mention of the necessity to study the account of creation by two persons may have something to do with the fact that *Sefer Yetzirah* was supposed to be studied by two persons, not by one alone. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 178. However, in R. Eleazar of Worms's *Commentary on Sefer Yetzirah*, Ms. Jerusalem, Fischel, fol. 17b, it is clear that his requirement of a minimum of two persons for studying *Sefer Yetzirah* is dependent upon the late midrash and is not, as claimed by Peter Schaefer (following Scholem though not mentioning him), a reversal of the discussion in BT, *Hagigah*. See Schaefer, “The Magic of the Golem: The Early Development of the Golem Legend,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 46:1–2 (1995), p. 260.
90. R. Yohanan Alemanno, *Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Moscow, Guensburg 140, fol. 251b.
91. In another important discussion, in his untitled treatise, Ms. Paris, BN 849, fol. 25a, Alemanno presents the possibility that a full-fledged human being may emerge in a natural way in certain atmospheric conditions, by means of *generatio equivoca*. See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 173–175 and the bibliography there. See also Sami S. Hawi, *Islamic Naturalism and Mysticism: A Philosophical Study of Ibn Tufayl's Hayy bin Yaqzan* (Brill, Leiden, 1974).



92. See Alemanno, untitled treatise, Ms. Paris, BN 849, fols. 77a, 124b.
93. On Lazzarelli and Judaism see Claudio Moreschini, *Storia dell'ermetismo cristiano* (Morcelliana, Brescia, 2000), pp. 234–236; and idem, “La poesia cristiana di Ludovico Lazzarelli,” *Accademia* 5 (2003), pp. 56–57.
94. Hanegraaff-Bouthoorn, *Lodovico Lazzarelli*, pp. 256–258. The Latin text of *Crater Hermetis* was printed by M. Brini in E. Garin, M. Brini, C. Vasoli, and P. Zambelli, eds., *Testi umanistici su l'ermetismo* (Archivio di Filosofia, Rome, 1955), p. 68. See also the detailed analysis of this passage in Hanegraaff-Bouthoorn, *Lodovico Lazzarelli*, pp. 84–96.
95. Gershom Scholem, “The Image of the Golem,” in Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Joseph ben Shlomo (Mossad Bialik, Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 405–406 n. 62 (Hebrew).
96. The redness of the earth may have something to do with the possible conflation of the vocalization of the consonants of 'Adama, as if related to 'Odem, “red.”
97. See Garin et al., *Testi umanistici su l'ermetismo*, p. 68.
98. Cf. Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (Warburg Institute, London, 1958), p. 68. See also Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 202–203; and idem, “Hermeticism and Judaism.”
99. Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 95a.
100. See, e.g., the texts in Idel, “Hermeticism and Judaism,” p. 65; and Schwartz, *Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, pp. 17, 247, 281–282 n. 73. For the concept of marrying heaven and earth as part of magic in late Quattrocento Florentine sources see Idel, “The Study Program,” pp. 325–327.
101. Idel, “Hermeticism and Judaism,” p. 65; and Dov Schwartz, *The Philosophy of a Fourteenth-Century Jewish Neoplatonic Circle* (Ben Tzvi Institute and Bialik Institute, Jerusalem, 1996), pp. 194, 266 (Hebrew). On the importance of Ibn Zarza's *Meqor Hayyim* for the astromagical theories of Alemanno see also chap. 21 and app. 4 in this volume. The book in which Enoch is mentioned differs, naturally, from the other books attributed to Enoch, including what is called the Hebrew Enoch. However, Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*, p. 85, suggests that Lazzarelli was perhaps referring to a Hebrew book of Enoch. The assumption that conjunction between man and God is possible by means of sacrifices is found explicitly in Alemanno's *Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1535, fol. 97b, although he assumes that this is a lower path cultivated by the forefathers, in contrast to the higher way proposed later by Moses and then Solomon, which operates by means of desire, a Platonic theory adopted by Alemanno from Ibn Falaquera's books.
102. R. Yitzhaq of Acre, *Collectanea*, Ms. New York, JTS 1777, fol. 33b. On the fuller context of this quotation see Moshe Idel, “Enoch—The Mystical Cobbler,” *Kabbalah* 5 (2000), pp. 268–270 (Hebrew); and the updated version in Idel, *The Angelic World*, pp. 105–134.
103. See Asclepius 23–24, quoted also in Lazzarelli's *Crater Hermetis*, 27.1, in Hanegraaff-Bouthoorn, *Ludovico Lazzarelli*, pp. 248–255.

104. Wouter Hanegraaff, "Sympathy or the Devil: Renaissance Magic and the Ambivalence of Idols," *Esoterica* 2 (2000), pp. 1–43, 84–96, and especially pp. 45–46 n. 143; Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 202–203; and idem, "Hermeticism and Judaism."
105. See Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 155–156.
106. *Ibid.*, pp. 156–159.
107. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, p. 56.
108. E.g., Ms. Parma, de Rossi 1390, fols. 92b–93a.
109. I printed this early manuscript version in the Hebrew version of my book *Golem*, pp. 271–275, together with some variants from other early manuscripts. More recently I analyzed its structure and meaning in idem, "Golems and God," pp. 235–243.
110. See Idel, "Golems and God," pp. 248–252.
111. The first statement of the book deals with the thirty-two paths of knowledge by which the worlds have been created. The comparison of the numerical value of LB to the structure of the Pentateuch aims at establishing some form of association between the two major accounts of creation.
112. These are the first and the last letters of the Pentateuch, which means that LB—heart—encompasses the entire Torah.
113. 'Erkkah, literally, value or price.
114. Compare *Midrash Tehillim*, ed. S. Buber (Vilnius, 1891), p. 33, discussed by Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 37; and by Yehuda Liebes, *Ars Poetica in Sefer Yetzirah* (Schocken, Tel Aviv, 2000) (Hebrew), p. 4.
115. This is an invention of the anonymous Kabbalist.
116. For the relationship between these two figures in the Middle Ages see Eli Yassif, *The Tales of Ben Sira in the Middle Ages* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 17, 32–36 (Hebrew).
117. Anon., *Commentary on the Secret of the Tetragrammaton*, Ms. New York, JTS 1887, fol. 7b. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 180–181. The text was paraphrased in the widely available kabbalistic book *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*, pt. I, fols. 51a–d. On this book see chap. 22 in this volume. For a use of this passage see also R. Jacob Israel Finzi's decision against printing the *Zohar*, printed by Simhah Assaf in *Sinai* 5 (1939–40), pp. 60–62 (Hebrew). On the story of Jeremiah see, e.g., BT, 'Avodah Zarah, fol. 17a, etc.; and Idel, *Golem*, p. 98 and n. 10.
118. Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*, p. 15 n. 50.
119. For a late-fifteenth-century Latin translation of this Hebrew text, which could have had an impact on some Christian authors in Italy, see *ibid.*, pp. 15, 19–21, 31.
120. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 180–181. See also Idel, *Golem*, pp. 177–179.
121. On this issue see my introduction to Reuchlin's *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, pp. xvi–xix.
122. This is exactly the deficiency of the anthropoid according to the talmudic story in BT, *Sanhedrin*, fol. 65b.
123. On the association between speech and thought see also an early Ashkenazi text belonging to R. Yehudah he-Hasid, discussed in Idel, *Golem*, p. 55. I assume that this is an earlier tradition found in Samaritan literature, as I shall try to show elsewhere.

124. On China as a place of magic see another text preserved by Ibn Zarza and discussed in app. 4. On taking dust from the mountain see above the recipe of R. Eleazar as quoted by both Alemanno and Lazzarelli. The parallel is quite astonishing, and shows that there might have been a common source. In any case this thematic affinity demonstrates that R. Eleazar of Worms did not invent his recipe. See also note 135 below.
125. The Hebrew text and the English translation according to Raphael Jospe and Dov Schwartz, “Shem Tov Falaquera’s Lost Bible Commentary,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 64 (1933), pp. 199–200. On the creation of life in this book see Pinella Travaglia, “Asclepio e la produzione artificiale della vita nella Agricoltura Nabatea,” in *Hermeticism from Late Antiquity to Humanism*, ed. P. Lucentini, I. Parri, and V. P. Compagni (Turnhout, Brespols, 2004), pp. 315–338, who does not deal with the passage translated here. See also Steven M. Wasserstrom, “The Challenge of Artificial Life: Medieval Jewish Responses from the Muslim World,” *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly*, Fall 2000, pp. 69–80.
126. On this thinker, whose writings were well known to Yohanan Alemanno, see Raphael Jospe, *Torah and Sophia: The Life and Thought of Shem Tov ibn Falaquera* (Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 1988).
127. See *L’agriculture Nabatéene, traduction en Arabe attribué à Abu Bakr Ahmad b. ‘Ali al-Kasdani, connu sous le nom d’Ibn Wahshiyya*, ed. Toufic Fahd, vol. 2 (Damascus, 1995), pp. 1318–1325. Thanks to Professor Sarah Stroumsa for her help in finding the quotation.
128. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963), pp. 515, 518, 522, 542, 547, 548, 549, 559.
129. See Pseudo-Ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-‘Atzamim*, ed. Menasse Grossberg (London, 1901), p. 21. See also app. 3.
130. See Idel, “Golems and God,” pp. 228–231.
131. Idel, *Golem*, pp. 4–5.
132. On this issue see Idel, *Golem* (Hebrew version), pp. 271–275.
133. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
134. See chap. 7 for a description of Ms. Parma, de Rossi 1390.
135. Compare the suggestion made by Peter Schaefer to connect the beginning of the Golem legend with the claim of the Hasidei Ashkenaz for purity; see his “The Magic of the Golem,” pp. 259–261. Schaefer, who mentions R. Yehudah Barceloni, nevertheless ignores the fuller version of the late midrash as preserving material that predates the Hasidei Ashkenaz, a fact that problematizes his theory. See also the mid-eleventh-century discussions already alluded to in Idel, *Golem*, p. 40 n. 18, but ignored by Schaefer. I shall elaborate in a separate study upon the details of the contribution of these early sources for a better understanding of the Golem ideas.
136. See the text from the Qumran literature *Pesher Habaquq* 8:9. Cf. F. G. Martinez and E. J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, vol. 1 (Brill, Leiden, 1998), p. 16. Although my reading of the Hebrew phrase *Niqra’ al shem ha-’Emmet* as “who was called in the name of Truth” is not attested in the translations or commentaries

I am acquainted with, I hope to be able to elaborate on this proposal elsewhere. I assume that the translation of the phrase *shem ha-'Emmet* as “the name of Truth” is erroneous. This is also the case in the later Arabic, where the term *Haq* means both God and truth, as is the case in Samaritan thought. See Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord* (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1985), pp. 156–157 n. 231. See also BT, Sabbath, fol. 55a; Genesis Rabba 8:5, p. 60; Fossum, *The Name of God*, pp. 245–253; Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, p. 229 n. 7; idem, *Ars Poetica in Sefer Yetzirah*, p. 185; Idel, *Golem*, pp. 4–5, 306–313; and Idel, *Ben*, pp. 29–30.

137. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, pp. 180–181. See also the views of two scholars who follow Scholem’s interpretation: Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (Routledge, London, 1994), p. 59; Eric Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation* (Louisiana University Press, Baton Rouge, 1956), p. 465; and idem, “Science, Politics and Gnosticism,” in *Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays*, trans. William J. Fitzpatrick (Gateway Edition, Chicago, 1968), pp. 53–73. See especially *ibid.*, pp. 56–60, 64–65.
138. See also chap. 16, sec. 2, on Al-Bataliyusi’s *Book of the Imaginary Circles*.
139. See Irene J. Winter, “‘Idols of the King’: Royal Images as Recipient of Ritual Action in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 6:1 (1992), pp. 13–42.
140. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
141. Another method of animating a lifeless structure is to put a divine name in the mouth of an anthropoid or of a dead person. This is evident already in magical texts, in the midrash, in *Megillat 'Ahima'atz ben Paltiel*, and in a more astral manner in the various layers of the *Zohar*. See Daniel Sperber, “Some Rabbinic Themes in Magical Recipes,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 16 (1985), pp. 95–99.
142. For more on the importance in rabbinic literature of the divine image as the shape found in man see Lorberbaum, *Image of God*.
143. See chap. 16, sec. 2. In addition to the vast Arabic philosophical literature available in Latin in the Middle Ages, Abu Yusuf ibn Yishak al-Kindi’s famous book in its Latin translation, *De Radiis*, had a direct influence. See the bibliography collected in Al-Kindi, *De radiis*, trans. Didier Ottaviani (Editions Allia, Paris, 2003); and Pinella Travaglia, *Magic, Causality and Intentionality: The Doctrine of Rays in Al-Kindi (Micrologus’s Library)* (Edizioni del Galluzzo, Florence, 1999). I assume that Alemanno knew this book also. The role attributed to utterances was central in the magical worldview of Al-Kindi. See Couliano, *Eros and Magic*, pp. 118–123, 126–128. Even Sufi material was present in the Hebrew material available in Florence. So, for example, in one of Moshe Narboni’s books there are quotations from the important mystic Al-Hallaj, as Georges Vajda pointed out in his “Comment le philosophe juif Moïse de Narbonne comprenait-il les paroles extatiques des soufis?,” in *Actas del primer congreso de estudios arabes islamicos* (Madrid, 1964), pp. 129–135; while Abuhamed al-Ghazzali’s views were known from a Hebrew version of one of his books, titled *Me’oznei Tzedeq*, which Alemanno quoted often. For the impact of Al-Bataliyusi via Alemanno on Giovanni Pico, see Idel, *Ascensions on High*, pp. 167–203.

CHAPTER 21: ASTROMAGICAL PNEUMATIC ANTHROPOIDS FROM  
MEDIEVAL SPAIN TO RENAISSANCE ITALY

1. See Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, ed. and trans. M. Greenberg (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960); J. L. McKenzie, "God and Nature in the Old Testament," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 14 (1952) pp. 18–39, 124–145.
2. See Michael E. Stone, "Lists of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature," in *Magnalia Dei, or the Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archeology in the Memory of G. Ernst Wright*, ed. Frank M. Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and Patrick D. Miller (Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1976), pp. 426–428; idem, "The Parabolic Use of Natural Order in Judaism of the Second Temple Age," in *Gilgul: Essays on Transformation, Revolution, and Permanence in the History of Religions Presented to R. J. Zwi Werblowsky*, ed. S. Shaked, D. Shulman, and G. G. Stroumsa (Brill, Leiden, 1987), pp. 298–308.
3. See Haym Soloveitchik, "Three Themes in the Sefer Hasidim," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 1 (1976), pp. 311–325.
4. It is obvious that magical elements were important in the Heikhalot literature, mostly an elitist mystical-magical kind of literature, more so than was previously recognized in modern scholarship; see, e.g., Peter Schaefer, "Gershom Scholem Reconsidered: The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism," in his *Hekhalot-Studien* (Mohr/Siebeck, Tübingen, 1988), pp. 277–295; idem, "Jewish Magic Literature in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41:1 (1990) pp. 75–91; Michael Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996). In more general terms on the status of magic in Judaism see Moshe Idel, "On Judaism, Jewish Mysticism, and Magic," in *Envisioning Magic*, ed. Peter Schaefer and Hans G. Kippenberg (Brill, Leiden, 1997), pp. 195–214.
5. On Ibn Ezra's astrology see Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Some Astrological Themes in the Thought of Abraham ibn Ezra," in *Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath*, ed. I. Twersky and J. M. Harris (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1993), pp. 28–85; Shlomo Sela, *Astrology and Biblical Exegesis in Abraham ibn Ezra's Thought* (Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 1999) (Hebrew); Ron Barkai, *Science, Magic, and Mythology in the Middle Ages* (Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 7–35 (Hebrew); Abraham ibn Ezra, *Le livre des fondements astrologiques*, ed. and trans. Jacques Halbronn (Retz, Paris, 1977); the numerous studies of Dov Schwartz, especially *Studies on Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, trans. D. Loubish and B. Stein (Brill, Leiden, 2005); idem, "The Religious Philosophy of Samuel ibn Zarza" (Ph.D. diss., Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 1989) (Hebrew); idem, *The Philosophy of a Fourteenth-Century Jewish Neoplatonic Circle* (Ben Tzvi Institute and Bialik Institute, Jerusalem, 1996) (Hebrew); idem, "Different Forms of Magic in Jewish Thought in Fourteenth-Century Spain," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 57 (1990–91), pp. 17–47 (Hebrew).
6. See Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonical Interpretations," pp. 204–210.

7. See Idel, "Hermeticism and Judaism," pp. 63–64, 65–66.
8. On Ficino's astromagic see Couliano, *Eros and Magic*, pp. 137–143. The influence of Hermetic magic on Renaissance magic has been accepted by scholars since the works of Daniel P. Walker and Frances A. Yates. More recently the importance of Neoplatonic magic in Ficino's thought has been highlighted by Brian Copenhaver, "Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus, and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance," in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, ed. I. Merkel and Allen G. Debus (Folger Books, Washington, D.C., 1988), pp. 79–110. The deep influence of Picatrix, a work closely related to Hermetic magic, on Renaissance thinkers is accepted by modern scholars.
9. Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations," pp. 192–195, 204–211.
10. See idem, "Jewish Magic from the Renaissance," pp. 82–117; idem, *Hasidism*.
11. Idem, "Hermeticism and Judaism," pp. 67–70. Stéphane Toussaint has demonstrated this assumption in a definitive way in his important study "Ficino's Orphic Magic or Jewish Astrology and Oriental Philosophy?: A Note on Spiritus, the Three Books on Life, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Zarza," *Accademia* 2 (2000), pp. 29–31.
12. See chap. 16, sec. 4.
13. See José Sangrador Gil, *La escuela de traductores de Toledo y sus colaboradores judíos* (Instituto Provincial de Investigaciones y Estudios Toledanos, Toledo, 1985).
14. Syntheses between some Jewish mystical concepts and Arabic magic are already evident in the Arabic writings of R. Yehudah ben Nissim ibn Malka, who flourished in the mid-thirteenth century, apparently in North Africa, long before the rearrival of Arabic magic in some Jewish elite circles in Spain in the fourteenth century. See Moshe Idel, "The Beginning of Kabbala in North Africa?: A Forgotten Document by R. Yehuda ben Nissim ibn Malka," *Pe'amim* 43 (1990), pp. 4–15 (Hebrew); and Georges Vajda, *Juda ben Nissim ibn Malka, philosophe Juive Marocain* (Collection Hesperis, Paris, 1954). On the different attitudes to astral magic in the *Zohar* see Dorit Cohen-Aloro, "Magic and Sorcery in the *Zohar*" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1989) (Hebrew).
15. Moritz Steinschneider, *Zur Pseudepigraphische Literatur* (Berlin, 1862), pp. 26–27. Despite his learned description of Ms. Munich, Hebr. 214, Steinschneider did not distinguish between the epistle on alchemy, which constitutes the greatest part of the described text, and the epistle on astrology, contained in the Munich manuscript, fols. 33a–b, which is an entirely different document. Ms. Ghirondi 28 (now Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2779), which contains Maimonides' spurious epistle on alchemy, found also in Ms. Munich, Hebr. 214, does not contain the epistle on astrology. See also Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994), pp. 300–313.
16. See Gershom Scholem, "Mi-Hoqer li-Mequbbal," *Tarbitz* 5 (1935), p. 95 (Hebrew). A spurious epistle dealing with astrological magic and attributed to Maimonides has nothing to do with the present text. Scholem correctly pointed out the affinity between that epistle and Abraham Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah. See also above, chap. 12, sec. 2. Maimonides himself rejected astrology and magic; see Tzvi Langermann, "Maimonides' Repudiation of Astrology," *Maimonidean Studies* 2 (1992), pp. 123–158. Cf. app. 4 in this volume.

17. See Hartwig Hirschfeld, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Hebrew Mss. of the Montefiore Library* (MacMillan, London, 1904), p. 128.
18. Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Hebräische Handschriften . . . in München* (Catalogus Codicum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Regiae Monacensis, Munich, 1895), p. 95.
19. In Ms. London, Montefiore 431, the name of the author of the original letter was erased and is no longer legible.
20. The following text has not been found in any of Claudius Ptolemaeus's extant writings.
21. This is the version in Ms. London, Montefiore 431. The meaning of the phrase "star of the Sun," namely the planet of the Sun, in Hebrew astrological terminology is Mercury. Although the term "Sun" appears alone in the two other manuscripts, on the basis of the passage in Ibn Billya quoted later in this chapter, apparently from an Arabic version of the text, which reads 'Utarid, namely Sun, I have preferred the version in the London ms.
22. In Ms. Budapest, Kaufmann 246, the version is 'Avir, namely Air. In Ms. Munich, Hebr. 214, we find 'Or, namely light, apparently a distortion of 'Avir. However, as we know from medieval astrology, Aquarius belongs to the element of water. Thus it seems that at least in this case the version of Ms. London, Montefiore 431, is superior to that of the Budapest ms.
23. The term *tzurah* has more than one meaning in this epistle: whereas it stands here for "form," shortly afterward it also stands for "constellation." For the various astromagical meanings of this term see also Schwartz, *Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*.
24. Namely Aquarius, portrayed as the drawer of water.
25. Ms. Budapest, Kaufmann 246, has 'Ofel, namely the dark house. Ms. Munich, Hebr. 214, has Shafel, namely low. I prefer the version of Ms. London, Montefiore 431, *Nofel*, "descendant," which complements the term "ascendant" designating the zodiacal sign Gemini.
26. This is the version in Ms. Munich, Hebr. 214. The version in the two other manuscripts seems to be erroneous: instead of *u-Levanah* we find *ve-lifneihem*, "in front of."
27. *Hokhmat ha-tekhunah* normally means astronomy; however, in this context it is not evident whether the author is referring to astronomy or to astrology.
28. The recurrence of the term previously used for the anthropoid form, in order to designate the configuration of the planets and "stars," seems to strengthen the parallelism between the form below and the constellation above. The affinity between the two realms involves not only the attraction of the supernal influx by the lower form, but also a structural similarity between these realms. See also another text found in Ibn Zarza, discussed in app. 4.
29. This term occurs already in R. Shelomo Itzhaqi's famous *Commentary on the Bible*, on Genesis 1:26–27, in connection with the creation of man in accordance with the *defus*, the Hebrew form of the Greek *typos*, apparently the mold prepared for him.
30. The idea of the need for a handsome form seems to be related to the concept that the soul looks for a beautiful body. See Paul Kraus, "Jabir ibn Hayyan et la science greque," *Mémoires présentés à l'Institut d'Egypte* 45 (1942), pt. II, p. 124 and n. 5.



31. In Hebrew *keli* can also mean an instrument. For the use of the term *keli* in relation to the creation of an anthropoid see Idel, *Golem*, pp. 174, 195 n. 104. However, even if the term is to be translated as “vessel,” it is obviously not the vessel wherein the anthropoid is created but the instrument for pouring the metal. Thus it has nothing to do with the theory of the creation of the homunculus in Paracelsus’s practice.
32. *Sha’ah* in the Munich and Budapest mss.
33. *Ruhaniyyut* is the Hebrew translation of the Arabic *ruhaniyat*. For a history of this concept, which was crucial in medieval Arabic and Jewish magic, see Pines, “On the Term *Ruhaniyyut*”; and Idel, *Hasidism*.
34. See the relationship between the revelation of secrets and prophecy and the *ruhaniyat* of a person in *Ghayyat al-Hakim*, namely *Picatrix*, as analyzed by Pines, “On the Term *Ruhaniyyut*,” p. 520.
35. On the meaning of the term *hitbodedut* as mental concentration see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 103–169; idem, “*Hitbodedut* as Concentration in Jewish Philosophy,” in Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, ed. Moshe Idel, Zeev W. Harvey, and E. Schweid, 2 vols. (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1988), 1: 39–59 (Hebrew).
36. In other parts of the epistle I have translated this term as “wisdom,” but here it seems to stand for thinking about a certain science or about issues related to discursive knowledge that cannot be decided by a rationalist process, and the thinker needs a special nonrationalist avenue. Compare the story on Avicenna adduced in Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 112. For more on this theory see ‘Amirah ‘Eiran, “The View of *Hads* in R. Yehudah ha-Levi and Maimonides,” *Tura’* 4 (1996), pp. 117–146 (Hebrew).
37. This is one of the qualities of Saturn; see Idel, “*Hitbodedut* as Concentration in Jewish Philosophy,” pp. 41–42.
38. The *varia* is not clear, although the meaning seems to be that the person is able to sustain the troubles related to intense study.
39. The Hebrew term *hitbodadeti* can also be translated “I have isolated myself.” However, I prefer this translation because it fits the use of the same term above. See note 35 above.
40. See note 16 above.
41. On this controversial figure see Schwartz, “The Religious Philosophy of Samuel ibn Zarza”; idem, *Philosophy of a Jewish Neoplatonic Circle*. On his views on magic see idem, “Forms of Magic in Jewish Thought in Fourteenth-Century Spain”; idem, *Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*. See also app. 4 in this volume.
42. See Schwartz, *Philosophy of a Jewish Neoplatonic Circle*, p. 29, for a list of quotations of Ibn Billya in Ibn Zarza’s supercommentary. For more on Ibn Billya see recently Ari Ackerman, “A Magical Fragment of Ibn Billya’s *Me’or ‘Enayyim*,” *Kabbalah* 1 (1996), pp. 73–80; and Schwartz, *Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, pp. 102–103, who supplied the pertinent bibliography on his thought and writings; as well as his edition of Ibn Billya’s book *Magen David* in *Qovetz ‘Al Yad*, n.s. 12 (1994), pp. 171–206. It is perhaps pertinent that a Hebrew manuscript that includes Ibn Billya’s *Magen David* has been



- preserved in a single manuscript, copied in 1485, and is found in a Florentine library: Ms. Florence, Laurenziana-Medicea, Gaddi 155. This manuscript also preserves another, more widely available work by Ibn Billya: the introduction to his *Commentary on the Thirteen Principles*. See Schwartz's edition of *Magen David*, pp. 183–184.
43. This is the Arabic term for Saturn; in the Hebrew text it is spelled in Hebrew characters.
  44. This is the Arabic term for Mercury. Thus it is obvious that the Hebrew form *kokhav ha-Shemesh* in the text of the epistle indeed stands for Mercury; see note 21 above.
  45. Samuel ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim* (Mantua, 1559), fol. 21b, printed also in an abridged edition in *Margaliyyot Tovah* (Ivano-Frankovsk, 1927), fol. 30b. See also Schwartz's edition of Ibn Billya's *Magen David*, pp. 181–182.
  46. See Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (Warburg Institute, London, 1958), pp. 40–42; and Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, pp. 35 ff.
  47. Gershom Scholem, *Elements of the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Joseph ben Shlomo (Mossad Bialik, Jerusalem 1976), pp. 362–364 (Hebrew); idem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, trans. J. Neugroschel and J. Chipman (Schocken, New York, 1991), pp. 228–231.
  48. Gershom Scholem, "Eine Kabbalistische Erklärung der Prophetie als Selbstbegegnung," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 74 (1930), pp. 285–290; Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 86–100; and Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*, p. 80.
  49. On this issue see Kraus, "Jabbir ibn Hayyan"; Henry Corbin, "Le livre du glorieux de Jabir ibn Hayyan," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 18 (1950), pp. 47–114; and idem, "La science de la Balance et les correspondances entre les mondes en gnose islamique," *ibid.*, 42 (1973), pp. 79–85.
  50. See Ibn Ezra, *Le livre des fondements astrologiques*, p. 266. On prophecy, caves, and Saturn and their possible impact on Sabbatai Tzevi I hope to elaborate elsewhere. See meanwhile M. Idel, "Saturn and Sabbatai Tzevi: A New Approach to Sabbateanism," in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. Peter Schaefer and Mark Cohen (Brill, Leiden, 1998), pp. 179–180.
  51. See Joseph Shatzmiller, "In Search of the Book of Figures: Medicine and Astrology in Montpellier at the Turn of the Fourteenth Century," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 7 (1982–83), pp. 383–407; idem, "The Forms of the Twelve Constellations: A Fourteenth-Century Controversy," in Idel, Harvey, and Schweid, *Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume*, 2: 397–408.
  52. Idel, *Golem*, pp. 88–89, 286–287.
  53. On the indifference of the Sephardic culture to the magical-linguistic concept of the Golem as presented by the Ashkenazi recipes, see *ibid.*, pp. 276–278.
  54. See Asher Weiser, ed., *Abraham Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch*, vol. 1 (Mossad ha-Rav Kook, Jerusalem, 1976), p. 94.
  55. *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87; and Vajda, *Juda ben Nissim ibn Malka*, pp. 112–113 and n. 3.
  56. See, e.g., *Pirquei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (Warsaw, 1852), chap. 36, fol. 84b; and Joseph Dan, "Teraphim: From Popular Belief to a Folktale," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 27 (1978), pp. 99–106. The gruesome midrashic interpretation has an astonishing parallel in

- B. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim*, vol. 2 (Columbia University Press, New York, 1970), pp. 753–754. Descriptions of a prophetic head are also known from some legends related to Orpheus; I hope to deal with this topic in a separate study.
57. R. Levi ben Gershon, *Commentary on the Pentateuch* (Venice, 1547), fol. 37c; Vajda, *Juda ben Nissim ibn Malka*, p. 149 n. 3.
  58. R. Levi ben Gershon, *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, fol. 38d.
  59. See Vajda, *Juda ben Nissim ibn Malka*, pp. 149–151. On magic and human imagination in Renaissance thought see Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 30–59; Couliano, *Eros and Magic*, pp. 28–36.
  60. On R. Abraham ben Hananel of Esquira and his work see David de Guensburg, “La Cabale à la veille de l’apparition du Zohar,” *ha-Qedem* 1 (1907), pp. 28–36, 111–121.
  61. This amalgamation of metals is reminiscent of Hermetic and other ancient practices of preparing the statues wherein the gods were attracted in order to prophesy. See Asclepius, in *Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. and trans. Walter Scott, in *Hermetica*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1926), p. 358; Brian P. Copenhaver, trans., *Hermetica* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1992), pp. 89–90; Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, pp. 40–42, 68, 71.
  62. R. Abraham ben Hananel of Esquira, *Yesod ‘Olam*, Ms. Moscow, Guensburg 607, fol. 179a; printed by de Guensburg, “La Cabale à la veille de l’apparition du Zohar,” p. 30. Compare also Ms. Moscow, Guensburg 607, fol. 104a. The Arabic phrase, which is a technical expression, is written in Hebrew letters.
  63. On the view, transmitted by R. Yohanan Alemanno and Giordano Bruno, that the calf was created by means of a pneumatic kind of magic, see Idel, “Hermeticism and Judaism,” pp. 67–68; and chaps. 14 and 20 in this volume.
  64. The connection between the cherubim and the teraphim is found in two areas: like the teraphim, the cherubim were already conceived of as anthropoids in the midrashic and talmudic literature, where they were presented as little children. However, Ibn Billya seems to hint at a more active role for the cherubim, namely as pneumatic talismans like the teraphim. On the theosophical and theurgical interpretations of the cherubim see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 128–135.
  65. Ibn Zarza, *Meqor Hayyim*, fols. 21b–c.
  66. On the metallic nature of the cherubim see R. Abraham of Esquira’s *Yesod ‘Olam*, immediately after the passage quoted at note 62 above; and Schwartz, *Astral Magic in Medieval Jewish Thought*, pp. 73–74, 102–103, 238–239.
  67. See Schwartz, *Philosophy of a Jewish Neoplatonic Circle*, p. 231.
  68. See Idel, “Hermeticism and Judaism,” pp. 66–67.
  69. R. Yohanan Alemanno, *Hei ha-‘Olamim*, Ms. Mantua, Jewish Community 21, fol. 51a.
  70. See Idel, “Jewish Magic from the Renaissance,” pp. 84–85; see also *ibid.*, pp. 105–106, the text of the young Solomon Maimon, who combined Kabbalah and Hermetic magic in his discussion of the nature of the Temple and the teraphim. For more on this topic see Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 195–198. For magical temples see also app. 4 in this volume for another text of Alemanno’s drawing upon Ibn Zarza.

71. See Idel, “The Study Program,” pp. 303–330; and app. 3 in this volume.
72. Genesis 5:24. On the possible source of Alemanno’s view of Enoch in Ibn Zarza see chap. 20.
73. Cf. Idel, *Golem*, p. 180 n. 28.
74. R. Yohanan Alemanno, untitled treatise, Ms. Paris, BN 849, fol. 25b. For Alemanno’s other discussions of artificial anthropoids see Idel, *Golem*, pp. 167–175; and chap. 20 above. See also Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*, p. 76.
75. See, e.g., Alemanno’s *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fols. 123a, 127a; and app. 4 of this volume.
76. See M. Idel, “Kabbalah and Hermeticism in Dame Frances A. Yates’s Renaissance,” in *Esotérisme, gnosés et imaginaire symbolique: Mélanges offerts à Antoine Faivre*, ed. R. Caron, J. Godwin, W. J. Hanegraaff, and J.-L. Vieillard-Baron (Peeters, Louvain, 2001), pp. 71–90; idem, “‘Book of God’ and ‘Book of Law’ in Late 15th Century Florence,” *Accademia* 2 (2001), pp. 16–17; and idem, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 482–492.
77. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, p. 86.
78. Abravanel’s Commentary on 1 Kings 3, printed as part of his *Nev’im Rishonim* (Hamburg, 1687), fol. 14d. The discussion is in BT, *Sanhedrin*, fol. 65b. See Idel, *Golem*, p. 328 n. 6 (Hebrew version).
79. Interest in Ibn Ezra was widespread in the Jewish Renaissance, as the inclusion of his commentary on the Bible in *Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Yuan Digarah, Venice, 1568), the printed edition of traditional commentaries on the Bible, attests.
80. On this author see Georges Vajda, “Recherches sur la synthèse philosophico-kabbalistique de Samuel ibn Motot,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Ages* 27 (1960), pp. 29–63.
81. Toussaint, “Ficino’s Orphic Magic”; and Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*, pp. 37–38. See also note 8 above.
82. See already Idel, “Hermeticism and Judaism,” pp. 68–70; idem, *Golem*, pp. 175–177.
83. See Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*, p. 20 n. 74.
84. S. A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico’s 900 Theses* (1486) (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Tempe, 1998), pp. 498–499; and Bacchelli, *Giovanni Pico e Pier Leone da Spoleto*, pp. 72–73.
85. See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 177–180.
86. See app. 4.
87. See Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola*, especially p. 80.
88. See *ibid.*, pp. 63, 123–125, 132–139, 143–146, 149–152, 161–169.
89. *Ibid.*, pp. 94–98, 100–105.
90. See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 128; idem, *Hasidism*, pp. 66–71, 159–160.
91. See Idel, *Hasidism*.
92. See *ibid.*, pp. 157–159.
93. See Jonathan Garb, “The Kabbalah of Rabbi Joseph ibn Sayyah as a Source for the Understanding of Safedian Kabbalah,” *Kabbalah* 4 (1999), pp. 255–313 (Hebrew); and idem, *Manifestations of Power*.

94. On the Golem passage in this Kabbalist see Idel, *Golem*, p. 111.
95. See Garb, “The Kabbalah of Rabbi Joseph ibn Sayyah”; idem, *Manifestations of Power*; and M. Idel, “Between the Kabbalah of Jerusalem and the Kabbalah of Israel Sarug,” *Shalem* 6 (1992), pp. 165–173 (Hebrew).
96. See Gershon Scholem, “The Maggid of Joseph Taitachek and the Revelations Attributed to Him,” *Sefunot* 11 (1971–1978), pp. 69–112 (Hebrew); idem, “On the Story of R. Joseph della Reina,” in *Hokhma Bina veDaat: Studies in Jewish History and Thought Presented to A. Altmann*, ed. Siegfried Stein and Raphael Loewe (University of Alabama Press, University, 1979), pp. 100–108 (Hebrew and English); Moshe Idel, “Inquiries into the Doctrine of *Sefer Ha-Meshiv*,” *Sefunot*, n.s. 2 (= vol. 17, ed. J. Hacker [Makhon ben Tzvi, Jerusalem]) (1983), pp. 185–266 (Hebrew); idem, “Magic and Kabbalah in the Book of the Responding Entity,” in *The Solomon Goldman Lectures*, ed. M. I. Gruber (Spertus College of Judaica Press, Chicago, 1993), pp. 125–138. On the attitude to Christianity see Georges Vajda, “Passages anti-chrétiens dans *Kaf Ha-Qetoret*,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 117 (1980), pp. 45–58; Idel, “The Attitude towards Christianity in *Sefer ha-Meshiv*,” *Zion* 46 (1981), pp. 77–91 (Hebrew), English version in *Immanuel* 12 (1981), pp. 77–95; idem, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 126–132.
97. See Idel, “Kabbalah and Hermeticism in Dame Frances A. Yates’s Renaissance.”
98. See Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*.

## CHAPTER 22: THE TRAJECTORY OF EASTERN KABBALAH AND ITS REVERBERATIONS IN ITALY

1. On his writings see Colette Sirat, “A Letter on the Creation by R. Shemarya b. Elijah Akriti,” *Eshel Beer Sheva* 1 (1980), pp. 199–227 (Hebrew); and Mauro Zonta, *La filosofia antica nel Medioevo ebraico* (Paideia, Brescia, 1996), pp. 75, 146.
2. See Sirat, “A Letter on the Creation,” p. 199.
3. Printed by Shmuel David Luzzatto in *Otzar Nehmad*, ed. Raphael Kircheim, vol. 2 (1857; reprint, Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 90–94.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 92–93.
5. See Joseph B. Sermoneta, “Prophecy in the Writings of R. Yehuda Romano,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky, vol. 2 (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1984), pp. 345–346 n. 11; and the material discussed by Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1979), pp. 206–207. For more on prophecy see Concluding Remarks, sec. 1, in this volume.
6. See Joseph B. Sermoneta, “Una trascrizione in caratteri ebraici di alcuni brani filosofici della Divina Commedia,” in *Romanica et Occidentalia: Études dédiées à la mémoire de H. Peri*, ed. Moshe Lazar (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1963), pp. 23–42.
7. See Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 379–395; Ravitzky, *History and Faith*, pp. 115–153; and Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 75–76.
8. See Eric Lawee, *Isaac Abrabanel’s Stance toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue* (SUNY Press, Albany, 2001), pp. 9, 25, 44, 56, 57, 82, 83.

9. See C. M. Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon, the Last of the Hellenes* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986), pp. 23–28; Raymond Marcel, *Marsile Ficin (1433–1499)* (Belles Lettres, Paris, 1958), pp. 133–134, 612; Efraim Wust, “Elisha the Greek: A Physician and Philosopher at the Beginning of Ottoman Period,” *Pe’amim* 41 (1989), pp. 49–57 (Hebrew). François Masai, *Plethon et le platonisme de Mistra* (Paris, 1956), p. 57, aired the possibility that Elisha was a Kabbalist, while Michel Tardieu, “Plethon lecteur des Oracles,” *Metis* 2 (1987), p. 144 n. 7, rejected this possibility, implying (see especially p. 141) that he was a Spanish Jewish thinker acquainted with Averroës’ thought who arrived in Adrianopole. Though there is indeed no evidence that Elisha was a Kabbalist, an interest in Averroës does not exclude an interest in Kabbalah, as in the case of Abraham Abulafia, who introduced Kabbalah in the Byzantine Empire in the 1270s. Later, in the mid-fourteenth century in Constantinople, a combination of interest in both Kabbalah, including ecstatic Kabbalah, and medieval philosophy is evident in R. Elnathan ben Moshe Qalqish’s *’Even Sappir*, a huge treatise extant in two manuscripts in Paris, BN 727–728.
10. See Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*, pp. 24–25; Tardieu, “Plethon lecteur des Oracles,” pp. 144–146.
11. See James Darmesteter, “Textes Pehlvis relatifs au Judaïsme,” *REJ* 19 (1889), p. 56. It may well be that this is an elaboration on the earlier view that Plato studied with this prophet, an issue that cannot be discussed in this framework.
12. For a possible source of this view see Joseph Bidez and Franz Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés: Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe d’après la tradition grecque* (Société d’éditions “Les Belles lettres,” Paris, 1938), 2: 21. On Zoroaster as Abraham’s student see *ibid.*, 1: 41 and 2: 48. On the Hebrew sources for such a view see Micah J. bin Gorion, *Die Sagen der Juden* (Schocken, Berlin, 1935), p. 219. See also chap. 13, sec. 3, of this volume for a discussion of R. Elijah Hayyim of Genazzano.
13. See Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Gallimard, Paris, 1964), pp. 285–286; Tardieu, “Plethon lecteur des Oracles,” pp. 144–146; Tambrun, “Marsile Ficin,” pp. 20–22; and Shlomo Pines’s remark in the discussion following a lecture by François Masai, “Plethon, l’Averroïsme et la philosophie religieuse,” in *Le Néoplatonisme*, ed. P. M. Schuhl and Pierre Hadot (Presses du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1971), p. 445; Efrayyim Wust, “Elisha the Greek,” *Pe’amim* 41 (1990), pp. 49–56 (Hebrew).
14. See Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” p. 13; and *idem*, “On Prophecy and Magic in Sabbateanism,” *Kabbalah* 8 (2003), pp. 31–32. For more on Kabbalah in the Byzantine Empire see *idem*, “Kabbalah in the Byzantine Empire: Preliminary Inquiries,” *ibid.*, 18 (2008), pp. 197–227 (Hebrew).
15. See *Sefer ha-Peliy’ah*, pt. I, fols. 50a–51a, 58d–59a, 59d–60b; Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” p. 11.
16. Michal Kushnir-Oron, “The *Sefer Ha-Peli’ah* and *Sefer Ha-Kanah*: Their Kabbalistic Principles, Social and Religious Criticism, and Literary Composition” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 76–80 (Hebrew).

17. See e.g., *Sefer ha-Peli'ah*, pt. I, fols. 23a–d.
18. Kushnir-Oron, “The *Sefer Ha-Peli'ah* and *Sefer Ha-Kanah*,” pp. 85–102.
19. Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, 3: xxxviii–xlv; and idem, *Quntres Taryag* (1878; reprint, Jerusalem, 1972), p. 129. Efraim Gottlieb also accepted this view about possible locations outside Spain; see Kushnir-Oron, “The *Sefer Ha-Peli'ah* and *Sefer Ha-Kanah*,” p. 23 n. 27.
20. See Israel M. Ta-Shma, “Where Was the Book ‘*Alilot Devarim* Composed?,” “*Alei Sefer 3* (1977), pp. 44–53 (Hebrew); and Kushnir-Oron, “The *Sefer Ha-Peli'ah* and *Sefer Ha-Kanah*,” pp. 6–18.
21. See Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 117–121.
22. See Haviva Pedaya, *Nahmanides: Cyclical Time and Holy Text* (‘Am ‘Oved, Tel Aviv, 2003) (Hebrew); Moshe Idel, “The Jubilee in Jewish Mysticism,” in *Millenarismi nella cultura contemporanea*, ed. Enrico Rambaldi (FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2001), pp. 209–232. See also chap. 12 above for the observation by Elijah del Medigo regarding the affinity between this kabbalistic theory and Neoplatonism.
23. See Kushnir-Oron, “The *Sefer Ha-Peli'ah* and *Sefer Ha-Kanah*,” pp. 294–297. This stand is hinted at in R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid, and I hope to demonstrate elsewhere the nexus between his thought, as found in an unidentified manuscript, and the Byzantine Kabbalah. See, for the time being, Moshe Idel, “The Meaning of *Ta'amei Ha-'Ofot Ha-Teme'im* of R. David ben Yehuda He-Hasid,” in *'Alei Shefer: Studies in the Literature of Jewish Thought Presented to Rabbi Dr. Alexander Safran*, ed. Moshe Hallamish (Bar-Ilan University Press, Ramat Gan, 1990), pp. 11–27 (Hebrew); idem, “Kabbalah, Hieroglyphicity, and Hieroglyphs,” *Kabbalah* 11 (2004), pp. 24–25; and idem, *Ascensions on High*, pp. 177–178.
24. See Moshe Idel, “On Some Forms of Order in Kabbalah,” *Da'at* 50–52 (2003), pp. xlix–liv; Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 460–475.
25. Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, pp. 176–193.
26. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 460–461 n. 233.
27. See note 23 above.
28. Kushnir-Oron, “The *Sefer Ha-Peli'ah* and *Sefer Ha-Kanah*,” pp. 18, 114.
29. Moshe Idel, “Neglected Treatises by the Author of *Sefer Kafha-Qetoret*,” *Pe'amim* 53 (1993), p. 78 (Hebrew); idem, “On Prophecy and Magic in Sabbateanism,” p. 11. More recently other scholars have adopted this characterization of Tzevi. See, e.g., Avraham Elqayam, “Sabbatai Sevi's Manuscript of the Zohar,” *Kabbalah* 3 (1998), pp. 358–361 (Hebrew).
30. An issue that does not concern us in the context of the east-to-west trajectory of Kabbalah's arrival in Italy is the impact of R. Nathan Harar's *Sefer Sha'arei Tzedeq*, and the influence of R. Yitzhaq of Acre on R. Moshe of Kiev's book *Shushan Sodot*. R. Moshe was a late-fifteenth-century Kabbalist who continued the Byzantine Kabbalah and preserved some otherwise unknown and important kabbalistic material. See my introduction to Har'ar, *Sha'arei Tzedeq*, pp. 37, 169, 174, 180, 185, 231, 232, 241, 250. However, *Shushan Sodot*, which represents a synthesis of the books and tendencies described above, did not influence Italian Kabbalah.

31. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, p. 116; Moshe Idel, "Saturn and Sabbatai Tzevi: A New Approach to Sabbateanism," in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. Peter Schaefer and Mark Cohen (Brill, Leiden, 1998), pp. 179–180.
32. For a survey of halakhic writings in Byzantium see Israel M. Ta-Shma, "On the History of Rabbinic Literature in Greece in the Fourteenth Century," *Tarbitz* 62 (1993), pp. 101–114 (Hebrew).
33. On the literary structure of the book see Kushnir-Oron, "The *Sefer Ha-Peli'ah* and *Sefer Ha-Kanah*," pp. 337–343.
34. See R. Yohanan Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 136a, quoting *Sefer ha-Peliy'ah*, pt. II, fol. 17a. See also *Collectanea*, fols. 37a–b, where additional quotations are found under the title *Sefer ha-Qanah*.
35. See, e.g., R. Yohanan Alemanno, 'Einei ha-'Edah, Ms. Jerusalem, NUL 8° 598, fols. 101b, 102b, 105a.
36. See Yohanan Alemanno, untitled treatise, Ms. Paris, BN 849, fols. 83ab, 104b, 110a, 121b–122b. See also his 'Einei ha-'Edah, Ms. Jerusalem, NUL 8° 598, fols. 103b, 104b, 119a, 128a. The anonymous, untitled Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1557, copied in late-fifteenth-century Italy, presents a combination of all three attitudes: some treatises of Provençal and Spanish Kabbalah, treatises by Abraham Abulafia, and, at the beginning, some treatises from the cluster of writings related to *Sefer ha-Temunah*. This codex attests to the arrival of Byzantine Kabbalah in Italy in the period when Alemanno was active there.
37. The rich inventory of kabbalistic literature known by Alemanno awaits full identification and analysis. I hope to deal elsewhere with the huge amount of kabbalistic material owned by the da Pisa family in Florence in the generation after the expulsion. For titles of kabbalistic and other sources available to Alemanno and Giovanni Pico, see app. 3 in this volume and the material collected in Fabrizio Lelli, "Pico tra filosofia ebraica e 'Qabbala,'" in *Pico, Poliziano e l'umanesimo di fine Quattrocento*, ed. Paolo Viti (Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1994), pp. 193–223.
38. Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds*, pp. 184–230; and Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 300–302, 402–422, 432–434.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

1. For earlier phenomena among Jews see chap. 4 and Joseph B. Sermoneta, "Prophecy in the Writings of R. Yehuda Romano," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky, vol. 2 (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1984), pp. 337–374.
2. See Eugenio Garin, "Paolo Orlandi e il profeta Francesco da Meleto," in his *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento Italiano* (Sansoni, Florence, 1961), pp. 213–233; and Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Late Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind., 1993), pp. 437–438. Like the other prophets, da Meleto was in close contact with Jews. See also the chapter devoted to prophecy in Henri de Lubac, *Pic de la Mirandole* (Aubier Montaigne, Paris, 1974), pp. 90–113; and



- Marjorie Reeves, "Cardinal Egidio of Viterbo: A Prophetic Interpretation of History," in *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period*, ed. Reeves (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992), pp. 91–109. In this context we should mention also the prophetic aspirations of R. Asher Lemlein, who was deeply influenced by Abraham Abulafia. See especially David Tamar, "On R. Asher Lemlein," *Zion* 52 (1987), 399–401 (Hebrew); as well as Kupfer, "Visions."
3. See Stéphane Toussaint, "L'individuo estatico: Tecniche profetiche in Marsilio Ficino e Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," *Bruniana & Campanelliana: Ricerche filosofiche e materiali storico-testuali* 6:2 (2000), pp. 351–354. See above, chap. 20, note 59.
  4. On this term see also Alemanno's commentary on the Song of Songs, *Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1535, fols. 64b–65a, 68a, 106a; and above, chap. 20, note 58. In one instance the sudden vision is described as obtained by means found in books of magic, such as the *Book of the Palm* attributed to Abu Aflah, and "Apollonius's" book on magic. See Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1535, fols. 65a–b. On *Hesheq Shlomo* see chap. 16 in this volume.
  5. R. Yohanan Alemanno, *Collectanea*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 2234, fol. 95a.
  6. See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 63–66.
  7. See Idel, "On the Meanings of the Term 'Kabbalah,'" pp. 58–59.
  8. On the impact of Avicenna's thought in general on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy, see N. G. Siraisi, *Avicenna in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1987). See also M. Idel, "Kabbalah, Hieroglyphicity, and Hieroglyphs," *Kabbalah* 11 (2004), pp. 11–47.
  9. Alemanno, *Sefer Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1535, fol. 63a. This and other, similar descriptions of the act of contemplation, *tzefiyyah*, and attaining a vision of the sefirotic world without symbolic mediation are important examples for an understanding of the kataphatic elements in Kabbalah, supporting a more positive type of theology, which are rather marginalized in modern scholarship, which centers upon an apophatic, or negative, theological approach. Alemanno adopted the verb *TzFH* both from the *Heikhalot* literature and from his understanding of Abuhamed al-Ghazzali's *Me'oznei Tzedeq*, and used it many times. This is an interesting example of the complexity emerging from a synthesis of different conceptual layers.
  10. Paulus Riccius, *Ars Cabalistica*, ed. Johan Pistorius (Minerva, Frankfurt, 1970), p. 116; cf. Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggeman, "Christian Kabbala: Joseph Gikatilla (1247–1305), Johannes Reuchlin (Wilhelm 1455–1522), Paulus Riccius (d. 1541), and Jacob Boehme (1575–1624)," in *The Language of Adam/Die Sprache Adams*, ed. Allison Coudert (Harassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1999), p. 101. This passage had an impact on Reuchlin's understanding of the Kabbalists when he distinguished between Talmudists and Kabbalists. See Idel in Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, pp. xxi–xxiii and 122–123. The use of the term "symbol" is important, since it may constitute one of the sources of Reuchlin's position on *receptio symbolica*, discussed at the end of this chapter.
  11. See Yates, *The Occult Philosophy*, p. 189. See also idem, *Giordano Bruno*, p. 92; and more recently the similar formulation in Charles Lohr, "Metaphysics," in *The Cambridge*



- History of Renaissance Philosophy, ed. Charles Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler, and Jill Kraye (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988), pp. 580–581.
12. See Isadore Twersky, “The Contribution of Italian Sages to Rabbinic Literature,” *Italia Judaica* 1 (1983), pp. 383–400; Israel M. Ta-Shma, “Nimmuqei Humash le-Rabbi Isaiah mi-Trani,” *Qiryat Sefer* 64 (1992–93), pp. 751–753 (Hebrew); idem, “R. Jesaiah di Trani the Elder and His Connections with Byzantium and Palestine,” *Shalem* 4 (1984), pp. 409–416 (Hebrew); and Ephraim Kanarfogel, “Mysticism and Asceticism in Italian Rabbinic Literature of the Thirteenth Century,” *Kabbalah* 6 (2001), p. 139 nn. 15–16 (Hebrew).
  13. On the absence of Christian kabbalistic literature from the Iberian peninsula, see my review of “Swietlicki’s Spanish Christian Cabala,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 78 (1988), pp. 310–313.
  14. On this approach see Idel, *Ascensions on High*, pp. 11–12.
  15. See Boaz Huss, “Sefer ha-Zohar as a Canonical, Sacred, and Holy Text: Changing Perspectives in the Book of Splendor between the Thirteenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7 (1998), pp. 257–307; M. Idel, “R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s Translation of the Book of the Zohar,” *‘Alei Sefer* 8 (1980), pp. 60–73 (Hebrew).
  16. See R. Yitzhaq ben Sheshet, *Responsum*, no. 157, printed in Adolph Jellinek, *Auswahl Kabbalistischer Mystik*, vol. 1 (Colditz, Leipzig, 1853), pp. 49–52.
  17. See Idel, “Between,” p. 93 n. 37.
  18. Idel, “The Study Program,” p. 310.
  19. *Ibid.*, pp. 310–311 n. 68.
  20. See Kupfer, “Visions,” pp. 412, 417, 422. On Abulafia’s profound influence on Lemlein I hope to expand elsewhere.
  21. See M. Idel, “The Throne and the Seven-Branched Candlestick—Pico della Mirandola’s Hebrew Source,” *JWCI* 40 (1977), pp. 290–292.
  22. Robert Bonfil, *Rabbis and Jewish Communities in Renaissance Italy* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization and Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990), pp. 278–280. On *Sefer ‘Or ha-Sekhel*, a classic of ecstatic Kabbalah, written in Sicily and dedicated to two of Abulafia’s disciples, Nathan ben Sa’adyah Harar and Abraham Shalom, see Idel, “Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 24–25 and 54–55 n. 161, for a list of manuscripts of this book, many of them stemming from Italy; and also Har’ar, *Sha’arei Tzedeq*, index, s.v. *‘Or ha-Sekhel*, p. 539.
  23. The most important among them is a document written by R. Jacob Israel Finzi, a mid-sixteenth-century Italian Kabbalist, found in Ms. Parma 2232 (1326) and printed as app. 6 of Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, together with other information. In the 1998 edition of this work, 1: 84, 151, I quoted from Ms. Parma 2232 and referred to the Finzi family as descendants of Recanati without mentioning the famous name Finzi. Giulio Busi, “Menahem Finzi of Recanati: The True Name of an Old Acquaintance,” *Materia Giudaica* 8:1 (2003), pp. 213–218, apparently overlooked those references in my book—which he nevertheless quotes in another context in his article—and implies that he

- was the first to find the document in the Parma manuscript, and thus that he has established the “true” family name of Recanati. See also below, note 25.
24. See Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 1: 151.
  25. The occurrence of the term *Makkaby* twice in the context of the proper name *Yehudah* must have something to do with the ancient hero of the Maccabean revolt, *Yehudah* the Hasmonean. The fact that the name *Finzi* occurs twice in this context demands an additional inquiry, as the very meaning of the name is not clear.
  26. See the testimony printed by Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 357–360. For more about this Kabbalist see Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 2: app. 6.
  27. Ms. Parma, de Rossi 99. In R. Jacob Israel’s list of names there is no *Mordekhai*; thus Scholem’s assumption that the author *Yitzhaq Eliahu* is R. *Yitzhaq ben Mordekhai* of Mantua is not plausible. See Gershom Scholem, “On the Questions Related to *Sefer Ma’arekhet ha-’Elohut* and Its Commentators,” *Qiryat Sefer* 21 (1944), pp. 288–291 (Hebrew).
  28. See Lelli, *La lettera preziosa*, pp. 9, 255–261. For more on Recanati’s influence on Genazzano see Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 2: chap. 22.
  29. See, e.g., Alemanno, *Hesheq Shelomo*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1535, fol. 64a. See also Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 2: app.
  30. Isaac ben Jacob ha-Kohen, *Ma’amar ha-’Atzilut ha-Smalit*, ed. G. Scholem, in *Madda’ei ha-Yahadut*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1927) (Hebrew); and Joseph Dan, “Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah,” *AJS Review* 5 (1980), pp. 17–40.
  31. See Idel, *R. Menahem Recanati*, 1: 93.
  32. See Avraham Elqayam, “Issues in the Commentary of R. Reuben Zarfati on the Book *Ma’arekhet ha-’Elohut*” (M.A. thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 13–32 (Hebrew).
  33. See above, chap. 21, note 96.
  34. See Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 258–259; Georges Vajda, “Passages anti-chrétiens dans *Kaf Ha-Qetoret*,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 117 (1980), pp. 45–58; M. Idel, “The Attitude towards Christianity in *Sefer ha-Meshiv*,” *Zion* 46 (1981), pp. 77–91 (Hebrew), English version in *Immanuel* 12 (1981), pp. 77–95; idem, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 126–132; and Abraham Gross, *Iberian Jewry from Twilight to Dawn: The World of Rabbi Abraham Saba* (Brill, Leiden, 1995), pp. 133–137. In Italy it is found to a certain extent in *Elijah Hayyim* of Genazzano.
  35. See Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, 46–52; Harar, *Sha’arei Tzedeq*, pp. 91–112; and app. 2 of this volume.
  36. See Idel, “Kabbalah, Hieroglyphicity, and Hieroglyphs,” pp. 14–15; and R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid’s *Commentary on the Alphabets*, printed in *‘Aleï Sefer* 9 (1981), pp. 84–94 (Hebrew). A similar stand is found in *Sefer ha-Temunah*, discussed in the previous chapter.
  37. Moshe Idel, “Nahmanides: Kabbalah, Halakhah, and Spiritual Leadership,” in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership*, ed. M. Idel and M. Ostow (Jason Aronson, Northvale, N.J., 1998), pp. 58–59.

38. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 136–144.
39. See Idel, “Between.”
40. Ibid.
41. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 137–143; and idem, “Nahmanides,” pp. 54–59.
42. See Idel, R. Menahem Recanati, 1: 189–214.
43. On the two groups see Idel, “Nahmanides,” pp. 15–59; idem, “The Jubilee in Jewish Mysticism,” in *Millenarismi nella cultura contemporanea*, ed. Enrico Rambaldi (FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2001), pp. 209–232; Haviva Pedaya, *Nahmanides: Cyclical Time and Holy Text* (‘Am ‘Oved, Tel Aviv, 2003), pp. 91–118 (Hebrew); Daniel Abrams, “Orality in the Kabbalistic School of Nahmanides: Preserving and Interpreting Esoteric Traditions and Texts,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 3 (1996), pp. 85–102.
44. See Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, pp. 85–137.
45. Gershom Scholem, “On the Story of R. Joseph della Reina,” in *Hokhma Bina veDaat: Studies in Jewish History and Thought Presented to A. Altmann*, ed. Siegfried Stein and Raphael Loewe (University of Alabama Press, University, 1979), pp. 100–108 (Hebrew); Moshe Idel, “Inquiries into the Doctrine of Sefer Ha-Meshiv,” *Sefunot*, n.s. 2 (= vol. 17, ed. J. Hacker [Makhon ben Tzvi, Jerusalem]) (1983), pp. 185–266 (Hebrew).
46. For Tzarfati’s attenuation of an ancient myth see Elqayam, “Issues,” p. 62 n. 78. For Alemanno’s attenuation of the more dynamic kabbalistic theosophy as espoused by Hayyat see Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” pp. 222–223; idem, “Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. Lenn E. Goodman (SUNY Press, Albany, 1993), pp. 341–342.
47. See Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*; Don Cameron Allen, *The Legend of Noah* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1963); idem, *Mysteriously Meant* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1970), pp. 279–311; Marco Ariani, *Imago fabulosa: Mito e allegoria nei “Dialoghi d’Amore” di Leone Ebreo* (Bulzoni Editore, Rome, 1984). On the hermeneutical framework in the Renaissance see Couliano, *Eros and Magic*, pp. 11–12.
48. Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1972), p. 287.
49. I take this term from Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Cosmopoiesis: The Renaissance Experiment* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2001). See Moshe Idel, “On Some Forms of Order in Kabbalah,” *Da’at* 50–52 (2003), pp. xlix–liv.
50. An example is Christian Kabbalah, whose emergence as an intellectual phenomenon and whose appearance in print seem to me to have influenced the politics of dissemination among Jewish Kabbalists. I cannot enter here into as detailed a discussion of this issue as I have done elsewhere. See, e.g., Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 134–136; idem, “Religion, Thought, and Attitudes: The Impact of the Expulsion on the Jews,” in *Spain and the Jews: The Sephardi Experience, 1492 and After*, ed. Elie Kedourie (Thames and Hudson, London, 1992), pp. 123–139. In our specific context let me point out that in his voluminous writings Alemanno never referred to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. I assume also that Genazzano wrote after 1492, and he, too, did not mention the event, although he criticized views expressed by one of the expellees, R. Isaac Abravanel.

51. See Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1977).
52. See the seminal study of Yosef B. Sermoneta, “Scholastic Philosophical Literature in Rabbi Yosef Taitasak’s *Porat Yosef*,” *Sefunot* 11 (1971–1978), pp. 135–185 (Hebrew).
53. Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds*, pp. 235–236.
54. See especially Shlomo Pines, “Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb?: Some Jewish and Arabic Sources of Leone Ebreo’s Doctrines,” in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. B. D. Cooperman (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1983), pp. 365–398; David B. Ruderman, “Hope against Hope: Jewish and Christian Messianic Expectations in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Exile and Diaspora: Studies in the History of the Jewish People Presented to Prof. Haim Beinart*, ed. A. Mirsky, A. Grossman, and J. Kaplan (Makhon ben Tzvi, Jerusalem, 1991), pp. 185–202; reprinted in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. D. B. Ruderman (New York University Press, New York, 1992), pp. 299–323.
55. Idel, “Major Currents in Italian Kabbalah between 1560–1660,” *Italia Judaica* 2 (1986), pp. 243–262; reprinted in Ruderman, *Essential Papers*, pp. 345–368; Idel, “Particularism and Universalism,” pp. 324–344.
56. See Gershom Scholem, “The Beginnings of the Christian Kabbalah,” in *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters*, ed. J. Dan (Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Mass., 1997), pp. 30–38. On Paulus de Heredia see François Secret, “*L’Ensis Pauli de Paulus de Heredia*,” *Sefarad* 26 (1966), pp. 79–102, 254–271. Heredia visited Sicily for a while (*ibid.*, p. 100), and in my opinion this visit accounts for some acquaintance with R. Abraham Abulafia’s kabbalistic thought, which was almost entirely ignored in Spain.
57. Scholem, “The Beginnings of Christian Kabbalah,” pp. 31–32; Secret, “*L’Ensis Pauli*,” pp. 86–89.
58. Scholem, “The Beginnings of Christian Kabbalah,” pp. 36–38; David B. Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol* (Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 1991), pp. 43–51; Gross, *Iberian Jewry from Twilight to Dawn*, p. 148 n. 88.
59. On this issue see Idel, “Particularism and Universalism.”
60. See David Kaufmann, “Elia Menachem Chalfan on Jews Teaching Hebrew to Non-Jews,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 9 (1896–97), pp. 500–508.
61. For other positive reactions to the first stage of Luther’s activity, which was tolerant toward Judaism, see Hayyim Hillel Ben-Sasson, “The Reformation in Contemporary Jewish Opinion,” in *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 239–326.
62. In Hebrew *galuyyiot*, meaning literally “exiles.” However, there seems no reason to doubt that he is referring to the late-fifteenth-century expulsions from the Iberian peninsula, and perhaps also to the later expulsion of Jews from Sicily.
63. R. Elijah Menahem Halfan, *Epistle*, Ms. New York, JTS 1822, fol. 154b; and see Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations,” pp. 186–187. I hope to elaborate elsewhere on the content of this text.

64. See the text printed by David Kaufmann, "Elia Menachem Chalfan on Jews Teaching Hebrew to Non-Jews," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 9 (1986–87), pp. 500–508.
65. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, pp. 155–156.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
67. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy*, p. 189.
68. See Charles Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magical Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century," *JWCI* 39 (1976), pp. 104–138.
69. For the contribution of the Hermetic magic of the Renaissance to later magical practices in various parts of Europe, see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Scribner, New York, 1971), pp. 222–231; R. J. W. Evans, *Rudolf II and His World: A Study in Intellectual History (1576–1612)* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984); Charles Schmitt, "John Case on Art and Nature," *Annals of Science* 33 (1976), pp. 543–559. See also the collection of articles in *Présence d'Hermès Trismégiste*, published as part of the series *Cahiers de l'Hermétisme* (Albin Michel, Paris, 1988), especially the studies by Antoine Faivre, pp. 13–56, 223–232; and his contribution in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, ed. Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus (Folger Books, Washington, D.C., 1988), pp. 424–435.
70. See especially Brian Copenhaver, "Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus, and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance," in Merkel and Debus, *Hermeticism and the Renaissance*, pp. 79–110.
71. Trinkaus, *In Our Likeness and Image*, vol. 2; Idel, "Hermeticism and Judaism," pp. 62–68.
72. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, pp. 398–455.
73. See Jonathan Garb, "The Kabbalah of Rabbi Joseph ibn Sayyah as a Source for the Understanding of Safedian Kabbalah," *Kabbalah* 4 (1999), pp. 255–313 (Hebrew).
74. See Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 65–81.
75. *Ibid.*
76. See R. J. W. Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1550–1700* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979), pp. 346–418; and *idem*, *Rudolf II and His World*.
77. See Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 45–145; and *idem*, "Hermeticism and Kabbalah," in *Hermeticism from Late Antiquity to Humanism*, ed. P. Lucentini, I. Parri, and V. P. Compagni (Turnhout, Brepols, 2004), pp. 389–408.
78. See Moshe Idel, "The Besht as Prophet and as Talismanic Magician," in Yoav Elstein's *Festschrift*, ed. Avi Lipsker and Rela Kushelevsky (Bar Ilan University Press, Ramat Gan, 2005), pp. 119–143 (Hebrew).
79. See also Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1: 31.
80. See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 424.
81. *Idem*, *Major Trends*, p. 26. For more on these issues see chap. 10, sec. 2. Scholem never revealed the precise content of the "strict" sense of symbolism.
82. *Idem*, *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time and Other Essays*, ed. Abraham Shapira, trans. Jonathan Chipman (JPS, Philadelphia, 1997), p. 140. See also *idem*, *Major Trends*, p. 27. For more on pansymbolism in modern scholarship and a critique of this view see Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 273–280; *idem*, "Zur Funktion von Symbolen bei G. G. Scholem," in *Gershom Scholem: Literatur und Retorik*, ed. Stéphane

- Mosès and Sigrid Weigel (Boehlau Verlag, Cologne, 2000), pp. 53–55; now in my *Old Worlds, New Mirrors: On Jewish Mysticism and Twentieth-Century Thought* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2010), pp. 83–108; as well as chap. 10 of this volume.
83. Reuchlin, *On the Art of Kabbalah*, p. 39.
  84. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
  85. *Ibid.*, p. 39. See also chap. 18 of this volume.
  86. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, p. 87. On Schelling's influence on Scholem on this point see the sources cited by Elliot R. Wolfson, *Aleph, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 2006), pp. 193–194 n. 225.
  87. See, e.g., Joseph Dan, "The Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin and Its Historical Significance," in *The Christian Kabbalah: Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters*, ed. Dan (Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Mass., 1997), p. 80.
  88. On this phenomenon in general see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 1–6.
  89. Gershom Scholem, *Die Erforschung der Kabbala von Reuchlin bis zur Gegenwart* (Selbstverlag der Stadt, Pforzheim, 1969), p. 7.
  90. *Ibid.*
  91. See *ibid.*, pp. 23–24; *idem*, *Major Trends*, p. 26.
  92. See David Biale, *Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah, and Counter-History* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pp. 138–140; Susan Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991), pp. 125–126.
  93. Gershom Scholem, "Die Stellung der Kabbala in europäischen Geistgeschichte," *Berlin Jahrbuch*, 1981–82, pp. 283–284.
  94. I pointed out the importance of Reuchlin's symbolic understanding of Kabbalah both in my 1993 introduction to Reuchlin, *On the Art of Kabbalah*, pp. xv–xvi, and in a more comprehensive lecture on this topic in 1999 at the Advanced Center of Judaic Studies in Philadelphia. I hope to analyze elsewhere the various meanings of "symbol" in Reuchlin. See meanwhile Idel, *Ascensions on High*, pp. 13–16; and Giulio Busi, "Die Kabbala als eine symbolische Option," in *Reuchlin und Italien*, ed. Gerald Doerner (Jan Thorbecke Verlag, Stuttgart, 1999), pp. 57–67. On the importance of Pythagoras for the arts in the Renaissance see Robert Klein, *Form and Meaning: Writings on the Renaissance and Modern Art*, trans. Madeline Jay and Leon Wieseltier (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1979), pp. 43–53.
  95. More recently Joseph Dan and Elliot R. Wolfson (in *Language, Eros, Being*) have reiterated Scholem's unqualified pansymbolism and emphasized apophantic structures of thought in Kabbalah as a whole. Both, like Scholem, and to some degree Ernst Cassirer in his theory of the symbolic approach, attenuate the magical and to a certain extent also the theurgical elements in the general economy of kabbalistic literatures. I hope to devote a separate study to the problems created by this return to an essentialist understanding of Kabbalah.
  96. See Arnaldo Momigliano, *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, ed. Silvia Berti, trans. Maura Masella-Gayley (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994), pp. 193–196.

97. Idel, "Kabbalah, Hieroglyphicity, and Hieroglyphs," pp. 39–46.
98. See Arnaldo Momigliano, "The Jews of Italy," in *Essays on Ancient and Modern Judaism*, pp. 133–134. See also Moshe Idel, "Arnaldo Momigliano and Gershom Scholem on Jewish History and Tradition," in *Momigliano and the Antiquaries: The Foundations of Modern Cultural History*, ed. Peter Miller (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2007), pp. 312–333.
99. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 11–12.
100. See Robert Bonfil, "Myth, Rhetoric, History?: A Study in the Chronicle of 'Ahima'atz," in *Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Haim Hillel ben Sasson*, ed. Menahem ben Sasson, Robert Bonfil, and Joseph R. Hacker (Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 99–135 (Hebrew).
101. See app. 3.
102. See the texts by the two authors translated in Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 63–64.
103. See, e.g., Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, for an emphasis on theosophy and symbolism and a maginalization of magic and theurgy. Just as Scholem was a Reuchlin redivivus, Wolfson is a Scholem redivivus both in his approach to the role of symbol in Kabbalah as a whole and in his emphasis on the similarity between the ancient Gnostic understanding of the androgyne and the kabbalistic theosophy. In his emphasis on the centrality of the androgynous ideal, however, he follows Carl Jung's and Mircea Eliade's metaphysics. See in more detail Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, pp. 53–103.
104. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 1–6; and Amos Funkenstein, "Gershom Scholem: Charisma, 'Kairos,' and the Messianic Dialectic," *History and Memory* 4 (1992), pp. 123–142.
105. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 390.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 389. Wolfson's assumption is that the male divine structure absorbs the female element in order to ensure a state of perfection. Note the singular form of the terms "symbolic view" and "medieval Kabbalah." As I have attempted to point out, even among the symbolic Kabbalists there are different symbolic systems. Some of them are anthropomorphic; some are familial—father, mother, sons, and daughter; some are vegetal—the sefirotic tree; others are geometrical—circles, centers, and lines—or historical—exile and redemption—or geographical; and so on. See Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 280–293, 298–305; *idem*, *Ben*, pp. 377–385.
107. Wolfson's recurrent use of the terms "incarnation" and "flesh" in kabbalistic contexts in which they are, in my opinion, gratuitous, is also fascinating. See his *Language, Eros, Being*, *passim*; and Idel, *Ben*, pp. 57–63. For the conviction that Kabbalah hides Christian tenets see the views of Giovanni Pico quoted in chap. 19 in this volume.
108. Idel, *Ben*, p. 392 n. 12: "I seek in my work to render poetically the teachings promulgated by kabbalists." Giovanni Pico intended to entitle his commentary on Girolamo Benivieni's poems "poetical theology"; Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, p. 155.



109. For other models in Kabbalah and Hasidism see Garb, *Manifestations of Power*; and Ron Margolin, *The Human Temple: Religious Interiorization and the Structuring of Inner Life in Hasidism* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2005) (Hebrew). For different models involving kabbalistic understandings of eros see Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, especially chap. 3.
110. See Idel, *Eros and Magic*, pp. 37–38.
111. See Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance* (Modern Library, New York, 2002); and Klein, *Form and Meaning*, pp. 34–36.
112. See Henry Thode, *Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien* (G. Grote, Berlin, 1885); and Klein, *Form and Meaning*, p. 35.

## APPENDIX 1: THE ANGEL NAMED RIGHTEOUS

1. See also Sara Tzfatman, *The Jewish Tale in the Middle Ages: Between Ashkenaz and Sefarad* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1993), p. 132 (Hebrew), for the shift in Italy between phases of importation to one of exportation of Jewish culture.
2. See Azriel, 'Arugat ha-Bosem, 2: 194–195 and 3: 148. Themes related to mythologems found in the Heikhalot literature are discernible in early medieval poetry arriving in Italy from the land of Israel and then from Ashkenaz. See, e.g., Idel, "The Concept of the Torah," pp. 40–44. See also above, Introduction, note 32. R. Moshe ben Qalonymos, the person who moved from Lucca to Mainz and brought the esoteric corpus there, is known basically as a poet. Also pertinent to understanding the continuity of the earlier mystical literatures in Europe is the legend about the affinities between R. Eleazar ha-Qallir's poetic activity and his ascent to the Merkavah. See Idel, *Ascensions on High*, p. 63 n. 59.
3. Taqqif. However, the version quoted by Azriel, 'Arugat ha-Bosem, 2: 194, has toqef.
4. The transformation of the human Enoch into the angelic power consists in assimilation to the fiery nature of the supernal world as described in both the rabbinic and Heikhalot literature. See Moshe Idel, "Enoch Is Metatron," *Immanuel* 24/25 (1990), pp. 220–222. The dating of R. 'Amittai's creativity is important to understanding the development of the concept of Enoch as a righteous. Later medieval authors' views of Enoch as righteous have an antecedent at least as early as the mid-ninth century. For more on this issue see Idel, *Ben*, pp. 645–670. On fire on high see also below, note 7.
5. I assume that there is a parallelism between the first part of this verse and the second, in which the equivalence between 'or, "light," and the Torah is mentioned. The use of 'or may have something to do with the alliteration of Torah and 'or. See the parallelism between the two in Proverbs 1:8.
6. Namely, Metatron teaches the Torah to the dead children. On this theme see also 'Amittai ben Palti'el, *Megillat 'Ahima'atz*, ed. Benjamin Klar (Tarshish, Jerusalem, 1974), p. 70. See already BT, 'Avodah Zarah, fol. 3b.
7. According to many midrashic statements, the Torah was written as a black fire upon a white fire. See Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 45–50.



8. For the use of this term in other contexts related to an angelic activity of bringing a diadem wrought of the prayers of Israel to the head of God, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 191–197; and Wolfson, “Metatron,” p. 83 n. 112.
9. The addition of a crown to the letters of the Torah is attributed to God in rabbinic literature. See BT, *Shabbat*, fol. 89a.
10. Cf. Proverbs 10:25.
11. ‘Amittai, *Megillat ‘Ahima‘atz*, pp. 81–82.
12. On the angel of the Torah see Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 140–142, 145–146, 173–178. On Yefeifiah as angel of the Torah see the introduction to a book of magic titled *Ma‘ayan Hokhmah*, printed by Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, 1: 58–59; Idel, “The Concept of the Torah,” pp. 27–28; Michael Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996), pp. 166–167, 179–181, 191. For a discussion of Yefeifiah as the angel of the Torah, see also R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo’s *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, ed. J. Epstein (Lemberg, 1865), para. 36, fol. 5b, a book that will be dealt with later in this appendix; as well as an anonymous liturgical poem, which I have identified as written by him, edited in M. Idel, “An Unknown Poem for Yom ha-Kippurim by R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo ha-Navi,” in *Rishonim va-Aharonim: Studies in Jewish History Presented to Abraham Grossman*, ed. Joseph Hacker, B.-Z. Keidar, and Joseph Kaplan (Merkaz Shazar, Jerusalem, 2009), pp. 244, 252 (Hebrew).
13. Namely the footstool of God’s feet. Cf. Isaiah 66:1.
14. On the appointment of an angel upon the face of God see Moshe Idel, “Metatron—Observations on the Development of Myth in Judaism,” in *Myth in Judaism*, ed. Haviva Pedaya (Ben Gurion University Press, Beer Sheva, 1996), pp. 22–44 (Hebrew); and now idem, *The Angelic World*, pp. 74–92. See also in another poem by ‘Amittai, *Megillat ‘Ahima‘atz*, p. 91, *qelaster panim*, “the configuration of the face.”
15. Namely together with other angels. In some texts in the *Heikhalot* literature there is a plurality of angels of the countenance.
16. ‘Er. Perhaps it should be read ‘iyṛ, namely a sort of angel.
17. ‘Amittai, *Megillat ‘Ahima‘atz*, p. 80. In several late-antique sources the higher angels, especially Shema’yel, silence the song of the chorus of angels in order to allow the prayers of the Jews to be heard. See, e.g., R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo’s *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, para. 25, fol. 4a. (Unless specified otherwise, citations of this work are from Epstein’s edition.)
18. See BT, *Hagigah*, fol. 12b; *Midrash Tehilim on Psalms 136:5*, ed. Shlomo Buber (Vilnius, 1891), p. 520. On humans—namely the apostles—as pillars see already in Paul. See the bibliography in Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Early Christianity* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2003), p. 158 n. 6. For the view of the four evangelists as supporting the world in a manner reminiscent of Atlas, see Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1962), p. 20 n. 10 and plates 7–8. The use of the four figures

as supporting heaven may echo Ezekiel 1, where the four beasts support the Divine Chariot.

19. On this dual function see Panovsky, *Studies in Iconology*, p. 20 n. 10 and plates 7–8.
20. For a quotation of the talmudic passage without any significant interpretation of the nature of the righteous or pillar, see R. Eleazar of Worms, *Sodei Razayya*, ed. Shalom Weiss (Sha'arey Ziv, Jerusalem, 1991), p. 37.
21. See Azriel, 'Arugat ha-Bosem, 2: 195.
22. On this figure see Idel, "Some Forlorn Writings." On the rabbinic and other late-antique discussions of the pillar see Idel, *Ascensions on High*, pp. 74–79.
23. R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, *Commentary on the Haftarah*, Ms. Berlin, Or. 942, fol. 153b. See also Moshe Idel, "The World of Angels in Human Shape," in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought = Studies in Jewish Mysticism, Philosophy, and Ethical Literature Presented to Isaiah Tishby*, ed. Joseph Dan and Joseph Hacker (Institute for Jewish Studies, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1986), p. 8; now in Idel, *The Angelic World*, pp. 26–27.
24. Ms. Berlin, Or. 942, fol. 153b. Cf. Deuteronomy 33:27.
25. Ms. Berlin, Or. 942, fol. 153b. The numerical value of the two Hebrew words is identical: 48.
26. I assume that this view represents not only an earlier understanding of the relationship between the chief angel and the world but also a theme that was accepted in the main school of Ashkenazi esotericism. See also R. 'Amittai's use of this verb in another poem, printed in *Megillat 'Ahima'atz*, p. 78. I delivered a lecture on this topic at the Dinur Center, Hebrew University, in 2000, and I hope to elaborate upon this issue elsewhere. See also the view that the world depends on the palm of Metatron in Ms. Jerusalem, NUL 8° 1136, fol. 26b, from the circle of R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo.
27. Ms. Berlin, Or. 942, fol. 155b, also from the circle of R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo. A question on which I cannot elaborate here is the possible contribution of this passage, and some others in the same text, to the concepts of cherubim in Ashkenazi esoteric literature. See Dan, *The "Unique Cherub" Circle*; and Eliot R. Wolfson, *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism, and Hermeneutics* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1995), especially pp. 61–62.
28. Ms. Berlin, Or. 942, fol. 153a. See Idel, "The World of Angels in Human Shape," pp. 1–15; now in Idel, *The Angelic World*, pp. 19–33.
29. See R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, Ms. Jerusalem, NUL 4° 6246, fols. 5b–6a. This text has been printed in Shlomo Musajoff, *Merkavah Shelemah* (Solomon, Jerusalem, 1921). Yuppiy'el, like Yefeyfyah, was sometimes identified as the angel of the Torah and thus also with Metatron.
30. See an edition of R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo's *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, R. Abraham Hamoi, ed., *Sefer Beit Din* (Livorno, 1858), fol. 3b, no. 22; fol. 4a, no. 24; fol. 4b, no. 30; fol. 6b, no. 49; fol. 8a, no. 61; and fol. 9b, no. 76. On the anthropomorphic aspect of the hand of God see Meir Bar-Ilan, "The Hand of God: A Chapter in Rabbinic Anthropomorphism," in *Rashi 1040–1990: Hommage à Ephraïm*

- E. Urbach, ed. Gabrielle Sed-Rajna (Le Cerf, Paris, 1993), pp. 321–335. On the various versions of this treatise, see Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 220–221; idem, “The Seventy Names of Metatron,” in *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C (World Union of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 19–23; Yehuda Liebes, “The Angels of the Shofar and Yeshua Sar ha-Panim,” in *Early Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan (Institute for Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 171–196 (Hebrew); Daniel Abrams, “The Boundaries of Divine Ontology: The Inclusion and Exclusion of Metatron in the Godhead,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994), pp. 301 n. 33, 302–305; Wolfson, “Metatron”; and, more recently, Idel, “Some Forlorn Writings.”
31. R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, Ms. Rome, Angelica 46, fol. 35a; and another version in Ms. New York, JTS 2026, fol. 8a. Yuppiy’el amounts, like ‘Ofan, to 137.
32. Tahsasyah = 543 = Tzaddiq ba’ ‘alay Yesod ‘Olam.
33. This is a pun on the Hebrew verb SBL, which means both “to sustain” and “to suffer.”
34. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, printed in *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, ed. Isaac M. Epstein (Lemberg, 1865), para. 50, fol. 6b.
35. Both words amount in gematria to 215.
36. Ms. Rome, Angelica 46, para. 49, fol. 6b. See also para. 5, fol. 1b, and para. 42, fol. 5b.
37. This phrase occurs in the context of God, *ibid.*, para. 33, fol. 5a.
38. *Ibid.*, para. 24, fol. 4a. See also Abrams, “The Boundaries of Divine Ontology,” pp. 301–302.
39. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, *Commentary on the Haftarah*, Ms. Berlin, Or. 942, fol. 154a. See also Wolfson, “Metatron,” p. 78.
40. Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, pp. 213–214, 219; and Idel, “The World of Angels in Human Shape,” pp. 10–11; now in idem, *The Angelic World*, pp. 26–27. This material was written by either R. Eleazar ha-Darshan or his son R. Moshe Azriel, and is found in Ms. Rome, Angelica 46, discussed in chap. 7, sec. 7.
41. BT, Hagigah, fol. 12b.
42. Printed by Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, p. 253. For a discussion of the context of this passage on the basis of an unknown manuscript see now Idel, *Ben*, pp. 651–654.
43. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio Evangelica* IX.17; for the English, see *Preparation for the Gospel*, trans. Edwin H. Gifford, vol. 1 (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1981), p. 451. See also Helge Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalypticism: The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure and the Son of Man* (Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1988), pp. 115–116, 260–261.
44. See Idel, *Ascensions on High*, pp. 79–85. Elliot R. Wolfson’s proposal in his *Through a Speculum*, p. 259 n. 304, that the recurring pillar motif of this “school” is a phallic symbol mistakenly imports kabbalistic sexual symbolism, found indeed in the Bahir’s treatment of the pillar, into a type of literature that does not operate with it.
45. See Idel, *Ascensions on High*, pp. 111–112; and chap. 7 in this volume.

46. See Idel, "Some Forlorn Writings."
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 194–196.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 192–193.
49. Although in some cases *Penei ha-Gevurah* implies some form of attenuating anthropomorphism, here, in my opinion, the situation is different. See also the quotation from R. Eleazar of Worms in *Sodei Razayya*, discussed later in this appendix near note 53. For other instances of anthropomorphism in some poems from the early Middle Ages see now Lorberbaum, *Image of God*, pp. 327–330; and Shama Y. Friedman, "Tzelem, Demut, ve-Tavnit," *Sidra* 22 (2007), pp. 141–144 and the bibliography there.
50. It is possible that the poet understood the term *qelaster* as pointing to a certain function of the face—luminosity, for example—thus creating a parallel between the face and the other limbs mentioned in this context together with their functions. In addition to its occurrence in the Talmud, the expression *qelaster panim* occurs in *Heikhalot* material. See Ra'anan Abusch, "R. Ishmael's Miraculous Conception," in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 2003), pp. 307–343.
51. R. 'Amittai, *Megillat 'Ahima'atz*, p. 91.
52. See BT, *Niddah*, fol. 31a. For quotations of this statement see the anonymous kabbalistic *Commentary on Prayers*, ed. Adam Afterman (Cherub Press, Los Angeles, 2004), p. 232; R. Eleazar of Worms, *Commentary on the Torah*, ed. Joel Klugmann, vol. 1 (*Benei Beraq*, 1986), p. 82.
53. R. Eleazar of Worms, *Sodei Razayya*, ed. Shalom Weiss (*Sha'arei Ziv*, Jerusalem, 1991), p. 19.
54. On anthropomorphism in Hasidei Ashkenaz see Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 86–87; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, pp. 192–195, 219, 230–232; and Moshe Idel, "Gazing at the Head in Ashkenazi Hasidism," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Mysticism* 6 (1997), pp. 265–300. See also for earlier midrashic sources Shama Friedman, "Graven Images," *Graven Images: A Journal of Culture, Law, and the Sacred* 1 (1994), pp. 233–238. Friedman's suggestion that Jacob's face on high represents the face of God, made in the context of late-antique Jewish texts, is particularly important for my suggestion for a more anthropomorphic reading of some aspects of Hasidei Ashkenaz's theology, beyond what has been already done in modern scholarship.
55. See Azriel, *'Arugat ha-Bosem*, 4: 74–77.
56. See Idel, "The Forlorn Writings," pp. 192–193.
57. Azriel, *'Arugat ha-Bosem*, 4: 81.
58. See especially R. Nehemiah's *Sefer ha-Navon*, whose discussions of *Shi'ur Qomah* have been printed and compared to the extant versions of this book by Martin S. Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* (J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1985), pp. 220–225.
59. On these terms see the material collected by Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 366 n. 106; and idem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, 1965), pp. 43–44. See also Wolfson, "Metatron," p. 80.

60. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, in Epstein, *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, para. 30, fol. 4b; and the version found in Ms. New York, JTS 2026, fol. 3b. See also Abrams, "The Boundaries of Divine Ontology," p. 305. For an explicit rabbinic denial that God has a son or a brother see *Deuteronomy Rabba* 2:24. In R. Nehemiah's commentary both the terms "son" and "brother" are attributed to Metatron.
61. See Idel, Ben, pp. 194–376.
62. On the brotherhood of God and Israel see also David Hoffmann, ed., *Mekhilta' de-Rabbi Simon b. Yohai* (Frankfurt am Main, 1905), p. 48.
63. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, in Epstein, *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, paras. 6, 11, and 49, fols. 1a, 2b, and 69 respectively.
64. Cf. Scholem's assumption that the Heikhalot literature degenerated over time from an experiential orientation into a magical one; *Major Trends*, pp. 54–78. The material found in both *Megillat 'Ahima'atz* and R. 'Amittai's poems renders this view problematic, just as it problematizes Schaefer's critique of Scholem's stand, in which he similarly argues that the Heikhalot literature was basically magical. See Peter Schaefer, "Gershom Scholem Reconsidered: The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism," in his *Hekhalot-Studien* (Mohr/Siebeck, Tübingen, 1988), pp. 277–295.
65. In some Ashkenazi sources the locution *demut demut*, "likeness, likeness," occurs in connection with the theory of the divine glory; see, e.g., R. Eleazar's *Hilkhot Kavod*, in Daniel Abrams, "Sod kol ha-Sodot: The Concept of the Divine Glory and the Intention of Prayer in the Writings of R. Eleazar of Worms," *Da'at* 34 (1995), p. 79 (Hebrew); and Wolfson, "Metatron," pp. 66–67.
66. This view implies that one of the two likenesses belongs to the terrestrial man. On the issue of *demut* in Hasidei Ashkenaz see Haym Soloveitchik, "Topics in the *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh*," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 18 (1967), pp. 75–78; Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, pp. 224–225.
67. The Hebrew is not quite clear here, and my translation is an approximation; in the original it is written *ka'asher ivhar be-'avodat ha-navi'*.
68. This form is a reconstruction that I offer to the meaningless *yeryimياهو*—apparently influenced by the occurrence of the term "prophet" beforehand—as found in print and quoted by Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, p. 223. Maybe it is a scribal error for *yare'hu*, namely "He [God] has shown to him [namely to the prophet]." However, the sequence *be-zohar kevodo* fits the phrase *yariymehu* and not *yare'hu*. See also Psalm 112:9, *Qarno yarum be-kavod*, which can be translated as "his horn will be exalted with glory." The ascension of the prophet, which is signified by *yariymehu*, fits the discussion immediately preceding this quotation, where the two likenesses are described as pointing respectively to the status of man and to Enoch's status as an angel, thus implying the translation, and thus the ascension, of the patriarch. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, p. 223, adduces the form *Yermiyahu*! Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, p. 223, translates this passage, on the basis of several manuscripts, with the version of *yare'hu* as the correct reading. See also M. Idel, "Additional Fragments from Joseph of Hamadan's Writings," *Da'at* 21 (1988), p. 51 and n. 26 (Hebrew).

69. Nehemiah ben Shlomo, *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, Ms. New York, JTS 1801, in Epstein, *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, para. 25, fol. 4a.
70. See Peter Schaefer, *The Hidden and the Manifest God* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1992), pp. 165–166; Moshe Idel, “Enoch Is Metatron,” *Immanuel* 24/25 (1990), p. 225 n. 18; and Elliot R. Wolfson, “Yeridah la-Merkavah: Typology of Ecstasy and Enthronement in Ancient Jewish Mysticism,” in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, and Typologies*, ed. R. A. Herrera (Peter Lang, New York, 1993), pp. 13–44.
71. See Pieter Willem van der Horst, “Moses’ Throne Vision in Ezekiel the Dramatist,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 34 (1983), pp. 21–29; Geo Widengren, “Heavenly Enthronement and Baptism: Studies in Mandaean Baptism,” in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Honor of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Brill, Leiden, 1968), pp. 551–582; idem, “Baptism and Enthronement in Some Jewish-Christian Gnostic Documents,” in *The Saviour God*, ed. S. G. F. Brandon (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1963), pp. 205–217.
72. See Eleazar of Worms, *Sodei Razayya*, p. 135. A process of angelification is described on p. 138. See also Moshe Idel, “Adam and Enoch According to St. Ephrem the Syrian,” *Kabbalah* 6 (2001), pp. 183–205.
73. See R. Eleazar’s *Hokhmat ha-Nefesh* (Benei Beraq, 1987), p. 23, stating that when God wants to elevate the soul to the throne of Glory, “He shows here the splendor of His Glory.” For additional examples of ascent by means of a ray that elevates the soul to the upper world in early Catalan Kabbalah see Moshe Idel, “In the Light of Life,” in *Qeddushat ha-Hayyim*, ed. Y. Gafni and A. Ravitzky (Merkaz Zalman Shazar, Jerusalem, 1992), pp. 209–211 (Hebrew). Those and other affinities notwithstanding, it is advisable to distinguish carefully between their views, and not attempt to attribute the views of one school to those found in another. For further differences between these two Ashkenazi schools see Idel, *Ben*, pp. 194–275.
74. As Scholem perceptively pointed out in the context of the Heikhalot literature, *Major Trends*, p. 79.

## APPENDIX 2: THE INFANT EXPERIMENT

1. On this issue see Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct: The New Science of Language and Mind* (Penguin, London, 1994), pp. 231–261; George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1975), p. 474.
2. See the rabbinic references on this issue collected by Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 5 (Philadelphia, JPS, 1968), pp. 205–206 n. 91.
3. See Nehemiah Alony, “The Kuzari—An Anti-Arabiyyeh Polemic,” in *'Eshel Beer Sheva': Studies in Jewish Thought*, vol. 3, ed. G. Blidstein, R. Bonfil, and Y. Salmon (Ben Gurion University Press, Beer Sheva, 1981), pp. 113–114 (Hebrew); and Yochanan Silman, *Thinker and Seer: The Development of the Thought of R. Yehudah Halevi in the Kuzari* (Bar-Ilan University Press, Ramat Gan, 1985), pp. 86–89 (Hebrew). For more on ha-Levi’s view of language see Wilhelm Bacher, “The Views of Jehuda Halevi Concerning the Hebrew Language,” *Hebraica* 8 (1892), pp. 136–149.

4. See *Cronica Fratris Salimbene, Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, vol. 32 (Hannover, 1912), p. 350.
5. On this figure see the articles in Isadore Twersky and Jay M. Harris, eds., *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra: Studies in the Writings of a Twelfth-Century Jewish Polymath* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1993).
6. According to one scholar, it was written in Rome in 1174; according to another, it was composed after his visit there, while the author was in France. See Zeev Bacher, *Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, the Grammarian*, trans. A. Z. Rabinovitch (1931; reprint, Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 24–25 (Hebrew). Thus Ibn Ezra visited Italy more than a century before Abraham Abulafia's studies there.
7. Ro'shah may also be translated as "principal language."
8. This view apparently influenced Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim; see Steiner, *After Babel*, p. 62.
9. R. Abraham ibn Ezra, *Safah Berurah*, ed. Michael Vilensky, *Devir* 2 (1924), p. 286.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. See BT, *Sanhedrin*, fol. 38b; *ibid.*, fol. 21b; Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1992), pp. 1, 12.
13. On the identity of the natures see later in the discussion.
14. Gimgum. Another possible translation would be "babble."
15. Quoted by R. Zerachyah ben Sha'altiel Hen in his response to R. Hillel, printed in *Otzar Nehmad*, ed. Raphael Kircheim, vol. 2 (1857; reprint, Jerusalem, 1967), p. 135. On the polemic about language between the two thinkers see the very important, though hardly accessible, discussion of Giuseppe Sermoneta, "R. Hillel ben Shmuel ben Eleazar of Verona and His Philosophical Thought" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1961), pp. 167–184 (Hebrew). See also the more general survey of Isaac E. Barzilay, *Between Reason and Faith: Anti-Rationalism in Jewish Italian Thought, 1250–1650* (Mouton, The Hague, 1967), pp. 33–57; and Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*.
16. Sermoneta, "Hillel of Verona and His Philosophical Thought," pp. 168–169.
17. R. Zerachyah Hen, in Kircheim, *Otzar Nehmad*, 2: 136.
18. Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 45–145; and *idem*, "Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Language*, ed. S. Katz (Oxford University Press, New York, 1992), pp. 42–79.
19. On these issues see Gershom Scholem, "The Name of God and the Linguistic of the Kabbala," *Diogenes* 79 (1972), pp. 59–80; *ibid.*, 80, pp. 164–194; Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*; and *idem*, *The Mystical Experience*.
20. See his claim in Abulafia, *Ve-Zot Li-Yhudah*, p. 18.
21. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Re'ayon*, Ms. Vatican 291, fols. 29b–30a.
22. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer ha-Melammed*, Ms. Paris, BN 680, fol. 296a. For bibliographical details on this book see Idel, "Abraham Abulafia," pp. 15–17.
23. See note 41 below.



24. On the affinity between language and geographical environment see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 154 n. 99.
25. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer 'Or ha-Sekhel*, Ms. Berlin, Or. 538, fols. 15b–16a; Ms. Vatican 233, fols. 11a–b.
26. Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, Ms. Munich 408, fols. 91a–b.
27. On the various versions of Aristotle's concept in Arabo-Judaic philosophies see Herbert Davidson's studies printed in *Viator* 3 (1972), 17 (1986), 18 (1987), and *REJ* 131 (1972), pp. 351–396.
28. See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 187 n. 240.
29. Abulafia, *Sefer 'Or ha-Sekhel*, Ms. Berlin, Or. 538, fol. 14b; Ms. Vatican 233, fol. 10b.
30. *Ibid.*, fol. 15b.
31. See Abulafia, *Ve-Zot Li-Yhudah*, p. 16.
32. Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 55, 65 n. 14, 84, 149 n. 52.
33. On the term *tziyyur* as forming a concept see H. A. Wolfson, "The Terms *Tasawwur* and *Tasdiq* in Arabic Philosophy and Their Greek, Latin and Hebrew Equivalents," *Moslem World*, April 1943, pp. 1–15.
34. Abulafia, *Sefer Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, Ms. Munich 408, fols. 91a–b.
35. This is how it appears in the manuscript; apparently the word *me'uleh*, "of highest quality," or some approximation of such a word, is missing. On the concept that the first language included all other languages, see R. Arnaldes's analysis of the opinion of the eleventh-century thinker and linguist from Cordoba, Abu Muhammad Ali ibn Hazm, *Grammaire et théologie chez Ibn Hazm de Cordove* (Paris, 1956), p. 46.
36. On this issue see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 3–8.
37. Namely the five main vowels according to the medieval Hebrew grammar as influenced by Arabic linguistics.
38. QDVSh (*qadosh* = holy) = 410, like the morpheme ThY in an elliptical spelling of *theos*, "divine," in Greek.
39. In Italian, *santo* means "holy," whence we deduce that the word *La'az* means (in the context of Abulafia's usage) "Italian."
40. Abraham Abulafia, *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1582, fol. 105b.
41. Abulafia, *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, p. 8; Idel, "Abraham Abulafia," pp. 86–87, 92–93, 96, 98–99, 103. On the possible importance of the unique status of language as a form of cognition higher than imagination for later developments in the description of man as having the form of speech, as in Dante, see Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, pp. 46–52.
42. Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 16–27. Abulafia quotes a passage from Averroës' *Commentary on Aristotle's De Interpretatione*, as translated by Jacob Anatoli in Italy toward the end of the first half of the thirteenth century, to make his point. See Abulafia, *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, pp. 16–17. This is why I see a much more Aristotelian orientation in Abulafia in matters of language than in any theosophical Kabbalists I know of. None of the latter quoted Aristotle or Averroës even in order to argue against them. Their approach to Hebrew was based upon the written aspects of Hebrew, which are imag-



- ined to represent divine powers in their external form. See, e.g., the *Commentaries on the Alphabet* printed in Moshe Idel, “R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid and His Commentaries on the Alphabet,” *‘Aleī Sefer* 9 (1981), pp. 84–98 (Hebrew); as well as in the anonymous *Sefer ha-Temunah*. See, however, Wolfson’s effort to reconcile the two different attitudes toward language in *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 204. It is worth remembering that Abulafia was more critical of the infant experiment than was Hillel, an Aristotelian. The theosophical Kabbalists, either in Spain or in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries in Italy, never referred to this experiment, and I suspect that if they had, their approach would have been closer to Hillel’s and quite critical of Abulafia’s naturalistic approach.
43. On this Kabbalist see Isaiah Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 177–254 (Hebrew).
  44. See Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 45–145; and idem, “The Talismanic Language in Jewish Mysticism,” *Diogenes* 43, no. 2 (1995), pp. 23–41.
  45. R. Aharon Berakhiah of Modena, *Sefer Ma’avar Yaboq* (Vilnius, 1896), fol. 124a. For the various midrashic and medieval sources of this view see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 29–32.
  46. On this concept see Pines, “On the Term *Ruhaniyyut*,” as well as his “Shi’ite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi’s *Kuzari*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980), pp. 165–251; and Idel, *Hasidism*.
  47. Aharon Berakhiah, *Sefer Ma’avar Yaboq*, fol. 123b.
  48. *Ibid.*
  49. See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 29–32.
  50. Cf. M. Idel, “*Deus sive natura*: Les métamorphoses d’une formule de Maimonide à Spinoza,” in *Maimonide et la mystique juive*, pp. 105–135.
  51. Allison Coudert, “Some Theories of a Natural Language from the Renaissance to the Seventeenth Century,” in *Magia Naturalis und die Entstehung des modernen Naturwissenschaften: Studia Leibnitiana*, vol. 7 (Steiner, Wiesbaden, 1978), pp. 56–118.
  52. Aharon Berakhiah, *Sefer Ma’avar Yaboq*, fol. 123b.
  53. The lowest in the kabbalistic hierarchy of ten sefirot.
  54. Aharon Berakhiah, *Sefer Ma’avar Yaboq*, fol. 102b. This text is heavily influenced by R. Moshe Cordovero’s commentary on the prayerbook, *Tefillah le-Moshe* (Premislany, 1892), fol. 4a. On the content of the latter see Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 71. Compare also the view concerning the *berakhah*, namely the blessing, as presented in R. Meir ibn Gabbai, *‘Avodat ha-Qodesh* (Jerusalem, 1983), fol. 39c; and R. Isaiah Horowitz, *ha-Shelah*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1969), fol. 22b.
  55. For more on Berakhiah’s thought see Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 71.
  56. Probably the biblical figure who was a king of Aram; see, for example, 1 Kings 20:1. I have not found an additional connection between this king and the issue of language.
  57. See also above, note 7.
  58. Printed in Hayyim Liebermann, *‘Ohel Rahel*, vol. 1 (privately printed, New York, 1980), pp. 319–320 (Hebrew).

59. See Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 25.
60. Cf. Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, pp. 48–52.
61. See Shlomo Pines, “Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb?: Some Jewish and Arabic Sources of Leone Ebreo’s Doctrines,” in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. B. D. Cooperman (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p. 390.
62. On this important point for understanding the general ambience of Italian Kabbalah, see the general remarks of David B. Ruderman, “At the Intersection of Cultures: The Historical Legacy of Italian Jewry,” in *Gardens and Ghettos: The Art of Jewish Life in Italy*, ed. Vivian Mann (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989), pp. 1–23; and Giuseppe Sermoneta, “L’incontro culturale tra ebrei e cristiani nel Medioevo e nel Rinascimento,” in *Ebrei e cristiani nell’Italia medievale e moderna: Atti del VI Congresso internazionale dell’AISG*, ed. Michele Luzzati, Michele Olivari, and Alessandra Veronese (Carrucci, Rome, 1988), pp. 183–207.
63. Yehudah Rosenthal, *Mehqarim u-Meqorot*, vol. 1 (Reuven Mass Editing House, Jerusalem, 1967), p. 217 n. 13 (Hebrew), stated that the English king James II was credited with an experiment similar to that of Frederick II, but he did not provide a precise source for this claim.

### APPENDIX 3: R. YOHANAN ALEMANNINO’S STUDY PROGRAM

1. See Idel, “The Study Program,” offering a more detailed discussion of the identity of these books and an analysis of the structure and content of this list in relation to Alemanno’s other writings. Here I present only what seems to me to be essential or updated information.
2. See P. Kibré, *The Library of Pico della Mirandola* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1936).
3. *Hatzalah* ’enoshit is an approximation of *eudaimonia*. Elsewhere Alemanno uses a term more common in the Middle Ages, *Hatzalah* ’aharonah. See Idel, “The Study Program,” p. 319. On these terms in Alemanno and his more general views on the topic see Hava Tirosch-Samuelson, *Happiness in Premodern Judaism: Virtue, Knowledge, and Well-Being* (Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, 2003), pp. 412–423.
4. R. Asher ben Yehi’el, known as *ha-Rosh*.
5. Namely the book by Profiat Duran, an early-fifteenth-century Provençal Jewish thinker.
6. Yehudah Messer Leon was the teacher of Alemanno and wrote a book on biblical rhetoric titled *Nofet Tzufim*.
7. Here and elsewhere in the curriculum Alemanno uses an Italian word, *pratici* or *pratica*.
8. Plausibly, we have here a recommendation to study also foreign languages and the rhetoric related to them.
9. Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (1893; reprint, Graz, 1954), p. 523.
10. Alemanno refers to an abridgment of the *Almagest* done by Averroës.
11. This a book by the twelfth-century Barcelonan Abraham bar Hiyya, whose full title is *Tzurat ha-’Aretz ve-Tavnit ha-Shamayyim*.

12. Presumably this is the Hebrew translation titled *Sefer Yesodot ha-tekhunah*, namely *Elements of Astronomy*. See Steinschneider, *Die Hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters*, p. 555.
13. Again a book by Profiat Duran.
14. This is the book by the fourteenth-century Toledan astronomer R. Isaac ben Joseph Israeli.
15. Namely the book by R. Abraham bar Hiyya.
16. In fact this is a book by R. Shem Tov Falaquera. See Steinschneider, *Die Hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters*, pp. 5–9. The same mistake occurs in the catalogue of Pico's library. See Kibré, *The Library*, p. 241, no. 295, and p. 43: *Opiniones philosophorum Rabi Samuelis*. See also Wirszubski, *Sermo de Passione Domini*, p. 62 n. 2.
17. Presumably this is his book *Me'oznei Tzedeq*, *The Scale of Justice*, which was well known to many medieval Jewish authors and was quoted by Alemmano many times.
18. Presumably Ibn Gabirol's book *Tiqqun Middot ha-Nefesh*. For the occurrence of this book together with the previous one see Idel, "The Study Program," p. 307 n. 34.
19. See *The Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect by Ibn Rushd with the Commentary of Moses Narboni*, ed. Kalman P. Bland (JTS, New York, 1982).
20. I assume that this is Abu-Bakr ibn Tufayl's *Hayy bin Yaqtan*, a book much revered by Alemanno, who taught it to Pico della Mirandola, and also quoted by Marsilio Ficino. On Alemanno's view on this topic see Georges Vajda, *L'amour de Dieu dans la théologie juive du Moyen Age* (J. Vrin, Paris, 1957), pp. 280–285; M. Idel, "The Sources of the Circle Images in *Dialoghi d'Amore*," *Iyyun* 28 (1978), pp. 162–166 (Hebrew).
21. *Tzori ha-Guf*, a book by R. Nathan ben Yo'el Falaquera, found still in manuscript.
22. This is an Arabic book translated into Hebrew, which was in Pico's library. See Steinschneider, *Die Hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters*, pp. 702–704; and Kibré, *The Library*, p. 47: *Viaticum peregrinatum*.
23. As the late Arie L. Motzkin let me know in a letter in 1981, this is the book attributed to the Dioscourides, translated as *The Greek Herbal*, which was very widespread in the Renaissance.
24. On Alemanno and alchemy see Idel, "The Study Program," pp. 307–308 n. 43.
25. See Martin Plessner, *Vorsokratische Philosophie und griechische Alchemie* (Steiner, Wiesbaden, 1975).
26. This may be again a book attributed to the Dioscourides.
27. By Al-Ghazzali.
28. *Tiqqun ha-De'ot*. On this book see Georges Vajda, *Isaac Albalag* (J. Vrin, Paris, 1960).
29. Al-Ghazali's book.
30. By R. Yehudah ha-Levi.
31. By the twelfth-century Spanish thinker Abraham ben Dawd.
32. Presumably Joseph Kaspi.
33. Namely *Moreh ha-Moreh*. Cf. Kibré, *The Library*, no. 532, p. 190, where the term *Auphalachera* is mistakenly interpreted as referring to Abulafia.

34. By R. Hasdai Crescas. This book had an impact on Giovanni Pico's nephew. See Harry A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1929), p. 749.
35. By Joseph Albo, an early-fifteenth-century thinker.
36. Maybe it is, again, R. Shem Tov Falaquera, whose books were quoted by Alemanno in various instances in his own works.
37. On the margin of this page Alemanno added "and the books of Leuccio di Ser Daniel," which is, as the late Professor Giuseppe Sermonetta told me, the name of R. Yehudah Romano.
38. The book by the controversial Jewish thinker R. Levi ben Abraham from Villefranche. See Colette Sirat, "Les différentes versions du *Liwyat Hen* de Levi ben Abraham," *REJ* 122 (1963), pp. 167–177; and Warren Zev Harvey, "Levi Ben Abraham of Villefranche's Controversial Encyclopedia," in *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedia of Science and Philosophy*, ed. S. Harvey (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 2000), pp. 171–188.
39. The Hebrew phrase is *Shorshei ha-Qabbalah*, and it recurs also in other contexts. See also above, chap. 20, note 60.
40. See chap. 18, sec. 3.
41. The identity of this book eludes me.
42. The identity of this figure is not clear to me.
43. R. Isaac ben Abraham ibn Latif, a mid-thirteenth-century thinker active in Spain, had an impact on both Alemanno and Pico. See M. Idel, "The Throne and the Seven-Branded Candlestick: Pico della Mirandola's Hebrew Source," *JWCI* 40 (1977), pp. 290–292; and idem, "The Study Program," pp. 309–310 n. 64. On his writings see Heller Wilensky, "Isaac ibn Latif—Philosopher or Kabbalist?" See also above, chap. 18, note 5.
44. This is a kabbalistic book emanating from Nahmanides' school, written in the early fourteenth century, presumably in Barcelona, and well known in Italy, where it was the subject of several commentaries. See chap. 18.
45. For a list of the commentaries on this book known to Alemanno see Idel, "The Study Program," p. 310 n. 67. Those commentaries mark the transition from theosophic-theurgic Kabbalah to the ecstatic form.
46. Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah is therefore situated at the top of kabbalistic studies, higher than the books dealing with theosophic-theurgic Kabbalah. On the list of this Kabbalist's books that were used by Alemanno see Idel, "The Study Program," pp. 310–311 n. 68. On the high rank of Abulafia's Kabbalah based on combinations of letters and the affinity to the spiritual, namely occult, sciences, see *ibid.*, pp. 319–321.
47. *Hokhmat ha-ruhaniyyut* or *Hokhmah ruhaniyt*, which in this context means the science of magic. On the history of this term see Pines, "On the Term *Ruhaniyyut*."
48. *Mel'ekhet ha-Muskket*. On this book see Idel, "The Study Program," pp. 311 n. 70 and 320; and chap. 16, sec. 2, in this volume.
49. See chap. 16, sec. 2; and chap. 16, note 37.
50. See Idel, "The Study Program," p. 312 n. 73. The work by Plato—perhaps titled *Mechanics*—has not survived.

51. See Gershom Scholem's edition of the Hebrew translation and a German translation, *Sefer ha-Tamar: Das Buch von der Palme des Abu Aflah aus Syracus* (Jerusalem, 1926–27); and Shlomo Pines, "Le *Sefer ha-Tamar* et les *Maggidim* des Kabbalists," in *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati (Peeters, Louvain, 1980), pp. 333–363. See now Reimund Leicht, *Astrologumena Judaica* (Mohr/Siebeck, Tübingen, 2007), pp. 306–308.
52. See Idel, "The Study Program," p. 312 n. 75; and now the contemporary use of the term *tahbbuli* to refer to some form of mechanics used to create an artificial anthropoid, in the manuscript of R. Moses ben Yehudah Galeano, an author active in the Ottoman Empire. See Y. Tzvi Langerman, "'From My Notebooks': Medicine, Mechanics, and Magic from Moses ben Judah Galeano's *Ta'alumot Hokhmah*," *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science & Judaism* 9 (2009), pp. 366–370.
53. This is a widely influential magical book attributed to R. Abraham ibn Ezra.
54. This is a Renaissance work found also in Pico's library. See Kibré, *The Library*, pp. 110, 127, no. 802. See H. Nais, "Le Rustican—Notes sur la traduction française du *Traité d'agriculture* de Pierre de Crescensiis," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance* 19 (1957), pp. 103–132. On the significance of the presence of this book at the top of Alemanno's list see Idel, "The Study Program," pp. 322–328, including some parallels to Pico della Mirandola's understanding of magic. See also chap. 20 in this volume on the *Nabbatean Agriculture*, a title known in the Middle Ages but rarely cited.

#### APPENDIX 4: MAGIC TEMPLES AND CITIES IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE

1. Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, pp. 54 ff., 367 ff.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 370–372. In the second half of the sixteenth century there were some links between architecture and Hermetic elements; see René Taylor, "Architecture and Magic," in *Essays in the History of Architecture Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, ed. Douglas Fraser, Howard Hibberd, and Milton J. Lewine (Phaidon Press, London, 1967), pp. 81–109.
3. The Latin translation, which was known in the Renaissance, has been edited by Vittoria Perrone Compagni, "Picatrix Latinus: Concezione filosofico-religiosa e prassi magica," *Medioevo: Rivista di storia della filosofia medievale* 1 (1975), pp. 334–337.
4. For the Sabeen background and parallels to the passages, see Henry Corbin, "Rituel sabéen et exégèse ismaélienne du rituel," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 19 (1951), pp. 182 ff. A Kabbalist of the mid-seventeenth century, probably writing in Poland, recognized the Sabeen character of Alemanno's passage. See R. Samuel ben Benjamin, *Devarim 'Atiqim*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1563, fol. 295b.
5. In Ibn Zarza's passage the phrase is "in ancient time"—*bi-zeman qadum*.
6. In Hebrew *Zin*; this spelling follows the Arabic.
7. In Hebrew *tzurah*. The Hebrew term means also "talisman"; see Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Hebräischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (1893; reprint, Graz, 1954), p. 846 n. 8.

8. The list of correspondences between colors and planets did not occur in Mas'udi's text, but it is found in Ibn Zarza's passage, and it has a quite impressive parallel to the Hebrew version of an Arabic magical text attributed to Abu Aflah al-Syracusi, titled *'Em ha-Melekh* (The Mother of the King), published by Gershom Scholem as an appendix to *Sefer ha-Tamar: Das Buch von der Palme des Abu Aflah aus Syracus* (Jerusalem, 1927), p. 41. Scholem noted (p. 41 n. 1) that the sources of *'Em ha-Melekh* are the *Risalas of Ikhwan al-Safa*.
9. On the forms of the stars, see Moritz Steinschneider, *Zur Pseudepigraphischen Literatur* (Berlin, 1862), pp. 29–30.
10. In Hebrew *nitzotzot*. The term *nitzotz* occurs several times in the *Book of the Palm*, and its meaning is “emanation.” See, e.g., p. 13 of Scholem's appendix to *Sefer ha-Tamar*.
11. From the beginning of the passage until here Alemanno quotes, without attribution, from R. Shmuel ibn Zarza's *Meqor Hayyim*, published in abridged form in *Margaliyyot Tovah* (Ivano-Frankovsk, 1927), fol. 77b. Thus there can be no doubt that Ibn Zarza mediated the passage between an Arabic source, close in its formulation to though not totally identical with Mas'udi, to Alemanno in Florence.
12. R. Yohanan Alemanno, *Sha'ar ha-Hesheq* (Halberstadt, 1860), fol. 26a–b.
13. In Hebrew *hashqafah pit'omit*, a concept that seems to be influenced by Abu Bakr ibn Tufayl's *Hayy bin Yoqtan*. See, e.g., Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1337, fol. 102b.
14. Alemanno, *Sha'ar ha-Hesheq*, fol. 34b; idem, *Sefer Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1535, fols. 106a–b.
15. Alemanno understood agriculture as a high form of magic. See the material collected to this effect in Idel, “The Study Program,” pp. 324–328, where I have shown that there is a parallel emphasis on the high status of agriculture in the writings of both Jewish and Christian thinkers in the Florentine Renaissance.
16. *tzurot*, namely talismans. See note 7 above.
17. On this term as close to magic see Idel, “The Study Program,” pp. 311–312 and 320 n. 73.
18. Alemanno, *Sha'ar ha-Hesheq*, fol. 34b.
19. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963), pp. 516–517. See also Howard Kreisel, “Veridical Dreams and Prophecy in the Philosophy of Gersonides,” *Da'at* 22 (1989), p. 80 (Hebrew).
20. On this version see David Flusser's introduction to *Josippon: The Original Version*, Ms. Jerusalem 8 41280 and *Supplements* (Merkaz Dinur, Jerusalem, 1978), p. 6. The Venice edition is the second, the first being Constantinople 1510.
21. In Hebrew *medinah*, but its meaning seems to be, according to the Arabic *madinah*, “city.” On the same page we read: “we went to one *medinah* in India, and it is found amidst a river . . . and the foundations of the *medinah* are on canes”; here it is evident that the topic is a city not a country.
22. I use here *The Book of Josiphon* (Hominer, Jerusalem, 1967), p. 52. Part of this passage was appropriated by the anonymous author of *The Book of Yashar* (Herts, Berlin, 1923). For another opinion about the source of the *Book of Yashar*'s passage on Keinan the son

of Enos, see Levi Ginzburg, "The Flood of Fire," in his *'Al Halakhah ve-Aggadah* (Devir, Tel Aviv, 1960), pp. 208–209 (Hebrew). See also Yoseph Dan, "When Was the Book of Yashar Composed?," in *Sepher Dov Sdan*, ed. N. Rotenstreich, S. Werses, and Ch. Shmeruk (ha-Kibbutz hameuhad, Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 105–110 (Hebrew). According to Dan, the book was written during the Renaissance. In the passage on Keinan as it appears in *The Book of Yashar*, and whose source is Josiphon, there are two variants that appear also in Isaac Abravanel's quotation from Josiphon in his *Commentary on Genesis* (Warsaw, 1862), fol. 27a. Dan's suggestion that the author of *The Book of Yashar* lived in Naples may be strengthened by the fact that Isaac Abravanel lived in Naples at the time when this book was supposedly written.

23. R. Abraham Yagel, *Beit Ya'ar ha-Levanon*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1304, fol. 9b. Yagel wrote his encyclopedia at the beginning of the seventeenth century and was strongly influenced by Alemanno's views. On this figure see Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science*; idem, *A Valley of Vision: The Heavenly Journey of Abraham ben Hananiah Yagel* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1990).
24. Quoted from *Documenti della Vita di Giordano Bruno*, ed. Vincenzo Spampanato (Florence, 1933), p. 44, in Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, p. 233. She did not identify the "Duke of Florence."
25. Cosimo ruled Florence from 1539 to 1564. There may be a connection between the building of the City of the Sun in that period and the printing of Copernicus's works from 1543 on. For the connection between Copernicus and Florentine Neoplatonism, which stressed the importance of the sun, see Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, pp. 151–155.
26. One of the five available manuscripts of the Latin *Picatrix* was copied in Florence in 1536; see Compagni, "Picatrix Latinus," pp. 279–280. Alemanno himself seems to have known one of the Medicis; in his commentary on the Song of Songs, *Hesheq Shlomo*, Ms. Oxford, Bodleiana 1535, he praises Lorenzo de' Medici. See the passage printed by Joseph Perles, "Les savants juifs à Florence à l'époque de Laurent de Médicis," *REJ* 12 (1886), pp. 246–253.

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