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Edited by

Z'ev Strauss and Isaac Slater

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What Does the Messiah Know?

A Prelude to Kabbalah's Trinity Complex

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Abstract

The present study sheds light on the tortured relationship between Iberian Kabbalah and medieval Christian doctrine by shifting the scholarly focus from the self-consciously para-Trinitarian speculation developed in late thirteenth-century Castile to the messianism of earlier kabbalistic writing composed in Catalonia. It documents a filiation of texts—leading from the threefold theosophical speculation incubated by Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona to Moses Naḥmanides's messianic assertions in the context of the 1263 Disputation of Barcelona—concerned with the interpretation of a single biblical episode: God's investiture of Bezalel, the chief artisan of the Tabernacle, with three intellectual attributes operative in the divine act of creation. On the foundation laid for him by Ezra ben Solomon and Azriel of Gerona, Naḥmanides identified Bezalel's knowledge of sacred architecture with knowledge of Kabbalah. Moreover, he intimated that the redeemer of Israel would resemble Bezalel as one endowed with such knowledge. This prompts the question: Did the Catalonian authors anticipate that Kabbalah would prove instrumental for the practical task of building a new sanctuary?

Keywords

early Kabbalah – messianism – Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona – Moses Naḥmanides – Bezalel – Tabernacle – eschatology – Trinity – Jewish-Christian disputation

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In Memoriam
 Michal (Kushnir) Oron (1939–2022)
 Joseph Dan (1935–2022)

• • •

We will achieve closeness to God by being in His Temple with His priests and His prophets. Additionally, we will have purity and sanctity, we will be in the chosen Land, and His presence will dwell among us. [...] Then we shall no longer linger over foreign faiths, [wondering] whether they are true, as those who lack knowledge among our nation wonder. Our appetitive soul bestirs itself likewise for those days and eagerly awaits them in order to demonstrate to her opponents, that is, her evil neighbors, the people of the strange religions, that “they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.” [Hos 8:7.] It is natural for a person to [wish to] prevail over his adversaries to show that the truth lies with him.

NAḤMANIDES, *Book of Redemption* (*Sefer ha-Ge'ullah*)¹

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1 “Fear and Cringing”

More than other partisans of medieval Jewish theology, the kabbalists of the thirteenth century bore the burden of disambiguating their teachings from those of the illicit faith of Christianity.² This burden saddled their efforts to

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- 1 Moses Naḥmanides, *Kitvey Ramban*, ed. Charles B. Chavel, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 2006), 1:280; translation based on Naḥmanides, *Writings and Discourses*, ed. Charles B. Chavel (Brooklyn: Shilo, 1978), 2:607–8. All citations from Naḥmanides's Torah commentary are based on Naḥmanides, *Commentary on the Torah by Moshe ben Nachman* (*Nachmanides*), ed. Charles B. Chavel, 2 vols., 4th ed. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1967); all translations thereof are adapted from Naḥmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, trans. Charles B. Chavel, 5 vols. (Brooklyn: Shilo, 1999).
- 2 Consider, e.g., the oft-quoted statement from Abraham Abulafia's composition *We-Zot li-Yehudah*: “The masters of the Kabbalah of the *sefrot* thought to unify the divine name and escape the faith of the Trinity, but they made a division into ten. And just as the Gentiles say that there are three and that the three are one, so some of the masters of the Kabbalah avow

disseminate a “secret of faith,”³ or alternately, a “secret of unity” among Israel,⁴ according to which the singular divinity comprises a multitude of individuating powers. The kabbalists disseminated their “hidden wisdom” at a time when the Dominican Order had intensified a campaign in territories to the north and south of the Pyrenees to convert Jews to the confession of a triune Godhead. Writing in 1292, Moses ben Shem-Tov de León of Guadalajara intimated the high stakes of confessing the doctrine of the *sefirot* by placing a theological anxiety on the lips of an apparently rhetorical questioner. The anxiety concerns the kabbalists’ discernment of a threefold divine unity within the very verses classically marshalled by Christians to prove a biblical basis for Trinitarian belief. These verses include the *šema*’ (Deut 6:4), the credal statement of Israelite monotheism in which God is invoked three times. They also include the *qedušaḥ* (Isa 6:3), in which God is thrice called “holy.” Referring to these verses, the questioner demands to know:

Why all of this multiplication by three? [...] Is this not the very thing that perplexes beliefs? [...] Truth is not lacking from the things you have taught, though the heart is not settled and cannot be pacified. The person who understands [these things] fears and cringes, lest he transgress with his tongue, and therefore keeps his mouth shut.⁵

In contrast to the extroverted, kerygmatic ethos accompanying the illicit doctrine of the Trinity, a fear of misspeaking imposes a fence of silence around Israel’s “secret of unity.”⁶ Nonetheless, the questioner utters the crux of his

and proclaim that the divinity is the ten *sefirot*, and that the ten are one.” See Adolf [Aharon] Jellinek, *Ginzei Ḥokhmat ha-Kabbalah* (Leipzig, 1853), 19.

3 On the term “secret of faith” (*sod ha-emunah*), see Jeremy Phillip Brown, “Gazing into their Hearts: On the Appearance of Kabbalistic Pietism in Thirteenth-Century Castile,” *European Journal of Jewish Studies* (2020): 193.

4 On the term “secret of unity” (*sod ha-yiḥud*), see Jonatan M. Benarroch, “‘The Mystery of Unity’: Poetic and Mystical Aspects of a Unique Zoharic Shema Mystery,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 37 (2013): 231–56; with specific reference to threefold unity, see Jeremy Phillip Brown and Avishai Bar-Asher, “The Enduring Female: Differentiating Moses de León’s Early Androgynology,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 28 (2021): 21–53, esp. 29–33. Noteworthy in connection with this term is the language used by Nahmanides to ascribe Trinitarian belief to his Dominican opponent in the context of the Disputation of Barcelona (*hu’ ma’amin be-yiḥud gemurah we-’im kol zeh yeš bo šaloš we-hu’ davar ’amoq me’od*); see Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:320.

5 See n. 7 below.

6 On the prohibition against disclosing secrets of Torah to non-Jews, see, e.g., Zohar 3:73a–b.

concern: “Why would it be that the *sefirot* are ten and not three, in accord with the secret of unity which [rests upon] three? About all of these things, minds are perplexed and hearts unsettled.”⁷

The nineteenth-century scholar Adolf Jellinek—a forerunner in studying the threefold motifs in de León’s theology—suggested that the kabbalists had inadvertently stumbled into their para-Trinitarian assertions under the spell of illicit attraction: “Some [Jewish] mystics of the thirteenth century, unintentionally and while protesting against it, let themselves be tempted to establish a triad” (“so haben doch einige Mystiker des 13. Jahrhunderts, ohne daß sie es wollten und während sie dagegen protestiren, sich verleiten lassen, eine Trias aufzustellen”).⁸ However, the suggestion of an unintentional and irresistible mimesis induced by the taboo doctrine does not sit well with the evidence. At the very least, the episode recounted by de León—whether factual, imagined, or somewhere in between—indicates that one of most consequential kabbalists of the late thirteenth century was painfully conscious of a double bind tethering his speculation to Trinitarian belief. On the one hand, Kabbalah was committed to zealously policing the boundaries of the faith. On the other, it clearly avowed the premise that the tenfold divinity is founded upon a threefold unity. This theological positioning, and the anxieties it provoked, illustrates a Trinity complex that bound Israel’s “hidden wisdom” from a formative moment of its development.⁹ Subsequent Christian apologists

7 Moses ben Shem Tov, *R. Moses de León’s Sefer Šeqel ha-Qodeš* [Hebrew], ed. Charles Mopsik (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 1996), 101; Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), 141–42. Compare the language of Zohar 2:43b when discussing the three names in the *šema*: “Here are three names. How can they be one? Even though we say *one*, how can they be one?”

8 Adolf Jellinek, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kabbala*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: C.L. Fritzsche, 1852), 2:51–56 (“Christlicher Einfluß auf die Kabbala”), esp. 54; see George Kohler, *Kabbalah Research in the Wissenschaft des Judentums (1820–1880)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 114; on the research of nineteenth-century scholars on various aspects of the Kabbalah-Trinity conundrum, especially in relation to the question of Kabbalah’s antiquity, see there 43, 60, 63, 97–98, 113–14, 151, 168, 193, 219, 230, 239, 249–50.

9 The example from de León is only the most apropos to the present study. Scholars have adduced other examples of para-Trinitarian speculation in contemporaneous kabbalistic sources; see, e.g., Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988), 52–53; Idel, “Abraham Abulafia: A Kabbalist ‘Son of God’ on Jesus and Christianity,” in *Jesus among the Jews: Representation and Thought*, ed. Neta Stahl (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 60–93; Idel, “Abulafia on the Jewish Messiah and Jesus,” *Immanuel* 11 (1980): 64–80; Harvey J. Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder: Abraham Abulafia, the Franciscans and Joachimism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007); Hames, “It Takes Three to Tango: Ramon Llull, Solomon ibn Adret and Alfonso of Valladolid Debate the Trinity,” *Medieval Encounters* 15 (2009): 199–224; Robert Sagerman, *The Serpent Kills or the Serpent Gives Life: The Kabbalist*

from Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (fifteenth century) on who claimed that Kabbalah proved Christological truths effectively justified the fear and cringing typified by de León's questioner. Nonetheless, the anti-Christian polemic incubated from early in its formation did not suffice to liberate Kabbalah from its image as a gateway to apostasy,¹⁰ an image exaggerated in significant part by a neo-Maimonidean tendency in modern historiography.¹¹ This is not only because censors often intercepted such polemic, but also because the kabbalists' dogged emphasis on the primacy of three divine attributes did little to allay the anxiety.¹²

In the past, some historians attributed one especially high-profile instance of apostasy/conversion to the knowledge of Kabbalah.¹³ It is now clear, however, that such knowledge did not play a decisive role in the much-studied

Abraham Abulafia's Response to Christianity (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Elliot R. Wolfson, "Textual Flesh, Incarnation, and the Imaginal Body: Abraham Abulafia's Polemic with Christianity," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish Intellectual and Social History: Festschrift in Honor of Robert Chazan*, ed. David Engel, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Elliot R. Wolfson (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 189–226; Jonatan Benarroch, *Sava and Yanuka: God, the Son, and the Messiah in Zoharic Narratives* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2018).

- 10 Jeremy Phillip Brown, "On the Censorship of Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Kabbalah," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* (forthcoming).
- 11 E.g., José Faur, "A Crisis of Categories: Kabbalah and the Rise of Apostasy in Spain," in *The Jews of Spain and the Expulsion of 1492*, ed. Moshe Lazar and Stephen Haliczer (Lancaster, CA: Labyrinthos, 1997), 41–64.
- 12 Here, I am engaging de León's discourse as representative, though from a later period, there is evidence of Jewish efforts to untie the knot binding Trinitarian to kabbalistic modes of speculation through the use of theological distinctions between the categories of persona on the one hand and relational attributes on the other; see, for example, the fourteenth-century treatment of Profayt Duran in *Kelimat ha-Goyim* (1397) discussed in Daniel Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press; Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), 74–75; Maud Kozodoy, *The Secret Faith of Maestre Honoratus: Profayt Duran and Jewish Identity in Late Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 136; Carsten L. Wilke, "Historicizing Christianity and Profiat Duran's *Kelimat ha-Goyim*," *Medieval Encounters* 22 (2016): 140–64, esp. 155–56. Note also the provocative view reported by Duran that Jesus of Nazareth was himself in possession of a distorted version of an ostensibly pre-Christian doctrine; Duran modified this view with the suggestion that the influence of Kabbalah crept in only in late strata of the New Testament. Either view—equally impossible—would explain the origin of Trinitarian speculation as the errant child of a nonetheless honourable pedigree.
- 13 E.g., Yitzhak Baer, "The Qabbalistic Doctrine in the Christological Teaching of Abner of Burgos" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 27 (1958): 278–89; Isaiah Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3:973–74; Liebes, *Studies*, 141–42.

apostasy/conversion of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid (ca. 1320).¹⁴ Nonetheless, the author's polemical writings do resort to a demonstration of the Trinity from one of the midrashic traditions employed by the early kabbalists to authorise the primacy of three intellectual attributes with which God created the world:¹⁵ *Midrash to Psalms* (ad 50:1).¹⁶ Indeed, earlier polemical sources had already flagged this midrash as a stock text for Christian apologists.¹⁷ On its basis, Abner/Alfonso alleged the sages of the Talmud espoused Trinitarian belief.

I say that what the Christians believe—in describing the Trinity of the one God—is exactly what the Talmudic sages affirm and prove from the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. [...] This is what is written in the *Midrash on Psalms* on the verse which says “God, the Lord God spoke and summoned the world” [Ps 50:1] [...].

Why did it mention the Name three times? To teach you that the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world with these three names which stand for the three attributes with which He created the world. And these are they: wisdom [*ha-ḥokhmah*], understanding [*ha-tevunah*], and knowledge [*ha-da'at*]. “Wisdom,” from whence? Because it is said, “The Lord founded the earth by wisdom, etc.” [Prov 3:19] “Understanding?” Because it is said, “He established the heavens by understanding.” [Prov 3:19] “Knowledge?” Because it is said, “By His knowledge the depths burst apart.” [Prov 3:20] Likewise, “For I the Lord your God, God. ...” [Exod 20:5] Behold, three names corresponding to three attributes with which the world was created. Likewise, the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben said, “God, the Lord God! God, the Lord God! He knows.” [Josh 22:22] Why did they mention the threefold name two times? “God, the Lord God!” with

14 Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Authority: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 143–73; Shalom Sadik, “When Maimonideans and Kabbalists Convert to Christianity,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 24 (2017): 154–55.

15 See the preliminary assessment in Moshe Idel, *Middot: On the Emergence of Kabbalistic Theosophies* (Brooklyn: Ktav Publishing House, 2021), 231–41.

16 Solomon Buber, ed., *Midrash Tehillim (Šoḥer Tov)* [Hebrew] (Vilna, 1891), 279 (Psalm 50); William Braude, trans. *The Midrash on Psalms* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 1:468.

17 Joseph ben Nathan Official, *Sepher Joseph Hamekane*, ed. Judah Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1970), 57–58 (cf. 65, and 107, on Ps 50:1); *Niṣaḥon Yašan* in Peter Berger, ed., *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizṣaḥon Vetus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 40 (par. 61; Hebrew pagination).

which the world was created and “God, the Lord God!” with which the Torah was given.¹⁸

One must conclude from this passage that the world could not have been created unless the Creator had these three attributes which are indicated by His three names, “God [El], God [Elohim], the Lord (YHWH),” because they are three from the one divine substance. They are indicated by those three other names [wisdom (*hokhmah*), understanding (*tevunah*), and knowledge (*da’at*)] because of their essential characteristics. [...] Indeed, He Himself is His wisdom, and He Himself is His understanding, and He is His knowledge.¹⁹

The three divine attributes that Abner/Alfonso elicited from the midrash—wisdom, understanding, and knowledge—lay at the crux of de León’s response to his questioner. According to de León, “there are commentators” who affirm that wisdom (*hokhmah*), understanding (*tevunah*), and knowledge (*da’at*) are three attributes that comprise the ten *sefirot* in their totality, and thus constitute Israel’s “secret of unity.”²⁰ Though it was not Kabbalah, after all, that brought Abner/Alfonso to baptism, the latter’s Trinitarian use of midrash shows that the anxiety exemplified by de León’s questioner was only too appropriate.

With such high stakes, why did kabbalists deem it necessary to insist upon such teachings—teachings which, they frankly acknowledged, courted sin?

18 Per the text as edited by Buber: “Why does the phrase ‘God, the Lord God’ occur twice here? Once to stand for the three attributes by which the world was created; and once again to stand for the three attributes whereby the Torah was given.” See Buber, ed., *Midrash Tehillim*, 279; Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms*, 1:468. On Josh 22:22, see *y. Ber.* 9:1, 12d; Julius Theodor and Chanoch Albeck, eds., *Midrash Bereshit Rabba: Critical Edition with Notes and Commentary*, 2nd printing (Jerusalem: Shalem, 1996), 1:62–63 (8:9; see variant in the apparatus on p. 63 for line 5, citing the verse).

19 Abner of Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid; translation adapted from Jonathan L. Hecht, “The Polemical Exchange between Isaac Pollegar and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid According to Parma MS 2440: *Iggeret Teshuvat Apikoros* and *Teshuvat la-Meharef*” (PhD diss., New York University, 1993), 144–47; see Walter Mettmann, *Die volkssprachliche apologetische Literatur auf der Iberischen Halbinsel im Mittelalter* (Opladen: Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1987), 52–55; Shoshanna G. Gershenson, “A Study of *Teshuvat la-Meharef* by Abner of Burgos” (PhD diss., Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, 1984), 86–136; Gershenson, “Midrash and Exegesis in the Christological Argument of Abner of Burgos,” *Hebrew Abstracts* 15 (1974): 96–100; Faur, “A Crisis of Categories,” 57; Jeff Diamond, “El tema de la Trinidad en el *Libro de la ley* de Alfonso de Valladolid,” *Sefarad* 57 (1997): 33–49; Yaacob Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah: Leon Modena, Jewish Mysticism, Early Modern Venice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 154–55.

20 See Liebes, *Studies*, 140–45.

Why, rather than seeking to extricate the discourse from such entanglements, did the producers of this knowledge double down and cinch up the bind? The present study responds to these questions on the basis of earlier speculation on the three intellectual attributes of divinity, viz. earlier kabbalistic speculation from Catalonia that formed the background for de León's para-Trinitarian teaching. It will be argued that the Catalonian kabbalists were not at liberty to desist from such threefold speculation because (a) it founded claims to the rabbinic authority of their traditions; (b) it supported constitutional elements of their knowledge; and, most ironically, (c) it was fundamental to their messianic agenda.

The particular strain of speculation isolated in this study focuses on a midrash from *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* concerning the three intellectual attributes with which God created the world and endowed key protagonists of Israel's redemption. This midrash (from a late compilation post-dating the advent of Islam) is closely related to—and sometimes cited together with—the midrash on Psalm 50:1 (the midrash appropriated above by Abner/Alfonso). What follows will review the earliest kabbalistic interpretations of the midrash from *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer*, which later proved instrumental in the binding of Kabbalah's Trinity complex. While speculation based on that midrash prompted the Trinitarian anxiety evident in the late thirteenth-century sources already discussed, its earlier interpretations had already coaxed the discourse into a bind of a different nature—a bind specifically related to the messianic character of kabbalistic knowledge. It appears that the earlier interpretations made no effort to distance themselves from the redemptive narrative that organizes the midrash. This may be gathered from the early kabbalists' interest in the biblical account of God's investiture of Bezalel, the chief artisan of the Tabernacle, with the intellectual attributes operative in the divine act of creation: wisdom, understanding, and knowledge (*hokhmah, tevunah, da'at*). On the foundation laid for him by Ezra ben Solomon and Azriel of Gerona, Naḥmanides identified Bezalel's knowledge of sacred architecture with knowledge of Kabbalah. Moreover, he intimated that the messianic redeemer of Israel would resemble Bezalel as one endowed with such knowledge. This begs the question: Did Naḥmanides view Kabbalah as a prerequisite for the practical task of building a new sanctuary?

2 Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge

Our analysis begins with the midrash from *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* that facilitated the early kabbalists' understanding of Kabbalah as the very knowledge that

would facilitate Israel's redemption. In this midrash, the motif of messianic expectation is linked with pre-kabbalistic ideation concerning the ten creative utterances (*ma'amarot*, or *logoi*) with which God created the world.²¹ The midrash affirms that three intellectual attributes, in fact, comprised the ten creative utterances and that God allocated the three attributes of the divine mind to the minds of Israel's most adept.

Some say that by ten creative utterances [*ma'amarot*] was the world created;²² and in three [attributes] are these [ten] comprised;²³ as it is said, "the Lord by wisdom founded the earth; with understanding he established the heavens, by his knowledge the depths were broken up" (Prov 3:19–20). By these three [attributes] was the Tabernacle made, as it is said, "And I have filled him [Bezalel] with the spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, and with knowledge" (Exod 31:3) [*b. Ber.* 55a]. Likewise with these three [attributes] was the Temple made, as it is said [of Hiram the chief artisan of Solomon's Temple], "He was the son of a widow woman of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass; and he was filled with wisdom and understanding and knowledge" (1 Kgs 7:14). By these three attributes it will be rebuilt in the future, as it is said, "Through wisdom is a house built; and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge are the chambers filled" (Prov 24:3–4). With these three attributes will the Blessed Holy One give three good gifts to Israel in the future, as it is said, "For the Lord will give wisdom, out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" (Prov 2:6). It is not said, "The Lord has given wisdom" [i.e., it does not speak in the past tense, but refers to future gifts]. These three [attributes]

21 Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 121–22.

22 *m. 'Abot* 5:1; Judah Goldin, trans., *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1955), 125 (31); Anthony J. Saldarini, ed. and trans., *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan: Abot de Rabbi Nathan—Version B: A Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 212 (36); *b. Roš. Haš.* 32a, *b. Ḥag.* 12a; Louis Finkelstein, *Introduction to the Treatises Abot and Abot of Rabbi Natan* [Hebrew] (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 84–87.

23 Some witnesses to this section are preceded by an account of the ten creative utterances, in contrast to standard recensions of the text: see, e.g., MS New York, Hebrew Union College, Klau Library 75, 4a–b, and the printed version from 1544, 5d–6a; Dagmar Borner-Klein, ed., *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer: Nach der Edition Venedig 1544 unter Berücksichtigung der Edition Warschau 1852* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 24–27; these may be contrasted with MS New York, Hebrew Union College, Klau Library 2043, 2a, and the *editio princeps* from Constantinople (1514), 2b.

will be given to King Messiah, as it is said, “And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord” (Isa 11:2).²⁴

The midrash collects a host of scriptural references into a single motif—the triumvirate of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. It weaves the three attributes into a single account of Israel’s sacred history, from the creation of the world to the fashioning of the Tabernacle, from the construction of the Jerusalem Temple to its future restoration, and, eventually, to the gifts of messianic knowledge that God will confer on Israel in the fullness of time.²⁵ The attributes are apportioned first to the artisans of Israel’s sanctuaries, Bezalel and Hiram of Tyre, then to Israel’s Messiah, and thereby to all Israel. One of the noteworthy features of this text is its alignment of the Messiah’s vocation with that of the divinely inspired artisans. The Messiah’s threefold knowledge is thus equated with that of Bezalel and Hiram of Tyre.

Although an early amoraic tradition includes the three intellectual attributes in a list of ten creative attributes,²⁶ the early kabbalists clearly favoured the threefold framework of the midrash from *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* as a springboard for their speculation. Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona’s agenda of wresting interpretive control of the cosmological traditions of *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* from the philosophers may have contributed to this preference.²⁷ Another contributing

24 *Pirqe R. El.* 3:12–13. Translation adapted from Gerald Friedlander, *Pirkē de Rabbi Eliezer* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Co; New York: Bloch, 1916), 17–19.

25 On wisdom in general, as an attribute of the Messiah (and the propagation of wisdom as an indication of the messianic time) in Maimonides’s theology, see Aviezer Ravitzky, “To the Utmost Human Capacity’: Maimonides on the Days of the Messiah,” in *Perspectives on Maimonides*, ed. Joel L. Kraemer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 227, 234, 247–48.

26 *b. Hag.* 12a: “Rav Zutra bar Tuvia said that Rav said: The world was created through ten attributes: Through wisdom, through understanding, through knowledge, through strength, through rebuke, through might, through righteousness, through justice, through kindness, and through mercy.” See Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. Allan Arkush, ed. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 82–83, for the unlikely comparison of this rabbinic wisdom to gnostic cosmology.

27 Specifically, Ezra upheld an ostensibly platonic interpretation of a midrash from the third chapter of *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* concerning the creation of the heavens and the earth from pre-existent light and snow respectively, one that was apparently criticised by Maimonides in *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2:26. In a letter apparently addressed to Abraham the Cantor of Gerona, Ezra wrote of Maimonides’s apparent denigration of the midrash that “in this matter Rabbi Moses came against the tradition (*ke-neged ha-qabbalah*)”; see Gershom Scholem, “Te’udah Hadašah le-Toldot Rešit ha-Kabbalah” [Hebrew], in *Sefer Bialik*, ed. Jacob Fichman (Tel Aviv: Ommanut, 1934), 157 (a similar use of this midrash is attested in Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona, *Peruš le-Šir ha-Širim*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:493–94; Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*,

factor may have been the significance of the three attributes in the proto-kabbalistic speculation contained in the *Sefer Yeširah* commentary composed by Judah ben Barzilai of Barcelona. The latter work helps to locate a curriculum for the study of midrashic lore concerning the traditionally esoteric domains of *ma'aseh berešit* (the account of creation) and *ma'aseh merkavah* (the account of Ezekiel's chariot) in medieval Catalonia in the century preceding the appearance of the first kabbalistic writing in Iberia. Just as in the midrash from *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, it is relevant to observe that Judah identified the three creative-intellectual attributes with both Bezalel's vocation of sanctuary-building and the Messiah's knowledge.²⁸

trans. Seth Brody [Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999], 69–70; and also Ezra's commentary on the rabbinic legends, MS Vatican Cod. ebr. 441, 69a–b; all three discussions of the midrash—in the commentary on the Song of Songs, the letter, and the aggadah commentary—turn upon the exegesis of Solomon building a “palanquin” or *apiryon* in Song 3:9 [glossed by Rashi, ad loc, as a Tent of Meeting within the Tabernacle at Shiloh, per Josh 18:1]. See too Alexander Altmann, “A Note on the Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 7 (1956): 195–206; Jonathan Dauber, *Knowledge of God and the Development of Early Kabbalah* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 37–38 n. 29; see too where Ezra's letter (159) refers to another topos in *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* (cap. 4) related to the “account of the chariot” rather than the “account of creation,” viz. the four faces of Ezekiel's chariot. Since this study deals in part with the theophanic function of Israel's sanctuaries, it bears mention that Ezra prefaced his letter by recounting, in the spirit of dissent, Maimonides's assertion that one will not be harmed by understanding the Glory of the Lord that filled the Tabernacle as “created light” (*Guide* 1:5 and 1:19—a nod on Maimonides's part to the doctrine of Saadia Gaon; see Esti Eisenmann, “The Term ‘Created Light’ in Maimonides' Philosophy” [Hebrew], *Daat* 55 [2004/5]: 41–57). This doctrine—which Maimonides tolerated because it neutralised the spectre of corporeality from the scriptural accounts of theophany—was diametrically opposed to Ezra's espousal of an ostensibly platonic position. Opposing the doctrine of created light helped Ezra to articulate a theosophically nuanced metaphysics of pre-existent light, and a correspondingly substantial concept of theophany. Thus, the aggadic midrashim, and *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* in particular, lay at the centre of a hermeneutic contest between kabbalists and philosophers. Ezra's overt endorsement of a Platonic position on creation may be contrasted with the restrained approach adopted by Nahmanides in “The Law of the Lord is Perfect” (*Torat YHWH Temimah*); see Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:159; Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 1:83–84. This campaign may be seen within the broader context of the intensive engagement with midrash on the part of the early kabbalists in Catalonia and the closely linked personality of Judah ben Yaqar; thereon, see Shalem Yahalom, “Tanhuma in Masquerade: Discovering the Tanhuma in the Latter Midrash Rabbah Texts,” in *Studies in the Tanhuma-Yelammedenu Literature*, ed. Ronit Nikolsky and Arnon Atzmon (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 222–45.

28 Judah ben Barzilai, *Commentar zum Sepher Jezira* [Hebrew], ed. Solomon Halberstam (Berlin: Mekize Nirdamim, 1885), 2, 7; see 75, where the text specifies the artisan's extraction from the Tribe of Judah. See too Pedaya, *Name and Sanctuary*, 49.

3 Ezra ben Solomon

The writings of Ezra ben Solomon contributed novel speculation concerning the three creative-intellectual attributes,²⁹ and, in particular, their redemptive character. Ezra, the earliest known Spanish kabbalist, prefaced his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (*Peruš Šir ha-Širim*) with an esoteric explanation of the encomium to wisdom in Job 28 in which the three attributes figure prominently. The authority that this explanation held for subsequent kabbalists may be gleaned from the fact that within a century of its composition, it appeared, whether cited or paraphrased, in the work of leading expositors of Kabbalah in Catalonia, Castile, Northern Italy, and as far east as Palestine.³⁰ None less than Naḥmanides deemed Ezra's teaching "glorified and praised," a tradition to be accepted.³¹

29 Scholem (*Origins*, 124) attempted to locate the theosophical interpretation of the midrash from *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* within *Sefer ha-Bahir*; however, the three attributes are disjoined within the Bahir. Moreover, Scholem's claim that the midrash served to support the kabbalists' predilection for bifurcating the ten *sefirot* into units of three upper and seven lower *sefirot* is misleading; this is because, as I will show, the early kabbalists seem to have understood the three intellectual attributes as encompassing the divine totality.

30 For what seems to be the earliest paraphrase, see Naḥmanides's commentary on Job 28:27, and adduced in the name of *ba'aley ha-qabbalah*: "Then He saw it"—[that is, God beheld] the primordial thought, and he brought forth from it *sefer*, and *sefar*, and *sippur* [the three primordial books mentioned in *Sefer Yeširah* 1:1], and wisdom, understanding, and knowledge"; see Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:90. See too Menahem Recanati, *Peruš ha-Reḡanati*, ed. Amnon Gross, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv: Barzani, 2003), 1:15, which adduces a paraphrase in the name of "Azriel"; Abraham Axelrod of Cologne, *Keter Shem Ṭov*, edited in "Ueber das Tetragrammaton von Abraham aus Cöln," in *Auswahl kabbalistischer Mystik*, ed. Adolf Jellinek (Leipzig: Colditz, 1853), 1:47–48 (Hebrew pagination).

31 Naḥmanides, *Peruš le-Sefer Iyyov*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:90; in connection with the pedigree of this tradition, it is relevant to recall that Ezra alluded to a kabbalistic interpretation of Job 28 on the authority of "he-ḥasid" (see below n73); if this epithet does not refer to Isaac "the Blind" but rather to Jacob ben Saul the Nazirite of Lunel, then it is perhaps relevant to recall that we possess an extant portion of a Job commentary attributed to the latter (though not on chapter 28); see Jordan S. Penkower, "The End of Rashi's Commentary on Job: The Manuscripts and the Printed Editions," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 10 (2003): 18–48, esp. 21–22. On Naḥmanides's endorsement of this tradition, see Georges Vajda, *Le commentaire d'Ezra de Gerone sur le Cantique des Cantiques* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1969), 271–91; Moshe Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition on This," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides (Ramban): Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 56–58; Yakov M. Travis, "Kabbalistic Foundations of Jewish Spiritual Practice: Rabbi Ezra of Gerona—On the Kabbalistic Meaning of the Mitzvot" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2002), 312–15, etc.

According to Ezra's explanation, Job 28 alludes to a theogonic process of divine self-construction, a process that parallels both the extra-divine act of creation and the work of Bezalel the artisan.³²

"He saw it and gauged it" (Job 28:27)—gazing upon the pure thought [*ba-maḥšavah ha-ṭehorah*], just as a person weighing a course of action first considers it within his heart and only afterward begins to carry it out and occupy himself with it. [...] In accord with the images within, He traced the totality which emanated from it. "And gauged it"—the three primordial books, *sefer, sefar, and sippur*, which are wisdom [*ḥokhmah*], understanding [*tevunah*], and knowledge [*da'at*]. "He measured it"—the intent of the verse is that the existences were not arrayed in accord with the order of the edifice [*lo' hayu 'omdot 'al seder tekhunot ha-binyan*]. Rather, God, be He blessed, brought the existences [*hawayot*] into being, arrayed them in order, transformed them into an edifice [*binyan*], combining, measuring, and transposing the twenty-two letters, binding each and every one to its fellow, so that they paralleled one another, [like a] woman to her sister.³³ "And He also probed it"—He affixed boundary to the attributes [*middot*], rendered them accessible to probing, although they in principle possessed no boundary from their beginning.³⁴

The three attributes play an axial role in the process of divine becoming that is bound up with the creation of the world. The process is set in motion when God acts like a person examining their heart; that is, when He contemplates "the pure thought." This act generates images and forms of the total divine projection. At this point, the divinity is arrayed in three attributes—wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. The text, in turn, identifies the three attributes with the three primordial books mentioned in *Sefer Yeširah*.³⁵ The three

32 Vajda, *Le commentaire*, 271–91.

33 The phrase "like a woman to her sister" is based on a biblical idiom for joining like parts used to describe the Tabernacle's construction; Exod 26:3, 5, 6, 17; cf. Ezek 1:9, 23; and Lev 18:8. For an alternate theosophical usage of this biblical idiom, see Jacob ben Sheshet of Gerona, "Ša'ar ha-Šamayim," *Ozar Nechmad* 3 (1860): 154; Nahora Gabay, "*Sefer Sha'ar ha-Shamayim (The Book Gate of Heaven)* by Rabbi Yacov ben Sheshet Girondi: Scientific Edition Including Forward and Annotations" [Hebrew] (MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1988), 103; and Jacob ben Sheshet of Gerona, *Mešiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, ed. Georges Vajda (Jerusalem: Israeli Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1968), 147 (cap. 16).

34 Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruš le-Šir ha-Širim*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:483–84; translation adapted from Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*, 37–38.

35 *Sefer Yeširah* 1:1. The equation of (a) the three primordial books with (b) wisdom, understanding, and knowledge results from harmonising two theologoumena: (a) the claim

attributes already comprise a totality. But at this moment in the intra-divine process of upbuilding, the totality has yet to achieve stability; thus, “the existences were not arrayed in accord with the order of the edifice [*binyan*].”³⁶ Wisdom (*hokhmah*) and understanding (*tevunah*) correspond to the second and third *sefirot* respectively, whereas knowledge (*da'at*) constitutes the divine edifice (*binyan*) comprised of the seven lower *sefirot*.³⁷ Ultimately, the edifice becomes stable when God gives measurement and boundary to His knowledge. This results in the firm establishment of the edifice comprised of the lower seven *sefirot*.³⁸ God thus performs the artisanal work of stabilising His knowledge by arranging and consolidating the raw material of this edifice:

from *Sefer Yeširah* that God created the world from three books, and (b) the claim from *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* that God created the world from the three intellectual attributes. Compare the Pseudo-Nahmanidean *Sefer Yeširah* commentary attributed to Azriel of Gerona in scholarship (ad loc; printed in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 453), where the three books refer to the “three names which that are called ‘the essence of the Name,’ which are included in it,” and also “the three letters of the Name—*yod, heh, waw*, in which everything is included” (i.e., the three letters of the “great name” alluded to in *Sefer Yeširah*); see Vajda, *Le commentaire*, 283. Compare the commentary on this lemma erroneously ascribed to Isaac “the Blind” ben Abraham of Posquières (see Gershom Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah be-Provans* [Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1963], 1 [appendix pagination]): “They [the three books] are three names that are in three letters that receive and are received from them” (this parallels the interpretation ascribed to Azriel above, in which the three books correspond to *yod, heh*, and *waw*); subsequently, the same commentary singles out the *yod*, which is said to seal the edifice of *sefirot* formed by combinations of the three letters of the “great Name”: “The *sefirot* are a foundation, and they are an interiority. The foundation of the edifice made with them is the letters, like stones from the mountain.” Compare too Judah ha-Levi, *Kuzari*, 1v:25; ha-Levi, *Das Buch al-Chazarî des Abû-l-Ḥasan Jehuda Hallewi im arabischen Urtext sowie in der hebräischen Übersetzung des Jehuda Ibn Tibbon*, ed. Hartwig Hirschfeld (Leipzig: Otto Schulze, 1887), 268–71 (both Judaeo-Arabic and Tibbonide Hebrew); ha-Levi, *The Kuzari (Kitab al Khazari): An Argument for the Faith of Israel*, trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 228–30. Compare too ha-Levi’s account of the creative function of *sefar* (i.e., number; 228) with Ezra’s description of God’s work of self-fashioning from letters: “As to *sefar* it means the calculation and weighing of the created bodies. The calculation which is required for the harmonious and advantageous arrangement of a body is based on a numerical figure. Expansion, measure, weight, relation of movements, and musical harmony, all these are based on a number expressed by the word *sefar*.”

- 36 Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruš le-Šir ha-Širim*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:483; translation adapted from Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*, 37.
- 37 On the theosophical vocabulary of *binyan*, see Mark Sendor, “The Emergence of Provencal Kabbalah: Rabbi Isaac the Blind’s Commentary on *Sefer Yeširah*” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1994), 1:336–42 (and 361 n. 258).
- 38 For related speculation on the three creative-intellectual attributes, see Jacob ben Sheshet, *Sefer ha-Emunah we-ha-Bittahon*, cap. 12 and 14, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:386, and 391.

the twenty-two Hebrew letters of the primordial Torah.³⁹ With this act, the theogonic process is actualised.

Ezra's speculation on the three intellectual attributes is not only based on the messianic theme of the midrash from *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer*. It is also indebted to a talmudic account where God's apportionment of attributes to Bezalel is identified with the latter's knowledge of letter combinations.⁴⁰ In fact, the talmudic reference to the artisan's proficiency in this art is one of the earliest allusions to letter combination in the ancient rabbinic corpus.⁴¹ The rabbis had already suggested that Bezalel's work of building the Tabernacle did not merely recapitulate God's act of creating the world in a general sense, but rather in the specific sense that the work entailed plying the creative medium of language and thus paralleled God's creation of the world through speech.⁴² It will be seen that Azriel of Gerona and Naḥmanides likewise attuned their speculation to this ancient characterisation of Bezalel.

The attributes apportioned to the artisan in Exodus 31:3 appear in another passage from Ezra's commentary on the Song of Songs, which explains how liturgical worship is ordered to the unity of the three divine attributes. Thus, three significant verses contained within the great *qeduṣah* of the Musaf Service for Sabbath and Festivals—the *qeduṣah* (Isa 6:3), the *berakhah* (Ezek 3:12), and the *šema'* (Deut 6:4)—are three that “enter under the rubric of the unity of wisdom, and understanding, and knowledge, which is the edifice (*binyan*) containing the seven [lower] *sefirot*.”⁴³ This account of the threefold

39 The commentary of Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes (Rashi) already interprets the divine act of gauging wisdom described in Job 28:27 in terms of God counting the letters of the Torah; Rashi's commentary on the verse goes on to invoke the authority of *Sefer Yeširah* to claim that God “created each and every thing with these letters.”

40 *b. Ber.* 55a: “Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: Bezalel knew to join letters with which heaven and earth were created. It is written here: ‘And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge [and in all manner of workmanship]’ [Exod 31:3]; and it is written there ‘The Lord, by wisdom, founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens’ [Prov 3:19], and it is written: ‘By His knowledge the depths were broken up and the skies drop down the dew’ [Prov 3:20].”

41 See Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 166–67; Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 31–32; Tzahi Weiss, *Sefer Yeširah and Its Contexts: Other Jewish Voices* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 39–40 (for references to Bezalel's knowledge of letter combination in the *Hekhalot* corpus, see there 149 n. 27).

42 On the creative function of language in kabbalistic speculation generally, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

43 Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruṣ le-Šir ha-Širim*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:495; translation adapted from Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*, 73.

unity supports the interpretation offered above, according to which the first two attributes refer to the second and third *sefirot* and the third encompasses the lower seven. The passage goes on to clarify its theosophical reading of the midrash from *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer*:

for the ten *sefirot* are included within the three: wisdom, understanding, and knowledge; the three recitations of the *qeduṣah* exist to unify the three of them. Within their totality, all things are included. So we have found in *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer*: “The world was created with ten utterances [*ma’amarot*] but these were included in three.”⁴⁴

In what appears to be a later composition⁴⁵—a commentary on the rabbinic legends (*Peruṣ ha-Aggadot*)—Ezra collated the midrash from *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* together with the aforementioned midrash from *Midrash to Psalms* (ad 50:1; viz. the above-cited text exploited by Abner/Alfonso as well as earlier apologists). The composition adduces the two traditions in immediate succession without any exegesis. The lack of interpretation suggests that Ezra judged that the two midrashim did not require any explanation to substantiate the three-fold speculation he extracted from them in his earlier Song commentary.⁴⁶ Indeed, when they are read from the author’s theosophical vantage point, the midrashim speak as if for themselves. As seen above, the first midrash culls verses from scripture to support the idea that God created the world with the use of three names—three names corresponding to the three attributes of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. As likewise seen above, the second midrash, which Ezra cited in full, weaves these attributes into a narrative that is chiefly concerned with their redemptive functions. Though nothing is added to the two midrashim, it is possible to connect the messianic character of the three attributes with an additional midrashic motif adduced by Ezra in his Song commentary; namely, the identification of the “spirit of God” hovering upon the waters on the first day (Gen 1:2) with the Messiah, who is endowed with wisdom (*hokhmah*) and understanding (*tevunah*). Thus, the excursus on Psalm 104 in Ezra’s Song commentary glosses the “spirit of God” (Gen 1:2) as an allusion to “the Messiah’s spirit, the spirit of wisdom and understanding,”

44 Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruṣ le-Šir ha-Širim*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:495; translation adapted from Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*, 73.

45 On the sequence of Ezra’s compositions, see Haviva Pedaya, “Possessed by Speech’: Towards an Understanding of the Prophetic-Ecstatic Pattern among Early Kabbalists” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 65 (2016): 568–69 n. 2.

46 MS Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Ebr. 441, fol. 48a; Abraham ben Judah Elmalik (or Elimelekh), *Liqqutey Šikheḥah u-Fe’ah* (Ferrara, 1556), 13a–b.

which “hovered over the waters, covering all.”⁴⁷ Understood in terms of the theosophical speculation promoted by Ezra, this identification may allude to the issue of the Messiah’s pre-existent spirit from the conjunction of the second and third *sefirot*. Ezra’s exegesis is apparently based on Isaiah 11:2, the verse adduced in the midrash from *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* to establish the scriptural link between Bezalel and Israel’s builder-Messiah: “And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord” (Isa 11:2). This messianic “spirit of God”/“spirit of the Lord” recollects, at least nominally, the “spirit of God” with which God filled Bezalel when He filled the artisan with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge “in every kind of craft” (Exod 31:3). While Ezra went no further than glossing the messianic “spirit of God” as “the spirit of wisdom and understanding” in a tacit nod to the midrash,⁴⁸ Naḥmanides, as I will show, seized upon this Bezalel-Messiah connection.⁴⁹

Azriel’s reworking of Ezra’s commentary on the rabbinic legends also yields speculation related to Bezalel’s knowledge. In addition to citing the midrash from *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer*,⁵⁰ the later version of the commentary also engages the talmudic dictum concerning Bezalel’s linguistic craft to characterise the artisan in terms that align with Ezra’s theogonic reading of Job 28:27.

Rav Yehuda said that Rav said:⁵¹ Bezalel knew how to combine the letters [*lešaref otiiyyot*] with which heaven and earth were created. It is written [of Bezalel]: “And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, etc.” (Exod 31:3). And it is written, “The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens, by his knowledge the depths were broken up” (Prov 3:19–20). And the letters are the foundation of everything,⁵² and they are a standard

47 Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:505; Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*, 111; Theodor and Albeck, eds., *Bereshit Rabbah*, 1:17 (*Gen. Rab.* 2:4).

48 On Ezra’s reading of this verse, see Jacob ben Sheshet, *Mešiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, 122–23 (cap. 9).

49 See discussion below.

50 Azriel of Gerona, *Commentarius in Aggadot* [Hebrew], ed. Isaiah Tishby (Jerusalem: Mekize Nirdamim, 1945), 86–87.

51 *b. Ber.* 55a.

52 Compare Naḥmanides on Gen 11: “The word *bereshit* alludes to the creation of the world by ten *sefirot*, and hints in particular to the *sefirah* called wisdom (*hokhmah*), in which is the foundation of everything, even as it says, “The Lord founded the earth by wisdom.” One may hypothesise that the ideational link between (a) Azriel’s assertion that the letters comprise “the foundation of everything” (cf. Ezra’s description of the letters as the raw material that God crafted into the edifice [*biḥyan*]), and (b) Naḥmanides’s view of wisdom

[šī'ur] for every each thing possessing measure [*middah*], for all descend-ers of the limit [*yordey ha-gevul*; i.e., the seven lower *sefirot*] are mutable and reversible with them [the letters], and with their combinations. And when combining limit with limit then a measure [*middah*] is made. [...] And the work of heaven and earth and sea and all therein, everything has limitation, everything is limited by the limit of the letters, the soul of all that is formed and all that will be formed. [...] There is no speech in any language apart from what is comprised within this verse that consists of the four divine names: spirit, wisdom, understanding, and knowledge (Exod 31:3). [...] For Mordecai Bilshan [(Ezra 2:2; Neh 7:7) glossed *ba'al lašon* (master of language), was so-called] for his knowledge of the seventy languages.⁵³ He did not venture hither and yon to learn the language of each people. Rather he learned the key with which to combine letters: all language[s] are comprised within the Torah. [...] This statement indicates that all languages are alluded to in the Torah. If it were it not so, it would not have been possible to explain the Holy Language [of Torah] by means of a foreign language.⁵⁴

This difficult text recalls the self-constructive process of a divinity imposing boundaries on its own being—stabilising the seven lower *sefirot* by variously manoeuvring the twenty-two letters of the primordial alphabet. Its author understood Bezalel's practical knowledge of letter combination as a function of his God-given attributes. Here, rather than three attributes,⁵⁵ the text adds “the spirit of God” to the triumvirate to yield four attributes. It appears

(*hokhmah*) as “the foundation of everything” is the premise that wisdom is the source of the primordial Hebrew letters; for instance, another text ascribed to Naḥmanides refers to the thirty-two paths of wisdom, including the ten creative utterances (*ma'amarot*), and the twenty-two letters “with which, in their combinations, everything came into existence”—thus, all of the paths proceeding from wisdom are comprised of language and its building blocks. See Oded Yisraeli, “Initial Ideas of Nahmanides' Kabbalah in His ‘Discourse for the Wedding’” [Hebrew], *Pe'amim* 153 (2018): 115; Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 1:10–11 (“Sermon for a Wedding”); and see below n. 83.

53 Ezra 2: 2, Neh 7:7; *b. Menah. 64b–65a*.

54 Azriel of Gerona, *Commentarius*, 24 (my translation).

55 For a discussion exploring threefold motifs in texts ascribed to Azriel, see Karl Erich Grözinger, “The Divine Powers of Amen and Their Variations in the Thought of Rabbi Azriel of Gerona” [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6, nos. 3/4 (1987): 299–308. Also of relevance for the present study when considered against the background of the Trinitarian interest in Exod 3:14 is Rolland Goetschel, “Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh' in the Works of the Gerona Kabbalists” [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6, nos. 3/4 (1987): 287–98, esp. 292–93, for discussion of Ezra's gloss on the question “What is His name?” concerning Israel's “secret of faith.”

that the text understands these four attributes in at least three interrelated ways: (a) as the universal matrix of all language, (b) as integral to the divine order, and (c) as the substrate of creation. The passage even invokes the legend that Mordecai, hero of the book of Esther, was a universal polyglot; it does so to explain Mordecai's supposed aptitude for language acquisition—a function of the linguistic matrix encoded within the primordial letters of the Torah. It may be noted, parenthetically, that this matrical concept of the language is closely paralleled in the writings of Jacob ben Sheshet of Gerona⁵⁶ and in Abraham Abulafia's conception of Hebrew as the “mother of all languages.”⁵⁷ For the author of the passage cited above, matrical knowledge of the primordial language (Hebrew) is commensurate with a technical, know-how understanding of the structures and dynamics of divinity. Accordingly, investiture with the intellectual attributes—qua divine essences—empowers humans to recapitulate a theogonic process in which reality achieves stability and structure through language. In this sense, Bezalel's construction of the Tabernacle does not only reproduce the divine work of world-creation. It likewise re-enacts God's project of self-fashioning. In other words, the use of letter combination to construct the sanctuary mirrors the upbuilding of the divine edifice by means of God's own primordial speech. However, the correspondence between the divine edifice and Israel's sanctuaries is not merely procedural, that is, related to the processes of their construction. Their correspondence is also structural, reflecting an isomorphism in design.

The idea that the Tabernacle is patterned after the structure of the divinity is indeed a commonplace in the diverse literature of medieval Kabbalah.⁵⁸ This idea coheres well with the premise that Bezalel's work reiterated intra-divine processes at the human level. It appears that Ezra ben Solomon is the first known kabbalistic author to portray the Tabernacle as an earthly representation of a supernal archetype. He seems to have coined the kabbalistic usage of the Hebrew term *dugmah* (pattern or archetype; etymologically related to the

56 E.g., Jacob ben Sheshet, *Mešiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, 108 (cap. 7); cf. Ezra's statement to the effect that all nations and languages attest to the words of Torah in his *Peruš le-Šir ha-Širim*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:502–3.

57 Moshe Idel, *Language, Torah, Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), 1–28, esp. 9–10 (where the passage attributed to Azriel is discussed).

58 Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3:867–940; the material collected here demonstrates the inaccuracy of Tishby's claim that “the kabbalistic literature that preceded the Zohar is [...] full of terms and symbols based on the holy vessels used in the Tabernacle and the Temple, the garments of the priests, and so on, but they are concerned mainly with the symbolized divine *sefirot*, and only rarely with the relationship between the actual Tabernacle and Temple to the powers of God and the cosmos” (Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3:869).

Greek δειγμα) in connection with his understanding of the archetypal design of Israel's sanctuaries. In one instance, his Song commentary states: "The forms of the Tabernacle are the archetype of the Glory of the Holy One, blessed be He [*dugmat ha-kevodo šel ha-qadoš barukh hu'*], and of this world [*we-dugmat ha-'olam ha-zeh*]."59

The delineation of archetypal correspondences between (a) the appurtenances of the Tabernacle and (b) the divine, angelic, and mundane worlds occupies a significant place in Ezra's Song commentary. This passage is typical:

Just as the tribal banners were made in the pattern [*dugmat*] of the world-to-come and this world [...] so too was the Tabernacle made in the manner of the supernal world [*'al derekh ha-'olam ha-'elyon*]—the edifice [containing] the Holy of Holies where the *shekhinah* rests between the two cherubim. Corresponding to the intermediate angelic world—in which those angels whose authority is over the earth serve—is the tent of meeting—in which are situated the shewbread table, the candelabrum and the golden altar, these being inner and spiritual vessels. The golden altar was not designated for wholly burnt offerings or sacrifices, but rather for the incense, which was a matter subtle and spiritual. Facing it was the candelabrum and the light from its six branches issuing as hammered work from its central branch, radiating light at the front of the lamp stand. Corresponding to the terrestrial world is the sacrificial altar, situated in the Tabernacle court, upon which all of the sacrifices might be offered.⁶⁰

This passage demonstrates Ezra's archetypal concept of Israel's sanctuary. The concept is further corroborated by Ezra's appropriation of a midrashic correlation between (a) the six days of creation and the Sabbath and (b) the six phases of work on the Tabernacle and its inauguration.⁶¹ This correlation

59 Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruš le-Šir ha-Širim*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:490; Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*, 57; see Travis, "Kabbalistic Foundations," 228 n. 637.

60 Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruš le-Šir ha-Širim*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:490; Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*, 56.

61 Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruš le-Šir ha-Širim*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:490–91; Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*, 57–58 (citing Numbers Rabbah 12:13; see *Sefer Midrash Rabbah 'al Sefer Bamidbar* [Shklov, 1814], 42a); cf. the text perhaps misattributed to Azriel, "Peruš 'Ešer Sefrot 'al Derekh Še'elah u-Tešuvah" (also known as "Ša'ar ha-Šo'el"), in Meir ben Ezekiel Ibn Gabbai, *Derekh Emunah* (Warsaw, 1890), 4c. Also relevant is Ezra's appropriation of a description from *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* of a pattern that God revealed to Moses and commanded him to replicate within the construction of the Tabernacle (Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruš*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:490; Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*,

supports Ezra's claim that the world "is comprised within the construction of the Tabernacle."⁶² The matter takes on theosophical significance when read in light of Ezra's equation of the seven primordial days with the seven lower *sefirot*.⁶³ This equation, in turn, becomes all the more poignant when it is recalled that the seven lower *sefirot* comprise the edifice (*binyan*) of knowledge (*da'at*) which God, like Bezalel, stabilised through the work of

57; Solomon Buber, ed., *Pesikta, die älteste Hagada, redigirt in Palästina von Rab Kahana* [Lyck, 1868], 4b; William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, trans., *Pèsikṭa dē-Rab Kahāna: R. Kahana's Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festal Days* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975], 11). The fourfold pattern, according to the midrash, is comprised of red fire, green fire, black fire, and white fire. Ezra discerned this four-colour pattern in several instances without reference to the Tabernacle, which suggests that he embraced the idea that the supernal archetype of the Tabernacle is enshrined on high. For example, he provided an apparently original typology of the four humours as "white, red, green, and black biles" (Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruš*, Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:481; Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*, 32); to cite another example, Ezra glossed the male's ruddy appearance in Song 5:10: "His appearance is ruddy, black, green, and white. Thus the appearance of the Holy One is like 'the appearance of the rainbow which is within the cloud'" (Ezek 1:28; Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruš*, Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:502; Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*, 102). A letter written by Ezra to Abraham the Cantor of Gerona recounts the theosophical motif of the four colours (white, red, black, and green) on the authority of an interpretation of Job 28 attributed to "he-ḥasid" (per Scholem, this refers to Isaac ben Abraham "the Blind" of Posquières; see Scholem, "Te'udah Ḥadašah," 156; concerning a "Rabbi Jacob the Pious" (*he-ḥasid*) mentioned by Ezra in his aggadah commentary, see Scholem, *Origins*, 232 n. 67, where the figure is taken to be Jacob ben Saul the Nazirite of Lunel; see too Scholem, *Kitvey Yad be-Qabbalah* [Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1930], 202 n. 7). Compare Azriel of Gerona, *Commentarius*, 36; a text ascribed to Nahmanides refers to black, green, red, and white fires on high corresponding to the colours of the four tribal banners (Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 1:17; Yisraeli, "Initial Ideas," 118); see too the reference to the colours of the archetypal Tabernacle (*tavmit we-dugmah*) in Jacob ben Sheshet of Gerona, "Ša'ar ha-Šamayim," 160 (cited on the basis of *Šir ha-Širim Rabbah*); and in the edition by Nahora Gabay, "*Sefer Ša'ar ha-Šamayim*," 111. For later material, see Gershom Scholem, "Colours and Their Symbolism in Jewish Tradition and Mysticism," *Diogenes* 108 (Winter 1979): 84–111; Scholem, "Colours and Their Symbolism in Jewish Tradition and Mysticism," *Diogenes* 109 (1980): 64–77; Moshe Idel, "Kabbalistic Prayer and Colors," in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times, Volume III*, ed. David R. Blumenthal (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 17–27; Idel, "Visualization of Colors, 1: David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid's Kabbalistic Diagram," *Ars Judaica* 11 (2015): 31–54; Idel, "Visualization of Colors, 2: Implications of David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid's Diagram for the History of Kabbalah," *Ars Judaica* 12 (2016): 39–51. On the midrashic motif of God revealing an archetype of the Tabernacle to Moses, see ha-Levi, *Kuzari*, 1:99; ha-Levi, *Das Buch al-Chazarī*, 52–55; ha-Levi, *The Kuzari*, 72; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 167.

62 Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruš*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:490.

63 Scholem, *Origins*, s.v. "Primordial days"; Ezra ben Solomon, *Le commentaire*, 292–319.

letter combination. Without, however, marking these additional layers of signification for his reader in the present context, Ezra limited himself to a terse comment signaling the theosophical import of the midrash: “All of the above alludes (*romez*) to the fact that this world draws life from, is connected with, and affixed to the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He.”⁶⁴

When Ezra’s theosophical understanding of Israel’s sanctuaries is calibrated to the author’s eschatology⁶⁵ and read together with the indications of Bezalel’s linguistic-artisanal craft, one is compelled to ask: Did Ezra anticipate that the builder of a future Temple would employ knowledge of Kabbalah? In the absence of any single unequivocal statement on the matter, answering this question in the affirmative depends on synthesising disparate elements of Ezra’s theology. It is at least clear from his express testimony that Ezra awaited the arrival of a messianic builder. He ascribed the task of rebuilding the Temple to the (Ephraimite) Messiah son of Joseph,⁶⁶ whereas the Davidic Messiah would succeed the slain Messiah son of Joseph and gather the exiles back to the Holy City rebuilt by his predecessor.⁶⁷ At minimum, the material culled from the early corpus of Catalonian texts helps to anticipate the reading I will elicit from Naḥmanides’s writings that such a redemptive builder would require the technical knowledge modeled by Bezalel. In a manner evidently indebted to Ezra’s theosophical understanding of the Tabernacle, Naḥmanides underscored the redemptive, if not messianic character of Bezalel’s knowledge.

4 Moses Naḥmanides

4.1 *The Secret of the Tabernacle*

Although a previous generation of scholars clung to the false supposition that Ezra’s esoteric speculation should be distinguished categorically from that of Moses Naḥmanides,⁶⁸ it is perfectly apt to find support from the latter’s

64 Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruš*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:491; Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*, 58.

65 Vajda, ed., *Le commentaire*, 425–55 (“La fin des temps et la béatitude de l’âme”); Pedaya, *Name and Sanctuary*, 212–13; Brown, “On the Censorship.”

66 Based ultimately on *b. Suk.* 52a; for an overview, see Joseph Heinemann, “The Messiah of Ephraim and the Premature Exodus of the Tribe of Ephraim,” *Harvard Theological Review* 68 (1975): 1–15.

67 Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruš*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:515; Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*, 144.

68 Ephraim Kanarfogel, “On the Assessment of R. Moses b. Nahman (Nahmanides) and His Literary Oeuvre,” *Jewish Book Annual* 51 (1994): 158–72; see, e.g., Idel, “No Kabbalistic Tradition”; Idel, *Middot*, 117–20; see, however, Idel, “Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism,” in *Platonism in Jewish Thought*, ed. Lenn Goodman (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012), 329–30,

writings for a similar reception of the midrash from *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* to that gleaned from Ezra's corpus. Naḥmanides is the pre-eminent medieval rabbinic theologian on the topic of the Tabernacle. Even so, scholars have yet to interpret this facet of the figure's contribution against the background of Ezra's writings. What follows locates Naḥmanides's theology of the Tabernacle within a messianic outlook in which artisanal knowledge of Kabbalah plays a constructive-redemptive role.

It is important to recall that Naḥmanides placed his imprimatur on Ezra's interpretation of Job 28, in which God's primordial upbuilding from the raw material of language mirrors Bezalel's craft. Not only did he praise this text, he cited it *in extenso* in his commentary to Job (ad loc). As in Ezra's writings, a host of aggadic motifs bolsters Naḥmanides's thinking about the Tabernacle, including (a) its construction as a repetition of the work of creation and (b) the pre-kabbalistic characterisations of its builder. These motifs will be discussed in due course. Foremost in Naḥmanides's theology, however, is what he dubbed "the secret of the Tabernacle" (*sod ha-miškan*).⁶⁹ Accordingly, the Tabernacle is a sanctuary whose service renders the indwelling of God at Mount Sinai into an enduring presence for Israel throughout their sojourn in the wilderness. It is indeed evident from the scriptural narrative that God spoke to Moses through the Tabernacle in a manner comparable to the theophany at Sinai:

The secret of the Tabernacle [*sod ha-miškan*] is that the Glory which abode upon Mount Sinai [overtly] should abide upon it in a concealed manner. [...] Thus Israel always had with them in the Tabernacle the Glory which appeared to them on Mount Sinai. And when Moses went into the Tabernacle, he would hear the divine utterance being spoken to him in the same way as on Mount Sinai. [...] Now one who looks carefully at the verses mentioned at the giving of the Torah, and understands what we have written about them, will perceive the secret of the Tabernacle and the Temple [built later by King Solomon].⁷⁰

The narratological structure of Naḥmanides's thinking situates the construction of the Tabernacle between the revelation at Sinai and the future construction of

where affinities between Naḥmanides and other Gerona kabbalists are adduced. For alternate approaches, see Travis, "Kabbalistic Foundations of Jewish Spiritual Practice," 302–10; Yair Lorberbaum, "Did Nahmanides Perceive the Kabbalah as 'Closed Knowledge'?" [Hebrew], *Zion* 82 (2017): 309–54; Judith Weiss, "The Kabbalah in Gerona in the 13th Century: Azriel and Nachmanides, A Re-Evaluation" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 87 (2020): 67–97; Brown, "On the Censorship," where additional studies are adduced.

69 Wolfson, "By Way of Truth," 162, discusses the Tabernacle's "theophanous quality."
70 Naḥmanides on Exod 25:1; Chavel, trans., *Commentary on the Torah*, 2:435–36.

Solomon's Temple. In prefiguring the construction of that latter sanctuary, the construction of the Tabernacle likewise foreshadows the building of a messianic sanctuary within Naḥmanides's immediate horizon of expectation.⁷¹

In his synopsis of the book of Exodus, the sage emphasised not only the theophanic aspect of the Tabernacle, but also its redemptive function. The following exegesis is based on the premise that the inauguration of the Tabernacle restored Israel to the status of the Patriarchs, after their protracted exile in Egypt:

When they [Israel] came to Mount Sinai and made the Tabernacle, and the Holy One, blessed be He, caused His presence to dwell again amongst them, they returned to the status of their fathers when the counsel of God (*sod eloah*) was upon their tents,⁷² and they constituted the [divine] chariot.⁷³ Then they were considered redeemed. It was for this reason that this second book of the Torah concludes with the consummation of the building of the Tabernacle, and the Glory of the Lord filling it always.⁷⁴

This account of the Tabernacle's redemptive function likely anticipates the future deliverance when a messianic ruler would restore a sanctuary to Israel⁷⁵

71 See below, n. 78; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3:869, points to the example of ha-Levi's *Kuzari* as a medieval work of Jewish theology that "posit[s] a real relationship between the Tabernacle and the Temple in the past and an eschatological expectation in the future." See above, n. 35.

72 Based on Job 29:4; see Naḥmanides's commentary ad loc; *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:90.

73 Theodor and Albeck, eds., *Bereshit Rabbah*, 2:983 (*Gen. Rab.* 82:6).

74 Chavel, trans., *Commentary on the Torah*, 2:4–5.

75 Although some medieval voices basing themselves on Ps 147:2 ("the Lord builds Jerusalem"—e.g., Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3:878; Wilhelm Bacher, "Judæo-Christian Polemics in the Zohar," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 3 [1881]: 781–82; Recanati, *Peruš*, 2:158 [Beḥuqotay]) clung to the view that the Third Temple would be erected by divine fiat (rather than by the labour of a human Messiah), it appears that Naḥmanides espoused the Maimonidean view that the Messiah himself would build the Temple; at least, he appears to have avowed the Maimonidean view in the Hebrew account of the Disputation of Barcelona when he clarified to his Dominican interlocutors the content of Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Melakhim u-Milḥamot*, 11:3 (see Naḥmanides, *Wikuah*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:315; Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992], 89): "If a king will arise from the House of David who diligently contemplates the Torah and observes its commandments as prescribed by the Written Torah and the Oral Torah as David, his ancestor, will compel all of Israel to walk in (the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of God, we may, with assurance, consider him Messiah. If he succeeds in the above, builds the Temple in its place, and gathers the dispersed

and the people would, like the ancient Patriarchs and the Tabernacle itself, serve as the very resting place for divinity in the world.⁷⁶ If understood according to the theosophical pattern I elicited from Ezra's writings above, it appears that this redemption came about through the completion of the Tabernacle, when the "counsel of God" (*sode loah*)—corresponding to the upper *sefirot* of wisdom (*hokhmah*) and understanding (*binah*)—came to rest upon the tents of Israel. That Naḥmanides identified Israel's tents with the edifice of the seven lower *sefirot* is suggested by his equation of the people's dwellings with the divine chariot constituted by the Patriarchs.⁷⁷ The complete picture, then, is one in which the indwelling of divinity gives rise to both theophany and redemption. There is sufficient indication that Naḥmanides clung to the prospect that the

of Israel, he is definitely the Messiah" (Cf. *Hilkhot Melakhim u-Milḥamot*, 11:1: "In the future, the Messianic King will [...] build the Temple"). See too Moses Maimonides, *Sefer ha-Miṣvot le-ha-Rambam 'im Haṣagot šel ha-Ramban*, ed. Charles b. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1981), 163–64 (Commandment 20): "And let them make me a Sanctuary"; Exod 25:8. Regarding the figure of a predecessor to the Messiah son of David, who, per Ezra, would build Jerusalem, Naḥmanides claimed the forerunner would wage wars and begin a process of ingathering; however, after the forerunner's death, that process would be completed by the secondary redeemer, who is likened to Joshua for his role in purifying the Land (Naḥmanides, *Wikuah*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:291, 294; Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 637, 648 ["Disputation at Barcelona"]); on Joshua as a proto-messianic figure, see discussion below. Notwithstanding their agreement on matters of theosophy and eschatology, it may be that Ezra and Naḥmanides differed on the question of which Messiah would accomplish which set of redemptive tasks. On the archetypal equation of the Tabernacle and the Temple in Naḥmanides, see Haviva Pedaya, *Nahmanides: Cyclical Time and Holy Text* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 2003), 185 and s.v. "משכן"; Pedaya also treats traditions on this motif from the disciplines of Solomon Ibn Adret and Isaac ben Todros of Barcelona (Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, 183, 203 n. 133).

76 Compare with the contemporary theology of indwelling elaborated in Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

77 Though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are technically but the first three elements of the lower seven, the early kabbalists devised a reading of the rabbinic identification of the Patriarchs with the chariot (above, n. 75) according to which the latter consisted of four elements, quite significantly adding the messianic figure of David to the triumvirate of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to establish a fourfold (i.e., *malkhut/a'arah*); with the addition of the fourth (which is effectively the tenth *sefirah*, viz. the last of the seven lower *sefirot*), this hermeneutic not only accommodates the equation of the chariot with the full edifice comprised of the seven lower *sefirot*, but also underscores the messianic topos of completing the sanctuary. For early texts positing David as the fourth, see Ruth Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, "King David as the Fourth Leg of the Chariot—Gender, Identity, and Heresy," in *Canonization and Alterity: Heresy in Jewish History, Thought, and Literature*, ed. Gilad Sharvit and Willi Goetschel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 96–98.

future Temple would perform a redemptive-theophanic function analogous to that of the Tabernacle, albeit in a manner theretofore unprecedented.⁷⁸

4.2 *Understanding, Wisdom, and Knowledge as Redemptive Attributes*

What sort of knowledge might one require to build sanctuaries capable of realising these ultimate functions? The inquiry will now turn to Naḥmanides's account of Bezalel's knowledge. In one instance, the Torah commentary seeks to explain why, in the scriptural narrative, God commanded Moses to discern the artisan's divine calling ("See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri"; Exod 31:2).

The reason for this is because Israel in Egypt had been crushed under the work "in mortar and in brick" (Exod 1:14), and had acquired no knowledge of how to work with silver and gold, and the cutting of precious stones, and had never seen them at all. It was thus a wonder that there was to be found amongst them such a great wise-hearted man who knew how to work with silver and gold, and in cutting of stones [for setting] and in carving of wood, a craftsman, an embroiderer, and a weaver. For even amongst those who study before the experts, you cannot find one who is proficient in all these crafts [*ha-ommanuyot kullam*]. And even those who know them and are used to doing them, if their hands are continually engaged in [work with] lime and mud, lose the ability to do with them such artistic and delicate work [*ommanut daqqah we-yafah*]. Moreover, he [Bezalel] was a great sage "in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge" (Exod 31:3), understanding the secret of the Tabernacle and all its vessels, why they were commanded and to what they would allude [*ḥakham gadol be-ḥokhmah bi-tevunah u-we-da'at lehavin sod ha-miškan we-khol kelaw lammah šuwu we-el mah yirmozu*]. Therefore, God said to Moses that when he sees this wonder (*ha-pele' ha-zeh*) he should know that "I filled him with the spirit of God" (Exod 31:3) to know all these things in order that he would make the Tabernacle. For it was His will to make the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and He created him for His Glory, for it is "He that called the generations from the beginning," [Isa 41:4] it being

⁷⁸ At least, Naḥmanides (ad Deut 33:12) discusses three different degrees of divine indwelling (*šaloš šekhinot*), where the degree corresponding to the future Temple will surpass the redemptive-theophanic function of the first two; see Moshe Halbertal, *Naḥmanides: Law and Mysticism*, trans. Daniel Tabak (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 224; compare Naḥmanides's view regarding the unprecedented degree of the future Temple to Maimonides's claims that the wisdom of the coming Davidic Messiah will exceed that of Solomon; see Ravitzky, "To the Utmost," 227.

similar in meaning to the verse, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee.” [Jer 1:5] [...] Our Rabbis have on this topic a Midrash:⁷⁹ “God showed Moses the book of the first man and told him: ‘Each person I have given a role from that moment on, and Bezalel too I have given a role already then, as it is said, “See, I have called by name Bezalel” (Exod 31:2).’” This is similar to what I have explained. The Rabbis have also said, “Bezalel knew how to combine the letters with which heaven and earth were created.” [b. Ber. 55a] The purport of this saying is that the Tabernacle would allude to these matters, and he [Bezalel] is the knower and expert of its secret [ki ha-miškan yirmoz be-ellu we-hu’ ha-yodea’ u-mevin sodo].⁸⁰

This passage characterises Bezalel as a redemptive figure whose task is to refine Israel’s knowledge—knowledge that had, per Naḥmanides’s above-cited synopsis of the book of Exodus, attenuated during their Egyptian exile. To the question of why God commanded Moses to take note of Bezalel’s calling, this exegesis responds that he was alerting Moses to the redemptive character of the artisan’s foreordained role. This served to remind Moses of the artisan’s destiny to exalt the Glory. The exegesis characterises Bezalel’s knowledge, following the biblical narrative, as divinely imparted. Moreover, the text explicitly connects the “wisdom, understanding, and knowledge” imparted to Bezalel with the artisan’s power “to understand the secret of the Tabernacle and all its vessels, why they were commanded and to what they would allude.” This suggests that the “wisdom, understanding, and knowledge” imparted to Bezalel comprised a pristine knowledge of the divinity, which is to say, a comprehensive knowledge of the *sefirot*; in short, knowledge of Kabbalah. This supposition is reinforced by the mention of the artisan’s knowledge of letter combination and the account of creation.⁸¹ This would suggest that Kabbalah

79 *Exod. Rab.* 40:2; scholarship has maintained that our earliest medieval citations of this late collection of aggadic midrash are found in the writings of Azriel of Gerona and Naḥmanides. See Avigdor Shinan, *Midrash Shemot Rabbah: Chapters I–XIV* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1984), 22–23; Yahalom, “Tanhuma in Masquerade,” 277. However, both Ezra’s Song of Songs commentary and his commentary on rabbinic lore precede Azriel and Naḥmanides in citing the compilation; see, e.g., Tishby’s introduction to Azriel of Gerona, *Commentarius in Aggadot*, 3.

80 Naḥmanides on Exod 31:2; Chavel, trans., *Commentary on the Torah*, 2:42–43. Recanati (*Peruś*, 1:152) repeats the final sentence of Naḥmanides’s account of Bezalel’s knowledge verbatim, without attribution.

81 The “Homily for a Wedding” text attributed to the Naḥmanides represents Bezalel’s knowledge in plainly kabbalistic terms: “What are the [...] thirty-two paths [of wisdom]? They consist of the ten creative utterances with which the world was created, and the

is the redemptive knowledge *par excellence* insofar as it facilitates the building of sanctuaries that, in recapitulating supernal patterns, furnish an abode for the Glory,⁸² thus democratising knowledge of God among Israel.

In another instance, the Torah commentary returns to characterising Bezalel in terms of the intellectual attributes bestowed on him. According to the text, the dispensation of divine knowledge prepared him to perform the singular task of fashioning the Ark of Testimony,⁸³ the most sanctified facet of the Tabernacle's construction. God appointed Bezalel alone to this task, to work independently of the other gifted artisans:

In the case of the ark, however, Scripture mentions specifically “and Bezalel made the ark” (Exod 37:1) in order to say that the greatest craftsman among them made the ark alone. The reason for this is because he was filled “with the spirit of God, in wisdom, understanding, and knowledge” (Exod 31:3) so that he could contemplate it and make it with intention (*še-yitbonen bo we-ya'aseno be-khawwanah*). For in the actual making of the ark there was no great artistry entailed, there being amongst the other work things which required greater skill than that of the ark.⁸⁴

In this context, Bezalel's divinely bestowed attributes are equated with a special gift for contemplation and intentional consciousness required to complete the ark within the Tabernacle's inner sanctum. This supports the premise that he possessed an archetypal knowledge of divinity—that is, kabbalistic knowledge—and, likewise, that such knowledge guided the artisan in calibrating Israel's sacred architecture to a divine archetype. As the exegesis suggests,

twenty-two letters [of the Hebrew alphabet] with which, in their [various] combinations, everything came into existence. And the Rabbis said: 'Bezalel knew how to combine the letters with which heaven and earth were created.' Conforming to them [i.e., the thirty-two paths of wisdom], the Torah is expounded through the thirty-two rules of Rabbi Nathan, which are the paths [of wisdom]. What spiritual quality makes one deserving of wisdom? It is understanding [*binah*], as the rabbis said, 'The blessed Holy One gives wisdom only to one who has understanding.' [...] Understanding is the life of the human spirit, as it is said, 'And it is the soul of God that gives them understanding' [*nišmat Šadday tevinem*; Job 32:8; cf. Naḥmanides on Genesis 2:7, see below n. 116].” See Yisraeli, “Initial Ideas,” 116 (see too 98); Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 1:10–11 (“Sermon for a Wedding”).

82 Halbertal, *Naḥmanides*, 269, refers to “the theurgic-talismanic activity of building the Tabernacle.”

83 Jacob ben Sheshet, *Mešiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, 116, compares Bezalel's knowledge of the order of constructing the Tabernacle, which is completed with the ark (based on *b. Ber.* 55a), with the order of creation of the world, whose telos is the world-to-come.

84 Naḥmanides on Exod 36:8; Chavel, trans., *Commentary on the Torah*, 2:605.

crafting the ark did not require brute virtuosity, but rather a unique aptitude for subordinating artisanship to contemplation (*hitbonenut*) and intention (*kawwanah*).

To further elucidate Naḥmanides's kabbalistic epistemology and its relationship to the physical sanctuaries required for Israel's redemption, it is possible to adduce two critical passages from *Ša'ar ha-Gemul* ("Gate of Reward," the final, eschatological chapter of *Torat ha-Adam*). In the first passage, the Catalonian sage links the design of Israel's sanctuaries with the apparently fantastical plants and rivers that the first humans found in the terrestrial Garden of Eden to make an argument about the mechanics of "understanding" supernal matters. Accordingly, the biblical descriptions of Eden's exotic trappings are not remotely fantastical. For Naḥmanides, their reality may be inferred from their capacity to facilitate human understanding of higher realities:

[They are] all true matters and firm subjects, alluding to a wonderful secret [*sod mufla*]: They are like drawings of a thing [that help] to understand a profound secret [*lehavin sod 'amoq*]. A parable, as we were taught: "Rabban Gamliel had pictures of the phases of the moon on a tablet on the wall of his upper chamber. He showed these to the uneducated [who come to attest to the appearance of the new moon, saying to them], 'Did you see this [or that] phase?'" [*b. Roš. Haš. 24a*] In a like manner [i.e., in the manner of an image alluding to higher realities], the work in the Tabernacle [was carried out] in three places: the outer Court, the Tent, and [the area] enclosed by the Curtain, [viz. the Holy of Holies. And later] in the Temple [in Jerusalem, the work was carried out in these three places]: the outer Court, the Sanctuary, and the innermost Chamber. Similarly, every aspect of the vessels, as well as the forms of the cherubim, were all [crafted] to facilitate understanding of the secret account of the upper, middle, and lower worlds [*lehavin sodot ma'aseh 'olam ha-'elyon we-ha-emša'i we-ha-šafel*], and allusions to the entire chariot [*we-rimzey kol ha-merkavah*],⁸⁵ as well as the very creatures created in [the divine] likeness [angels],⁸⁶ as the Rabbis said in *Sefer Yeširah*: "A sign and trustworthy witnesses for this matter is the world, the year, and the soul."⁸⁷

85 Cf. Naḥmanides on Exod 25:21.

86 The composition "The Law of the Lord is Perfect" (*Torat YHWH Temimah*) claims that the sixth day of creation, in which God made Adam in the divine likeness, alludes to the sixth millennium, in which the Messiah will reign and rebuild Jerusalem; see Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:169; Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 1:119. Cf. Naḥmanides ad Gen 1:26.

87 *Sefer Yeširah* 6:4.

The first human, the handiwork of the Blessed Holy One, was distinguished among humans in understanding and knowledge [*bi-tevunah uwe-da'at*], and God, blessed be He, set him in the best of places for the enjoyment and benefit of the body. He inscribed in that honored place the entire function of the supernal world, which is the world of souls in a physical form [*kol ma'ašeh ha-olam ha-elyon hu' olam ha-nešamot be-šiygur gašmi*],⁸⁸ [so that humans might] understand therefrom the foundations of all creatures—physical, spiritual, and angelic [*lehavin mi-šam yesodey kol nivra' gufi we-nafshi u-mal'akhi*]—and all of which possesses the creaturely faculty to attain from the blessed Creator [*we-khol mah še-yeš be-hašagat ha-nivra' le-hašig min ha-bore' yitbarakh*].

That place [the terrestrial Garden of Eden] is also the most glorified of all locations in the lower world because of the center of the middle of the middle and upper worlds that is suspended over it [that is, both the angelic and divine worlds are aligned above it]. Therefore, more “visions of God” [*mare'ot ha-elohim*; Ezek 1:1] are seen in it than in any of the other places upon the earth. This is similar to our belief that the Land of Israel and Jerusalem are glorified places, singularly distinguished by their essential nature of [facilitating] prophecy, and all the more so [does this apply] to the Temple, “the throne of the Lord.”⁸⁹ [...]

Thus in the [terrestrial] Garden of Eden, which is the chosen place for understanding all the supernal secrets within the forms of things [*la-mevin be-šiygurey ha-devarim kol sodot ha-elyonim*],⁹⁰ the souls of the dwellers [therein] become elevated by that study and they behold “visions of God” [*mare'ot Elohim*] in the company of the higher beings of that place. They attain whatever [degree of] knowledge and understanding a created being can achieve [*u-mašigim kol mah še-yakhhol la-da'at u-lehavin*].⁹¹

This dense passage establishes an analogy between (a) the quality of understanding facilitated by the terrestrial Garden of Eden and (b) the quality of understanding facilitated by the Tabernacle, the Land of Israel generally, Jerusalem specifically, and the Temple situated at its navel. Each of these sites facilitates a comprehensive mode of understanding that encompasses

88 Pedaya, “The Divinity as Place and Time,” 95–96, 100; and Pedaya, *Nahmanides*, s.v. “צורה, צורות,” “ציור, ציורים,” and “ציורי דברים.”

89 Jer 3:17. Cf. Nahmanides on Deut 33:12.

90 See above n. 88.

91 Nahmanides, *Torat ha-Adam*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:296; Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 2:508–9 (“Gate of Reward”). On the passage, see Avishai Bar-Asher, *Journeys of the Soul: Concepts and Imageries of Paradise in Medieval Kabbalah* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2019), 73–74.

three tiers of being: the lower world, the angelic world, and the divine world (wherein “the entire function of the supernal world” is inscribed).⁹² On the one hand, the reader may presume that this mode of understanding proceeds from the subjective operation of abstracting from the archetypal patterns discernible in Paradise, in Israel’s sanctuaries, and so forth, to apprehend transcendent realities. However, both the claim that angels and “visions of God” abide in the terrestrial Paradise and the premise that the Glory resides in Israel’s sanctuaries indicate that the presence of archetypal correspondences at lower levels of existence facilitates the indwelling of higher realities below.⁹³ In this sense, the process of understanding is not generated solely by the intellectual exertion of a subjective knower who might gain access to upper realities through mental ascent from below. Rather, this mode of understanding—which is both theophanic and prophetic in nature—derives from “the creaturely faculty to attain *from* the blessed Creator.”⁹⁴ Moreover, the fact that the supernal pattern is discernable below in the first instance is a function of the primordial wisdom imprinted upon creation.

Aside from the rhetoric of attainment, the terminology iterated several times in this passage is that of discerning secrets and allusions. Adam, rather than Bezalel, is the exemplar of divine handiwork who is distinguished in the attributes of understanding (*tevunah*) and knowledge (*da’at*), although it is certain that Naḥmanides envisioned Bezalel’s knowledge along similar lines. It is also important to point out that all humans, according to this passage, are, at least potentially, possessed of “the creaturely faculty to attain from the blessed Creator,” though actualising this faculty would depend upon coming into contact with the archetypal forms. When the Torah commentary alludes to patterns of the supernal world, it appears to favour the language that scripture applies to the design of the Tabernacle; that is, *tavnit* (pattern) rather than *dugmah* (Ezra’s preferred vocabulary). The preference for *tavnit* may be related to the operation of *tevunah*, to which it is etymologically linked (i.e., a mode of discerning the archetypal patterns of being).⁹⁵

Another passage from *Ša’ar ha-Gemul* affirms that Israel’s capacity to discern supernal realities from their patterns below is truly inspired—dependent

92 Elsewhere, the same composition compares the enlightenment of the deceased soul in the lower Garden of Eden to “the soul of a person who stands in Jerusalem [and] clothes itself with the Holy Spirit, and prophetic crafts [*mela’khot nevu’ah*] by the supernal will, whether in dreams or visions, more than all of whom abide in an impure land.” See Naḥmanides, *Torat ha-Adam*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:298; Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 2:515–16 (“Gate of Reward”).

93 Pedaya, “The Divinity as Place and Time,” 96.

94 Naḥmanides, *Torat ha-Adam*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:296.

95 On this semantic field, see Vajda, ed., *Le commentaire*, 280–81.

upon the descent of the Holy Spirit. When inspired, the sages (*hakhamim*; i.e., those possessing wisdom) behold both the light and the voice of the seven lower *sefirot* (from *hesed* to *ʿatarah*) resting upon Israel's sanctuaries. This auditory aspect of theophany is related to the prophetic function that Naḥmanides ascribed to the Tabernacle, the Temple, the Garden of Eden, and so forth. Prophetic inspiration enables the sages to discern the signature of divine realities within the sevenfold structure of the harp (*kinnor*) contained within the Temple and the candelabrum contained within the Tabernacle.

The harp and the musical instruments in the Sanctuary allude to the attainment of thought which is dependent upon the spirit. And there is nothing as subtle in the physical realm as music. This is similar to the subject of "voice, speech, and spirit" [*Sefer Yeširah* 1:9] which is the Holy Spirit. In this world, the sages perceive seven *sefirot* by the Holy Spirit. Their light is attached to the Tabernacle and the Temple, and they are alluded to in the seven lamps of the candelabrum,⁹⁶ and in some of the offerings.⁹⁷ [...] The sages thus spoke of the seven-string harp as the instrument of the aforementioned "voice" in this world.⁹⁸

The text goes on to indicate that in contrast to the sevenfold character of the divine world that Israel apprehended within their previous sanctuaries, they

96 Compare Naḥmanides, "Prayer at the Ruins of Jerusalem" (in Oded Yisraeli, "Jerusalem in Naḥmanides's Religious Thought: The Evolution of the 'Prayer over the Ruins of Jerusalem,'" *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 41 [2017]: 434; Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:425): "There is the pure candelabrum, / which sheds light onto the sages of Israel, / shining forth with its seven lamps. / And they that are wise shall shine / as the brightness of the firmament." On the sevenfold candelabrum made by Bezalel as an emblem of divine unity in *Sefer ha-Yiḥud*, see Jonathan Dauber, *Secrecy and Esoteric Writing in Kabbalistic Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 181–82, and 256 n. 22.

97 See *b. Suk.* 58b; and Naḥmanides ad Num 11:16; on the sevenfold number seventy, termed a "perfect number" (*mispar šalem*), Naḥmanides claimed: "It is fitting that the Glory of the *shekhinah* should rest upon [a group of] this perfect number, since it is [comparable to] the camp on high, for Israel are "the hosts of the Lord" (Exod 12:41) on earth, just as the Ark and its Cover and the Tabernacle were all made in the likeness of those ministers on high. So also were the tribal banners made in the image of the chariot that Ezekiel saw, in order that the *shekhinah* should rest upon them on earth as it is present in the heavens." Compare "Prayer at the Ruins of Jerusalem," (in Yisraeli, "Jerusalem," 435 [430 for Hebrew]; Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:425): "There is the chosen place, the chamber of hewn stone, / adorned with its seventy elders and judicial courts, / glorified and honoured / like sacred ministers and ministers of God / arranged according to the heavenly pattern [*le-tavit ma'lah mesudderet*]."

98 Naḥmanides, *Torat ha-Adam*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:303; Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 2:528–29 ("Gate of Reward"). On this passage, see Pedaya, *Naḥmanides: Cyclical Time and Holy Text*, 138.

will apprehend eight gradations at the time of the messianic redemption. They will yet attain the fullness of the tenfold divinity in the world-to-come: “The harp in the era of the Messiah will consist of eight strings [...]; that of the world-to-come will consist of ten strings.”⁹⁹ This teaching affirms that the messianic redemption would augment Israel’s capacity for both *understanding* and *knowledge*, two attributes which, as demonstrated, possess a technical meaning for Naḥmanides.¹⁰⁰ Accordingly, the messianic era is a time in which these faculties would be actualised to a degree that was unprecedented during Israel’s exile.

5 What Does the Messiah Know?

And wisdom will be the virtue of the Messiah, and his nearness to God: for neither Abraham, whom the glorious and fearful Name speaks of as “His friend” (Isa 41:8) and with whom He likewise made a covenant; nor Moses, who was nearer to God than any human; nor the ministering angels [...] approach so closely to the knowledge of the Name [*yedi’at hashem*] as the Messiah. [...] Hence, Isaiah writes that “he will be exalted” (Isa 52:13) in his intellect [*be-šikhlo*], enabling him to profoundly comprehend the Name [*yaškil me’od et hashem*], and [to be] greatly exalted and lofty in the modes of knowledge of his blessed Name [*naša’ ve-gavah me’od bi-yedi’ot hašem*], more so than all the prophets before him.¹⁰¹

99 Naḥmanides, *Torat ha-Adam*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:302; Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 2:528 (“Gate of Reward”). On this, see the gloss to Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Tešuvah 8:2, by Shemṭov ben Abraham Ibn Gaon, *Migdal ‘Oz*: pace Maimonides, Ibn Gaon upholds the eschatological paradigm of Naḥmanides’s *Ša’ar he-Gemul*, including the present account of the harp.

100 If understood technically, the specification of “understanding” (the eighth *sefirah*) and “knowledge” (the lower seven *sefirot*) corresponds well to the motif of the eight-string harp.

101 Translation adapted from Samuel R. Driver and Adolph Neubauer, *The Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters. II: Translations* (Oxford, 1877), 79–80 (see too 83, where the same commentary affirms that the Messiah will, among other things, impart “knowledge and wisdom” and spur repentance), on the basis of Moses Naḥmanides, *Nachmanidis disputatio publica pro fide Judaica (a. 1263) e Codd. Mss. Recognita addita ejusdem expositione in Jesaiam LIII*, ed. Moritz Steinschneider (Berlin, 1860), 23–24; though Naḥmanides’s commentary on Isa 52:13–53:12 is conventionally viewed as an independent composition that is closely related in content to the Christological dispute concerning the “Servant of the Lord” at Barcelona (see Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond*, s.v. “Servant of the Lord passage”), I regard the commentary as a formal epilogue to Naḥmanides’s account of the Disputation at Barcelona; that is, as an integral component of the *Wikuah* composition, bookending the account as a closing counterpart to the opening citation *in extenso* from *b. Sanh.* 43a and consummating the composition with a messianic flourish;

When Nahmanides disputed Friar Paú Crestià and other Dominican friars in Barcelona in July, 1263,¹⁰² one of the questions debated was: “Do you believe that the Messiah prophesied by the prophets will be both entirely human, and truly divine [*iš gamur we-eloah mammasš*]?”¹⁰³ By all indications, Nahmanides defended the rabbinic position that there is no basis for the divinity of the human Messiah predicted by scripture. Nonetheless, his defence of the Messiah’s thoroughgoing humanity, as preserved in the Hebrew account of the disputation, is buoyed into the realm of divinity by Nahmanides’s assertion of the human Messiah’s complete investiture with the divine attributes. In fact, the Messiah is vested with the same divine attributes of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge mooring so much early kabbalistic speculation.

Against his opponent’s insistence that rabbinic wisdom demonstrates the humanity of Israel’s redeemer, Friar Paú, per Nahmanides’s account, pressed for the divinity of the prophesied Messiah, citing an amoraic midrash on Genesis 1:2 (the same tradition invoked by Ezra to identify the spirit of the Messiah with the emanation of wisdom and understanding): “In Genesis Rabbah, they say, ‘And the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. This is the spirit of Messiah.’¹⁰⁴ If so, [the Messiah] is not man; he is the spirit of God.’¹⁰⁵ To this, Nahmanides replied, on the authority of another tradition, that the verse referred to “the spirit of the first human.”¹⁰⁶ Nahmanides thus demonstrated that when interpreted according to its context, the midrash cited

it appears as such in early manuscript witnesses to the *Wikuah* (for example, MS Parma, Biblioteca Palatina 2437, fols. 10b–12a, and MS New York, Jewish Theological Seminary of America 2218, fols. 19b–23b; see too Driver and Neubauer, *Fifty-Third Chapter*, ix [§. 20]).

102 For a lucid overview, see Oded Yisraeli, *R. Moses b. Nachman (Nachmanides): Intellectual Biography* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2020), 281–320.

103 Nahmanides, *Wikuah*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:316; Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 2:658 (“Disputation at Barcelona”).

104 Theodor and Albeck, eds., *Bereshit Rabbah*, 1:17 (*Gen. Rab.* 2:4); cf. Frank Talmage, ed., *Sefer ha-Berit we-Wikuhey Radaq ‘im ha-Naşrut* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1974), 21–22 and n. 3; Joseph Kimḥi, *The Book of the Covenant of Joseph Kimḥi*, trans. Frank Talmage (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1972), 28 and n. 3, where the sanctioned interpretation avoids a Trinitarian reading of the verse.

105 Nahmanides, *Wikuah*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:319.

106 See *Tanḥ*, Tazria’ 1:2 (on Lev 12:2); Solomon Buber, ed., *Midrash Tanḥuma* (Vilna, 1884), 3:16b (Leviticus pagination): “It is written (in Gen 1:2), ‘and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters’; this spirit was the soul of the first Adam”; see, however, the discussion from Nahmanides’s “The Law of the Lord is Perfect” (*Torat YHWH Temimah*), in Chavel, ed. *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:159; Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 1:86–87: “Our rabbis of blessed memory said: “‘And the spirit of God hovered” (Gen 1:2) refers to the spirit of the Messiah’ [*Gen. Rabb.* 2:4; see citation immediately above]. This alludes to the beloved soul [of the Messiah] and [the fact that] with it were created all [other souls].” This assertion may relate to Nahmanides’s esoteric allusions to the rabbinic topos (*b. Yebam.* 62a;

by the friar reads Genesis 1:2 in reference to a prophecy concerning Israel's subjugation to four successive kingdoms.¹⁰⁷ Accordingly, the four elements of primordial chaos mentioned in the Genesis verse refer to the four kingdoms of Babylon, Media, Greece, and Rome. But "the spirit of God" hovering "over the face of the deep" refers to the human Messiah insofar as he will redeem Israel from foreign rule. In making this point, however, Naḥmanides qualified the midrashic identification of "the spirit of God" with the Messiah in a manner befitting the latter's exalted humanity:

[After mentioning the penultimate reign of Rome, the midrash] introduces "the spirit of God" that represents the Messiah, a consummate human (*adam gamur*), full of wisdom and full of the spirit of God, as were Bezalel, of whom it is said, "and I have filled him with the spirit of God [wisdom, understanding, and knowledge]," (Exod 31:3)—and Joshua—of whom it is said, "And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom" (Deut 34:9). It now stands explained that they [the ancient sages] were speaking of the Messiah who is destined to come after the fourth kingdom.¹⁰⁸

In the process of defending the non-divinity of the Messiah, the sage adduced a handy exegetical tradition concerning the kind of sublime knowledge that the Messiah would possess. On the one hand, the tradition refers to a concretely human mode of knowing. On the other, it is a mode of knowing that is ordered to the structures and processes of the divinity, and one that is divinely imparted. The Naḥmanidean terminology of a "creaturely faculty to attain from the blessed Creator" may be the most succinct language to qualify this class of knowledge.¹⁰⁹ When Naḥmanides's defence is prefaced by the foregoing analysis, readers will recognise the sense underlying the sage's equation of the Messiah's knowledge with that of Bezalel. This is an equation with firm midrashic precedent, and one rife with kabbalistic significance when illuminated by Naḥmanides's broader corpus. The defence, as reported in the Hebrew account of the disputation, identifies the Messiah not only with Bezalel, but also with Adam, the initial figure to whom Naḥmanides referred the phrase

b. Nid. 13b) of the Davidic Messiah's advent once the storehouse of souls (*guf*) has been exhausted (ad Gen 1:26 and Deut 30:2).

107 On the four kingdoms in related exegesis, see Brown, "On the Censorship."

108 MS Parma 2437, fol. 9b; MS Paris, BNF 334, fol. 234a (which omits the Joshua prooftext); Naḥmanides, *Wikuah*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:319; Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 2:693 ("Disputation at Barcelona").

109 See above.

“the spirit of God” to convey the divine character of his knowledge. What about Joshua, the third “consummate human” identified with the Messiah?

It is only appropriate that Joshua the son of Nun—custodian of the Tabernacle, successor to none less than Moses, and leader of Israel into its Land¹¹⁰—is characterised in both a messianic and a kabbalistic vein.¹¹¹ Consider, for example, the following inquiry into Joshua’s name from the Torah commentary, which functions (similarly to Nahmanides’s inquiry into Bezalel’s name) to underscore the superlative character of knowledge traditionally ascribed to Moses’s acolyte:

Why [of all the times that Joshua the son of Nun is cited in scripture] is the name of this righteous man not once mentioned properly [i.e., why is his name vocalised as *bin Nun* rather than *ben Nun*]?! [...] I think that they used to call him in this way as an honorific, since he was the greatest of the disciples of Moses our teacher. And so they called him *bin-nun*, meaning “the understanding one” [*ha-navon*], since there was “none so understanding and wise” [*navon we-ḥakham*]¹¹² as he.¹¹³

110 According to Nahmanides, the high degree of honour bestowed upon the Land of Israel in the generation of Joshua set the standard for subsequent generations; Nahmanides, *Ḥidduše ha-Ramban ha-Šalem*, vol. 2, ed. Moshe Hershler (Jerusalem: Mekhon ha-Talmud ha-Yisra’eli ha-Šalem, 1973), 8–9, (ad *Meg.* 2a); on the proto-messianic task of purifying the Land ascribed to Joshua, see above, n. 75.

111 In the introduction to his commentary on the Song of Songs, Ezra recounted Joshua’s critical role as the successor to Moses in promulgating “knowledge of the Creator” (i.e., Kabbalah) to subsequent generations; thus: “Moses transmitted this wisdom [*ḥokhmah*] to Joshua, as it is written, ‘And Joshua, the son of Nun, was filled with the spirit of wisdom’ [*ruaḥ ḥokhmah*; Deut 34:9] because Moses laid his hands upon him”; Ezra ben Solomon, *Peruś*, in Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 2:478–79; Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary*, 20–21; see Vajda, ed., *Le commentaire*, 333–38; Travis, “Kabbalistic Foundations,” 36.

112 In their scriptural context, the words “none so discreet and wise” (*navon we-ḥakham*; Gen 41:39) are Pharaoh’s praise of Joseph, but here they apply to Joshua. Joseph is yet another figure whose investiture with “the spirit of God” (Gen 41:38) is affirmed by scripture. In fact, Nahmanides’s exegesis of Pharaoh’s recognition of the “spirit of God” in the person of Joseph places even more explicit language in Pharaoh’s mouth that supports the epistemological paradigm we have seen linked to a host of inspired figures. Thus, Pharaoh said (Nahmanides ad loc, concerning Joseph): “Since God has imbued you with this great wisdom [*ha-ḥokhmah ha-gedolah ha-zot*], thus enabling you to interpret all secret and hidden dreams, and not a word of yours has failed, there is none so understanding and wise in all matters as you are (*en navon we-ḥakham be-khol ‘inyan kamokha*), and you are therefore fit to assume authority and rulership and to be second to me.” Joseph’s special attributes of knowledge, which are ostensibly not found among the Egyptians, facilitate knowledge “in all matters.” This suggests a kabbalistic epistemology according to which “all matters” are apprehensible by virtue of the divine pattern ordering creation.

113 Nahmanides on Exod 33:11.

After indicating that the idiosyncratic vocalisation of Joshua's name bespeaks his stature in knowledge—using terminology closely linked to the attributes of *tevunah* and *hokhmah*—the inquiry takes an explicitly kabbalistic turn. Thus, the commentary suggests another explanation of his honorific: “It may be that the meaning of it is: Joshua, whom understanding begot [*yehošua' še-ha-binah molid*].”¹¹⁴ This startling explanation tropes Joshua as the very issue of *binah* (i.e., *tevunah*),¹¹⁵ the ultimate source of divinely bestowed understanding (and, elsewhere, the source of “the spirit of God”).¹¹⁶ This not only suggests the modality of archetypal discernment discussed above, but also a messianic characterisation of the figure who ushered Israel into its Land. This is confirmed when the text continues: “They thus used the term *nun* as in the expression,¹¹⁷ ‘may his name endure [*yinnon*] as long as the sun.’”¹¹⁸ In connecting Joshua's name with Yinnon, the text alludes to an ancient tradition ascribed to the school of Yannai, according to which Yinnon is the name of the Messiah.¹¹⁹

In sum, the Messiah will possess Adamic knowledge that Naḥmanides described (in the above-cited passage from *Ša'ar ha-Gemul*) as the discernment of supernal archetypes within the forms and patterns inscribed in the

114 Naḥmanides on Exod 33:11.

115 The image of Joshua as the child of understanding may relate to his designation as a youth (*na'ar*; Exod 33:11; cf. Naḥmanides ad loc); in the Zohar, this designation is related to Joshua's duty as the custodian of the earthly Tabernacle, paralleling the vocation of Metatron, likewise designated as a “youth,” the angelic keeper of the supernal Tabernacle; see Zohar 2:164a and Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3:877. For Abraham Abulafia on the figures of Joshua, Hur, and Bezalel (as they relate to Christianity and messianism), see Moshe Idel, *Ben: Sonship in Jewish Mysticism* (London: Continuum, 2008), 286–87.

116 See too Naḥmanides on Gen 2:7, where Adam's divinely apportioned soul emanated from understanding (*binah*): “And He breathes into his nostrils the breath of life.’ This alludes to the degree of the soul, its foundation and secret [...]. And the verse says that He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life in order to inform us that the soul did not come to the human from the elements, as He intimated concerning the soul of moving things, nor was it concatenated from the separate intellects. Rather it was the great spirit of the Lord, knowledge and understanding from His mouth [*hī' ruah ha-šem ha-gadol mi-piv da'at u-tevunah*]. For one who breathes into the nostrils of another person gives unto him from his own soul. And this is what is written, ‘And the soul of God gives them understanding [*nišmat Šadday tevinem*; Job 32:8; cf. above n. 83],’ because the soul is from the foundation of understanding [*binah*] by way of truth and faith.”

117 Ps 72:17.

118 Naḥmanides on Exod 33:11.

119 *b. Sanh.* 98a. See Arnold Goldberg, “Die Name des Messias in der rabbinischen Traditionsliteratur: Ein Beitrag zur Messianologie des rabbinischen Judentums,” in Goldberg, *Mystik und Theologie des rabbinischen Judentums: Gesammelte Studien I*, ed. Margarete Schlüter and Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 208–75.

terrestrial Eden, the Tabernacle, the Temple, and so forth;¹²⁰ he will possess the intellectual attributes of Joshua, who is not only characterised in explicitly messianic terms, but is named “Joshua, whom understanding begot” (recall Ezra’s claim that the messianic spirit emanates from both wisdom and understanding¹²¹); finally, the Messiah will be like Bezalel, who, in addition to being filled with “the spirit of God,” will embody the three creative-intellectual attributes, show proficiency in letter combination and the account of creation, possess comprehensive knowledge of the Tabernacle’s secrets (including the rationales of its commandments), and demonstrate a special capacity for contemplation and intentional consciousness. Undergirding all of this seems to be the assumption that a human Messiah who would come to build a new sanctuary would require precisely the kind of knowledge ascribed to these figures, and to Bezalel above all.¹²² It thus appears that, per Naḥmanides, the dissemination of Kabbalah would potentiate the unfolding of redemption in the concrete ways indicated.

6 Conclusion: Kabbalah as Redemptive Knowledge

Scholarship has duly portrayed Kabbalah as a redemptive enterprise from its inception. This picture is supported by its appearance as a written discourse at the cusp of the sixth millennium; its rhetoric of esotericism (viewed in connection with the end-time motif of revealing secrets); as well as its pietistic elements (befitting a movement harbouring messianic expectations). Perhaps the clearest indication of the messianic profile of early Kabbalah, however, is the fact that several of its protagonists—Jacob ben Saul the Nazirite of Lunel, Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona, Asher ben David of Posquières, and, most famously, Naḥmanides—applied their exegetical skills to calculating the time of Israel’s redemption (*ḥešbon ha-qeṣ*) despite the established prohibition against such activity. It is now possible to correlate the early kabbalists’ eschatological orientation with the threefold speculation analysed in this study.¹²³ To reiterate my hypothesis, Naḥmanides, largely on the basis of earlier teachings, understood Kabbalah as the artisanal knowledge needed to realise both the concrete and spiritual processes of Israel’s redemption.

120 The restoration of humanity to a prelapsarian nature is a central feature of Naḥmanides’s messianism; see Halbertal, *Nahmanides*, 103–36.

121 See above n. 47; cf. n. 106.

122 On the Messiah as builder, see above, n. 75.

123 Vajda, ed., *Le commentaire*, 425–55 (“La fin des temps et la béatitude de l’âme”); Brown, “On the Censorship.”

It is, of course, curious that key support for this hypothesis derives from a disputational context. Would not such a context by its very nature constrain any testimony to Jewish messianism (let alone an arcane vein of messianic lore about Bezalel)? When interrogating these constraints, one does well to avoid theorising about a messianic double bind too generically (e.g., the structural diagnosis of messianism as an intrinsically conflicted confession of hope for a hope-negating arrival).¹²⁴ Such an approach would miss the particulars of an ideational trajectory leading from (a) the expectations fostered by the Catalonian speculation to (b) Naḥmanides's polemical and inherently political assertion of the Bezalel-type Messiah at Barcelona. This trajectory may be interpreted in the specific terms of a messianic bind vis-à-vis Christianity, or more specifically, vis-à-vis the "innovative" Dominican mission to the Jews of Aragon exemplified by the Disputation at Barcelona.¹²⁵ Within these parameters, any intimation of messianic arrival on the part of the Jews would have rendered the defence vulnerable in obvious ways. Of course, in addition to the embattled question of the Messiah's divinity,¹²⁶ Naḥmanides also disputed the time of his coming. Even so, the sage lived at a moment when the knowledge needed to catalyse the work of redemption had newly emerged to the light of history. In fact, he played an outstanding, even unparalleled role in bringing that moment to a head.

The complex binding Naḥmanides's testimony is, to be sure, characterised by the simultaneous avowal and disavowal of messianic advent.¹²⁷ On the one

124 Consider, e.g., Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 2005), 173–74: "Who has ever been sure that the expectation of the Messiah is not, from the start, by destination and invincibly, a fear, an unbearable terror—hence the hatred of what is thus awaited? And whose coming would wish both to quicken and infinitely retard, as the end of the future?"

125 See, e.g., Robert Chazan, "From Friar Paul to Friar Raymond: The Development of Innovative Missionizing Argumentation," *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983): 289–306; Brown, "On the Censorship."

126 The scholarly debates concerning a kabbalistic discourse of incarnation lie beyond the scope of the present discussion, though it may be observed in passing that their putative focus concerns the divinisation of flesh generally, rather than the divinity of an incarnate Messiah in particular.

127 This is not to endorse Yitzhak Baer's claim that Naḥmanides dissimulated in his testimony at Barcelona when limiting the truth value of the rabbinic lore (per Baer, he "argued—against his own convictions—that belief in the Aggadah is not obligatory"; see Baer, *History of the Jews of Christian Spain*, vol. 1, trans. Louis Schoffman [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961], 1:153); in fact, the sage qualified the credibility of aggadah in a more limited sense, on which see Yaakov Taubes, "In Denial: A Fresh Approach to Naḥmanides and Aggadah at Barcelona," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 110 (2020): 679–701. On Naḥmanides's claim that—concerning a particular aggadah about

hand, the Ramban committed himself to defending the position of non-arrival within the dispositional milieu: Israel had anointed no such latter-day King to satisfy all criteria. On the other, Naḥmanides sowed the seeds of advent via eschatology and Kabbalah. The time for disseminating the “hidden wisdom” had indeed arrived.¹²⁸ The tension, to be precise, results from the fact that Naḥmanides disputed the Messiah’s appearance while heralding his advent through the propagation of messianic knowledge.¹²⁹ Did the Trinity complex for which Kabbalah became infamous arise from the context of an earlier Messiah complex based on the same midrash from *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer*? Notwithstanding the historical, thematic, and textual intersections shared by these complexes, they may be distinguished in terms of the articles of Christian faith they narrowly evade: the Trinity in de León’s case,¹³⁰ and the Messiah’s arrival for Naḥmanides.

In either case, the significant authority vested in the midrash from *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* would have obstructed any hope of discharging the attendant burdens of disambiguation. Not only did this ostensibly ancient midrash support the task of projecting the kabbalists’ theosophical speculation backwards into the rabbinic past and furnishing it with an honourable pedigree, but it also supported the forward projection of theosophical speculation onto the horizon of Israel’s redemption. The midrash likewise performed the discursive work of authorising a host of constitutional facets of the “hidden wisdom,” including the theosophical appropriation of the account of creation (*ma’aseh berešit*); the theogonic transition from a threefold to a tenfold established in its edifice (*biryan*); the primordiality of the Hebrew letters and their creative-constructive function; the theophanic character of Israel’s sanctuaries; the doctrine of

the birth of the Messiah—he knew of another interpretation that runs counter to the historical-factual reading, one according to “the secrets of the sages” (*peruš aḥer mi-sitrey ha-ḥakhamim*; Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:306), see Marvin Fox, “Naḥmanides on the Status of Aggadot: Perspectives on the Disputation at Barcelona, 1263,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 40 (1989), 95–109, esp. 102.

128 As stated, for example, in the introduction to Ezra’s commentary on the Song of Songs; on which see Oded Yisraeli, “Jewish Medieval Traditions Concerning the Origin of Kabbalah,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 106 (2016): 21–41.

129 My argument is not directly concerned with the Naḥmanides’s assertion at Barcelona regarding the Messiah’s presence in the Garden of Eden, which may not concern the question of arrival per se; on that assertion, especially as a springboard for further polemical engagement, see Syds Wiersma, “The Dynamic of Religious Polemics: The Case of Raymond Martin (ca. 1220–ca. 1285),” in *Interaction between Judaism and Christianity in History, Religion, Art and Literature*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz, and Joseph Turner (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 209.

130 And later in Catalonia as well; see, e.g., Hames, “It Takes Three,” esp. 209 (on Ibn Adret’s polemical use of the midrash on Ps 50:1).

isomorphism generally; and the epistemology of archetypal discernment. These factors, it seems, compelled the discourse to double down and intensify its commitments in the face of Israel's perplexities before "strange faiths."

From all of this, it would be patently false to conclude by generalizing that "the school of Catalonia promoted ideas and beliefs that tended [by dint of an unconscious mimetic impulse] to dissipate many of the fundamental differences between Judaism and Christianity."¹³¹ The development of the early discourse in Gerona was by no means hellbent on the assimilation of Christian theology. It was more demonstrably motivated by a calculated engagement with Christianity that was firmly committed to Israel's distinctive eschatological destiny. To be sure, the discourse fixated upon a midrash that had been exploited by Christian apologists. But it did so with the intention of securing its hermeneutical grip upon an aggadic heritage claimed by Maimonidean philosophers and Christian apologists alike—as if to prove that "strange religions [...] have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."¹³² The restoration of the Glory to Jerusalem, contingent on the arrival of a Messiah embodying "wisdom, understanding, and knowledge," would, per the integrative reading of Nahmanides advanced here, vindicate the truth of Israel. Nahmanides's last known public address may best exemplify his hope for the restoration of God's house. Spoken at Acre on the occasion of the Jewish New Year 5029 (1268 CE), his words capture a longing to behold the return of the Glory as it dwelt of old upon the Tabernacle, as it rested upon the cherubim in Ezekiel's vision:

The beauty of the world is the Land of Israel. The beauty of the Land of Israel is Jerusalem. The beauty of Jerusalem is the Temple. The beauty of the Temple is the place of the Holy of Holies. The beauty of the Holy of Holies is the place of the cherubim for the Glory resides there, as it is said, "And there will I meet with thee, and I will speak with thee from above the ark-cover, from between the cherubim."¹³³ It is also said, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock, You Who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth."¹³⁴ It is further said,¹³⁵ "This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river Chebar, and I knew that they were cherubim."¹³⁶

131 Faúr, "Crisis," 56–8.

132 See epigraph.

133 Exod 25:22; addressing Moses.

134 Ps 80:2.

135 Ezek 10:20.

136 Chavel, ed., *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:252; translation adapted from Chavel, ed., *Writings and Discourses*, 1:535. Compare the language of Nahmanides, "Prayer at the Ruins of Jerusalem"

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in *Kitvey Ramban*, 1:432; Yisraeli, "Jerusalem in Nahmanides's Religious Thought," 452–53: "From Your servant's house comes this Moses ben Nahman / to see Your city and Sanctuary and their ruins, / and when he rent his garment and tunic, / crying and lamenting, / he bowed unto You and made supplication unto You, / that he should merit and behold / Your inner holiness and Sanctuary, / Your posts and arches rebuilt. / Our eyes shall see Jerusalem a peaceful habitation and the cities of Judah in their restoration, / when Israel shall return to their homes, / the priests to their divine service and the Levites to their platform, / as it said: And the Eternal will create over the whole habitation of Mount Zion / and over her assemblies a cloud and smoke / and over all the Glory shall be a canopy / for the *shekhinah* of Your might in Your Sanctuary. / The dwelling shall not be cut off / and this Your servant shall sit under its cover, / and abide in the shadow of Shaddai."

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“The Last German Jew”

A Perspectival Reading of Franz Rosenzweig’s Dual Identity through His Collection at the Leo Baeck Institute

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Abstract

This essay is an attempt to analyse the multi-layered dimensions of Franz Rosenzweig’s *Nachlass*, which is held at the Leo Baeck Institute and is also available online. It aims to underscore the hermeneutic interplay in the archive itself, including a kind of explicit awareness of Rosenzweig’s posthumous reception as well as the discrepancy between the various profiles of him that emerge from reviews and obituaries. Following the development of Rosenzweig’s reception will enable us to understand why he was such a controversial figure, considered too Jewish for the Germans and too German for the Jews. In the first part of this study, I will analyse Rosenzweig’s archival consciousness by considering some passages from his diaries and correspondence, as well as his archival sensibility. In the second part, I will illuminate the outside view of Rosenzweig’s works—namely, the reviews and obituaries collected by his wife, Edith Rosenzweig-Scheinmann—in order to show both the tensions and the uniqueness of his reception during his lifetime and after his death. Finally, in the conclusion, I will discuss some “spectres” of the archive and the figure of Edith herself, whose work was crucial in shaping Rosenzweig’s legacy.

Keywords

Franz Rosenzweig – Edith Rosenzweig – *Nachlassbewußtsein* – archival studies – German-Jewish thought

1 Introduction: Franz Rosenzweig’s Displaced Archives¹

In a letter written to Rudolf Hallo in 1923, Franz Rosenzweig commented on his rediscovery of Judaism after his existential crisis of 1913, when he was on the point of converting to Christianity, as follows:

I am perhaps especially innocent with respect to the problem of *Deutschtum* and *Judentum*. I believe that my Judaisation (*Verjudung*) has not made me a worse German, but a better one. I do not remotely view the generation before us ... as better Germans. [...] Germany will honour us at the utmost after we die, but that is why as long as we do it in Germany, we do it for Germany.²

Rosenzweig’s prediction failed in the most tragic way, even though he did not witness the end of German Jewry, since he died before the advent of the Nazis. He was not forced to emigrate, but his family, friends, and estate became refugees.

The geography of Rosenzweig’s literary estate mirrors the twentieth-century German-Jewish Diaspora, starting from his library.³ It is true that the

1 The research for this article was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG; German Research Foundation) under Germany’s Excellence Strategy—EXC 2176 “Understanding Written Artefacts: Material, Interaction and Transmission in Manuscript Cultures,” project no. 390893796. The work was conducted within the scope of the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) at Universität Hamburg. The title of the project is “Wandering Artefacts: The Materialistic History of German-Jewish Archives,” RFE10 (2020–2024), and its principal investigator is Professor Giuseppe Veltri. However, the final version of this article was completed during my Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement N° 101027857.

2 Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk. 1. Band: Briefe und Tagebücher 1900–1918. Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rachel Rosenzweig and Edith Rosenzweig-Scheinmann, with Bernhard Casper (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), N° 847, 887. In this quotation, the first ellipsis is Rosenzweig’s, while the second (in brackets) is mine. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations from the German are mine.

3 After his death in late 1929, Edith Rosenzweig-Scheinmann (Hahn) and their son Rafael remained in Germany until they had to flee the persecutions of Hitler’s regime in 1939. They were allowed to take Rosenzweig’s rich personal library of around 3,000 volumes with them, along with a detailed catalogue. However, the Belgian ship that was to bring it to Palestine shortly before the outbreak of World War II was interned in Tunis. In the 1950s, Rafael, who was then living in a kibbutz, sold the collection to the Tunisian national library. For the story of Rosenzweig’s library, see Norbert Waszek, ed., *Rosenzweigs Bibliothek. Der Katalog des Jahres 1939 mit einem Bericht über den derzeitigen Zustand in der tunesischen Nationalbibliothek* (Freiburg: Karl Alber Verlag, 2017), particularly his introduction, 9–28. Rosenzweig’s

displacement of his archives after his death was due to several catastrophic events, such as the Nazis, WWII, and the controversial post-war years in Israel, and it was always linked to precise circumstances, such as Nahum N. Glatzer's emigration to the US and his efforts to keep his friend's memory alive. However, this is not just a coincidence; rather, it becomes clear in the archive itself how Rosenzweig's position conditioned his reception and made him a problematic figure for the construction of Zionist identity and culture even during his own lifetime. After the Holocaust, there was no space for the German-Jewish symbiosis in the contemporary debate, unless it was as an ancient, illusory, and also somewhat guilty remnant of the past. Since the question of belonging to a certain canon in the construction of identity is at the heart of the archive itself, as an institution where *topos* and *nomos* are combined,⁴ Rosenzweig's placelessness is mirrored in the displacement of his works. Therefore, as an embodiment of the German-Jewish symbiosis, his archive was destined to be a Diasporic one.⁵

handwritten estate was divided between Nahum N. Glatzer, who brought it to the US on his emigration there in 1938 after a period in Haifa, and Edith, who carried her husband's manuscripts in her suitcase on her way to Palestine, but later gave them to the Leo Baeck Institute in New York. Nowadays, the manuscripts of Rosenzweig's major and minor works, letters he sent and received, and documents pertaining to his life and family are located in archives in the United States and Germany; namely, the Center for Jewish History at the Leo Baeck Institute (which contains the majority of his estate), the Glatzer Collection at the Divinity Library at Vanderbilt University, the Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College (which contains the papers of Eugen and Margit Rosenstock-Huessy and the famous *Gritli-Briefe*), and the archives of the University of Kassel. There is also a small number of documents preserved in the Martin Buber archive at the National Library of Jerusalem. Cf. Franz Rosenzweig, *Die "Gritli"-Briefe. Briefe an Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy*, ed. Inken Rühle and Reinhold Mayer (Tübingen: Bilam Verlag, 2002). However, in February 2022, the complete "Gritli-Letters"—namely, the surviving correspondence between Rosenzweig and the Rosenstock-Huessys—were published by the Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy Fund and are now available online (<https://www.erhfund.org/gritli-not-chosen/>).

- 4 For the notion of the archive as a spatial institutionalisation of authority and power, which combines *topos* and *nomos*, see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), especially 2: "The Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded [...]. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that place which is their house (private house, family house or employee's house), that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the document's guardians. [...] It is thus, in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest, that archives take place." Even though Rosenzweig's case is a private collection and not an official one, there is always a power dynamic at play in the selection, decision-making, placement, and storage of the material.
- 5 There is an essentialist drive in the archival search, which can be interpreted as a pivotal element in both shaping history and constructing identity. On the difference between two

This essay is an attempt to analyse the multi-layered dimensions of Franz Rosenzweig’s *Nachlass*, which is held at the Leo Baeck Institute and is available online.⁶ A huge part of the digitised collection is constituted by articles from newspapers or magazines, most of which are reviews or discussions of Rosenzweig’s works published during his lifetime. His diaries and the letters he sent to himself from the front during WWI are of the utmost interest here. Aside from the theoretical works that he produced during the war, the letters that he sent to his parents from 1914 to 1917—comprising 444 pages, seventeen typewritten documents—which explicitly reveal his material conditions and needs are especially precious. However, the majority of the archive is made up of Rosenzweig’s correspondence with more than sixty different intellectuals.

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- strategies of archiving in the Jewish Historical General Archives in Jerusalem and the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, both of which opened in 1947, see Jason B. Lustig, “A Time to Gather: A History of Jewish Archives in the Twentieth Century” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2017), 244–59. The Jewish Historical General Archives aimed to be a unique source for the study of Jewish history, with a particular focus on German Jewry; in contrast, the American Jewish Archives pursued a similar ambition by collecting documents on Jewish history in the Western world. While the former collected original documents, the latter sought duplicates and microfilms, reflecting its vision of a network of Jewish archives. According to Lustig, the former strategy is consistent with a Zionist-oriented understanding of archives, while the latter is more Diasporic.
- 6 The Franz Rosenzweig Collection (1882–1999), which is held at the Leo Baeck Institute, is available online on the recently refurbished website of the Center for Jewish History: <https://archives.cjh.org/repositories/5/resources/11012>. This collection was divided into six series, catalogued by Monika Weidenmüller in a detailed thirty-six-page list. The series are: I) Personal; II) Writings; III) Correspondence; IV) Family; V) Varia; and VI) Addenda. The sixth addendum, the most recent addition to the archive, contains an accurate English description of the genesis and composition of the archive itself (see Rosenzweig Collection, VI, *Addendum 6*, 907–1018). Even though many documents, such as diaries and letters, have already been printed in the *Gesammelte Schriften*, I will analyse and refer to them as they are preserved in the archive. From now on, I will quote from the Rosenzweig Collection (RC) by indicating the series (I, II, etc.), the subseries (1, 2, 3 ...), the label, and the page numbers. There have already been many attempts to work on Rosenzweig’s *Nachlass* from an innovative perspective; for instance, a research project named “The Annotated Star: A Digital Edition of Franz Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*” or a visualisation of the portion of Rosenzweig’s estate in Kassel explored in an important article by Matthew Handelman, who organised the materials in the *Teilnachlass* via a timeline, map, and network diagram. See “The Annotated Star: A Digital Edition of Franz Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*,” <http://www.annotatedstar.org>; “The Annotated Star employs various digital technologies—often referred to as the digital humanities (DH)—to aid in the preservation of Franz Rosenzweig’s philosophical and theological legacy. It thus hopes to promote new modes of inquiry into the questions about belief and reason, language and translation, intellectual history and biography raised by Rosenzweig’s life and work.” See also Matthew Handelman, “Digital Humanities as Translation: Visualizing Franz Rosenzweig’s Archive,” *Transit* 10 (2015), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/69dog8iv>.

1.1 *The Hermeneutic Interplay: Readings of the Archive*

My intention here is to read the portion of the Rosenzweig collection held at the Leo Baeck Institute as a complete work. This approach raises many different questions and challenges. How can scattered documents be gathered into a single body of work? Is everything worthy of consideration? Is there a philosophical ethic of archiving, or better, an aesthetic of archiving? These questions also deal with the function the agents plays with regard to narrative discourse, or, more accurately, with a plurality of authors who can assume different roles: a reader, an addressee, a lover, a patient, and so on.

Secondly, this plurality can be transposed to a different way of reading documents that requires special attention to their context and to the different circumstances from which they stem. This is precisely the Foucaultian dilemma:

What is a work? What is this curious unity which we designate as a work? Of what elements is it composed? Is it not what an author has written? Difficulties appear immediately. If an individual were not an author, could we say that what he wrote, said, left behind in his papers, or what has been collected of his remarks, could be called a “work”?⁷

Furthermore, the reader of the archive also plays a central hermeneutic role. Reading the archive has to do with the decision to favour certain aspects and deny others. Thus, my attempt to read the archive as a complete work might seem challenging and paradoxical. This approach entails a desire for completeness and unforgetfulness, much like Borges's character Funes the Memorious,⁸ which contradicts both its fragmentary nature and the radical finitude of the human condition.⁹ From a more factual perspective, however, I have been looking through the archive like a book, from beginning to end. And like reading a book, there are parts that attract more attention and others that interest us less. I approached the archive with my precomprehension of Rosenzweig,

7 See Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?,” in Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1998), 207.

8 See Jorge Luis Borges, “Funes the Memorious,” in Borges, *Labyrinths*, trans. James E. Irby (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), 87–95. See also the position of the Italian philosopher Carlo Sini on the archive as a figure of the limit and its inevitable paradox: Sini, *Archivio Spinoza. La verità e la vita* (Milan: Ghibli, 2005), 15–190. On Sini's position, see also Matteo Angelo Mollisi, “La filosofia a partire dall'archivio. Breve nota su Carlo Sini interprete di Spinoza,” *Noema* 81 (2017): 3–8.

9 On the crucial role of forgetting in the archival process, see Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (Munich: Beck, 2006), and Assmann, *Formen des Vergessens* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016).

not as *terra incognita*, and what guided me in my research was the intention to find a narrative of the archive in the archive itself.

Recently, the German philosopher Knut Ebeling defined the theoretical framework of “archivology” by emphasising the performative aspect of the archive as an event (*Ereignis*) that produces another reality, as well as its citability (*Zitierbarkeit*).¹⁰ Following Ebeling’s interpretation, my methodological approach aims at conceiving the archive as an interweaving of multiple perspectives that can only interact and take shape in the space-time of the archive itself. My intention here is to meander through the paths of the archive conceived as the result of different elements and agents, as the centre of a macro-level hermeneutic interplay.

In order to find the philosophical significance of reading Rosenzweig’s archive as a whole work, I thought that this method might help us to see how his *erfahrende Philosophie* becomes visible in its concrete circumstances.¹¹ In fact, the documents are not only a practical encounter between the Jewish tradition and the German *Lebenswelt*; they can also be considered an essential part of Rosenzweig’s innovative thought, broadly defined as an active engagement in turning philosophical and theological abstraction into a factual *Lebensphilosophie*. The famous last words of his masterpiece—“ins Leben”¹²—stress the necessity of going beyond the book and beyond his own work in order to reach a way of life that might save us from the sick abstractions of thought. In this perspective, Rosenzweig asks for another style of thought, as well as another way of doing philosophy based on concrete practices. These practices can be found in the treasures of his archives, where the jump beyond the book becomes more evident in his communication through diaries and letters, which are a living, performative example of his philosophy.

In my reading of Rosenzweig’s collection, I attempted to underscore the hermeneutic interplay in the archive itself, including a kind of explicit awareness

10 See Knut Ebeling, “Die Asche des Archivs,” in *Das Archiv brennt*, ed. Georges Didi-Huberman and Knut Ebeling (Berlin: Kadmos, 2007), 33–222; see also Ebeling and Stephan Günzel, eds., *Archivologie. Theorien des Archivs in Wissenschaft, Medien und Künsten* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2009), 7–28.

11 In a letter written to Buber in 1922, Rosenzweig stated: “I have simply forgotten how to write after the *Star*; since then, I have only letters and pamphlets, that is, [things that are] directly initiated and addressed” (*Ich habe eben seit dem Stern das Schreiben verlernt; seitdem habe ich nur noch den Brief und die Denkschrift, also das unmittelbar veranlasste und adressierte*). Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, N° 795, 806–7.

12 Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Press, 2005), 447: “The words are above the gate, the gate that leads out from the mysterious, wonderful illumination of the divine sanctuary where no man can remain alive. But whither do the wings of the gate open? You do not know? INTO LIFE.”

of his posthumous reception as well as the discrepancy between the various profiles of Rosenzweig that emerge from reviews and obituaries. By following the development of his reception, it will be possible to understand why Rosenzweig was such a controversial figure, considered too Jewish for the Germans and too German for the Jews. Both the symbiosis and the dichotomy of German Jewry can be seen in many different elements of the archive, viewed from different perspectives or by different actors: first, by Rosenzweig himself, who wanted to preserve his own archive and family history as a testimony of German Jewry; second, by his readers, whose critical or sympathetic receptions shaped his *Wirkungsgeschichte*; and third, by Edith Rosenzweig-Scheinmann, whose work was crucial in shaping Rosenzweig's archive and legacy. Therefore, in the first part of this study, I will analyse Rosenzweig's archival consciousness by considering some passages from his diaries and correspondence, as well as his archival sensibility. In the second part, I will illuminate the outside view of Rosenzweig's works—namely, the reviews and obituaries collected by Edith—in order to show both the tensions and the uniqueness of his reception during his lifetime and after his death. Finally, in the conclusion, I will discuss some “spectres” of the archive and the figure of Edith herself, whose work was crucial in shaping Rosenzweig's thought.

2 *Traces of Rosenzweig's Nachlassbewusstsein*

Rosenzweig was born into an almost secular Jewish family in Kassel in 1886 and died in Frankfurt am Main in 1929. He can be defined as the last German-Jewish thinker, someone who was perfectly aware of the “bifurcated soul”¹³ of his identity and of the peculiar Jewish heterotopias as a form of linguistic, political, and historical *Heimatlosigkeit*. Rosenzweig's archive therefore represents one of the last testimonies to reflect the greatness, potential, and vitality of German-Jewish history. The peculiarity of the post-mortem displacement of his archive, his illness, his search for an *erfahrende Philosophie*, and his rejection of Zionism all contribute to making archive-based research seem a viable prospect.

As is well known, Rosenzweig suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a muscular degenerative disease. From August 1922, he increasingly lost the ability to write and to communicate independently, and he began dictating essays and correspondence to his wife using a communication system based on blinking his eyes. Edith contributed enormously to the constitution and

13 Cf. Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews: A Dual Identity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 1–24.

preservation of the archive itself. Therefore, Rosenzweig’s archive is an interesting case of *Nachlassbewusstsein* that can be defined as a “self-historicisation” dealing with a double temporal semantic: on the one hand, it means situating oneself as an author in a historiographical context; on the other, it requires a plan for future transmission.¹⁴ The awareness of one’s posthumous reception requires projection as a testamentary act, which entails a specific form of authorship, but also a new way of reading or discovering the work. It can be said that there is a potential gap between the expectations of the creator of the archive and the socio-cultural function of the archive itself.

However, in Rosenzweig’s case, a pivotal impact in both the building of his legacy during his lifetime and its preservation after his death was played by Edith, who, until her death, forged the awareness of his legacy, most likely in conformance with his will.¹⁵ Although we cannot know how many articles Edith did not include in the collection, there are several reasons to believe that she included as much as she could—with one blatant exception¹⁶—since there are also documents that were highly critical of Rosenzweig’s thought, as well as articles written in other languages. As the person responsible for the estate, Edith shaped its final form. Her contribution was crucial, not only because she collected all the works, translations, letters, newspaper articles, and biographical materials that are contained within the archive, but also because during the seven years of her husband’s illness, she was the only intermediary between him and the rest of the world.¹⁷ Edith translated her husband’s

14 See the contribution by Kai Sina, “Die vergangene Zukunft der Literatur. Zeitstrukturen und Nachlassbewusstsein in der Moderne,” in *Nachlassbewusstsein. Literatur, Archiv, Philologie 1750–2000*, ed. Kai Sina and Carlos Spoerhase (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), 49–74.

15 It would be fascinating to reconstruct the hidden history of the articles that did not find their way into the Franz Rosenzweig collection. This topic requires further development in the context of future research.

16 As proof of her censorship, it is remarkable that almost every trace of Gritli—Eugen Rosenstock’s wife and Rosenzweig’s lover—has been removed from the archive. We know that after Rosenzweig’s death, Edith asked Eugen to burn the correspondence between them, as she herself had done. Fortunately, Eugen kept the letters, which have been published in a huge epistolary (see footnote 2). There are only two documents in the archive that eluded Edith’s control. One is a letter from Gritli that has been mistakenly preserved in the section concerning Margarete Susman in which she warns the poetess about a change of plan: Gritli was unexpectedly leaving for Frankfurt (most likely to meet Rosenzweig, even if this is not specified in the letter) since her husband had gone to Berlin (see RC, III.2, *Susman-von Bendemann, Margarete*, 569). The other is a letter written by Mrs Weizsäcker in which Edith is called “Frau Rosenstock” (see RC, III.3, *Briefe*, 679), a lapsus that is still present in the archive despite having been erased.

17 For Edith’s immense contribution to Rosenzweig’s legacy, see Amy Hill Shevitz, “Silence and Translation: Franz Rosenzweig’s Paralysis and Edith Rosenzweig’s Life,” *Modern Judaism* 35 (2015): 284: “The twenty-seven-year-old Edith willingly became the primary caregiver for her progressively disabled husband. [...] In addition to overseeing—and

gestures or signals into words, letters, and translations. The materials that she collected were a posthumous memorial, a legacy consciousness forged during his lifetime through her combined gaze and work as the one who created the archive in view of preserving his memory. Even though there are preserved documents containing critical remarks, the monument to words that this archive represents is meant to celebrate Rosenzweig as the last witness of German Jewry whose idea of Judaism was not assimilable with Zionism. For this very reason, it is not only the material nature of the archive that is an element of *Nachlassbewusstsein*, but also its location and its eventual dispersal.

Even if it is difficult to see where Rosenzweig's self-perception ends and Edith's contribution begins, I will first attempt to analyse the documents where Rosenzweig's archival sensitivity or *Nachlassbewusstsein* is explicit; namely, the last diary and the *Feldpostbriefe*. These documents were both written under peculiar circumstances: the first after the diagnosis of Rosenzweig's illness and the second during the war. These limited experiences of facing death allowed him to think about his own legacy as well as the preservation of his writings.

2.1 *The Last Diary*

From 1905 to 1922, albeit with consistent interruptions, Rosenzweig wrote seven notebooks of about ninety-three pages each. His diaries are an invaluable document for understanding the concrete circumstances from which his thought emerged.¹⁸ Therefore, they can be considered a living testimony of the encounter between German culture and the Jewish tradition. It is not only Rosenzweig's *Bildung* that is tangible in the diaries, but also the progressive shaping of his own intellectual trajectory, along with his awareness of his Judaism.

often providing—Franz's physical care, Edith enabled him to continue his work in the Jewish community."

18 See RC, II.1, *Diaries*, 668–1217. The first diary covers the period from 14 December 1905 to 29 March 1906; the second covers 1 April to 22 September 1906; the third covers 29 September 1906 to 3 March 1908; the fourth covers 6 March to 22 June 1908; and the fifth covers 31 July to 21 September 1910. The seventh diary is the last and is constituted by brief notations covering the period from 24 April to 13 September 1922. Between the fifth diary and the sixth, which starts in 1914 with the outbreak of the war, Rosenzweig continued to write his own notes, as we can see from some references in his letters, such as his letter to Hans Ehrenberg from 26 September 1910. The sixth diary—which is not preserved in the archive, but was transcribed in the printed version of Rosenzweig's letters—starts in 1914 and contains fleeting entries up to 1 February 1918, when he was in Kassel on vacation from the front. The sporadicity of the entries is due to the fact that Rosenzweig wrote his *Paralipomena* during his time as a soldier.

Rosenzweig began his last diary in 1922, after being diagnosed with his incurable disease. In these pages, he wrote a “sequence of feverish, breathless reflections, of flashing and paradoxical intuitions,”¹⁹ as he knew that his time was running out and he had one last chance to cope with his obsession and to reassess his thoughts. The handwriting is difficult to read, and the style is almost aphoristic. Reflections on redemption, death, and prophets are found alongside notes on technology, politics, nature, and law in general. This intertwining of different topics is a *unicum* in his production.²⁰

In this diary, there are at least two entries that show Rosenzweig’s *Nachlassbewusstsein*. Persuaded that he would soon be dead, he planned his epitaph and his funeral, which was to be sober and without magnificent speeches. His last wishes were for the publication of another three-volume (paperback) edition of the *Star of Redemption* and its translation into Hebrew with the title *Stern aus Jacob* (*Kokhav mi-Ya‘aqov*), because he believed a literal translation would not make sense.²¹ Rosenzweig did not want to publish many things from his estate: the *Büchlein* was not mature enough for publication and he proposed to publish only an abridged version of his essay “Reichschule und Volksschule” and *Globus*, which was written during his time at the front.²² As he was convinced that he would die without seeing the birth of his child, he thought of two possible names: Franz for a boy, Shulamit for a girl. However, he lived longer than he expected, and the last entry in his diary—after the birth of his son, whom he named Rafael—concerns his legacy and the destiny of his books, which he considered appropriate not only for scholars, but for educated businessmen, lawyers, and doctors as well. The sick Rosenzweig wrote: “My son will learn a lot from me from these books—never bought *en masse*, but always on a case-by-case basis—that he cannot learn otherwise.”²³ He considered his legacy to be more dependent on his books than on his philosophical writings. Rosenzweig’s need both to determine the destiny of his works and

19 See Stéphane Mosès, “Franz Rosenzweig in Perspective: Reflections on His Last Diaries,” in *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1988), 185.

20 For instance, in his last diary, Rosenzweig developed an interesting idea of the nexus between political power and technology being an attempt to overcome the natural limits of the surface of the globe, some parts of which are uninhabitable. He also attempted to define the German essence and showed an interest in psychoanalysis, quoting Freud’s *Totem and Tabu* and explaining idealism through the lens of schizophrenia or onania; one of his last notes concerns the connection between prophecy and land. See RC, II.1, *Diaries V–VII*, 941–75.

21 See RC, II.1, *Diaries V–VII*, 962.

22 See RC, II.1, *Diaries V–VII*, 962.

23 See RC, II.1, *Diaries V–VII*, 973.

rely on his library as a materialistic form of his legacy on the one hand and to order and preserve his philosophical notes from the front on the other stems from his archival knowledge. Thanks mostly to the work of Edith Rosenzweig, this authorial self-perception is enriched by the posthumous reception of his works. This double perspective helps us to understand the reason why the controversial figure of Rosenzweig was neglected and forgotten for many years after his death.

The collection preserved a detailed list of the works in Rosenzweig's library, but following the thread of his archive, it is possible to see how his strong German classical training became increasingly combined with the Jewish tradition over the years. Hidden in a notebook where he began to write and collect the memories of his family recounted by his uncle Adam, there is an interesting detailed report entitled "Einnahmenbuch" (revenue book) that recounts Rosenzweig's daily intellectual routine from 17 November 1907 to 31 October 1908.²⁴ This is a list, though it is more similar to what is usually called a diary, since the other seven notebooks "hardly contain anything which may be considered intimate."²⁵ It is astonishing to see what the young Rosenzweig was able to read and write and how many different works interested him. The variety of authors he was engaging with every day is impressive: from Simmel to Shaftesbury, from Hegel to Dilthey, from Cassirer to Dostoevsky, from the Brothers Grimm to Boccaccio; he would also read one canto of Dante's *Inferno* every day. Strikingly, there are no Jewish books on this list.

2.2 *News from the War: The Paralipomena and the Letters to His Parents*

During his time at the front, Rosenzweig was able to conceive and write many essays, a vast amount of letters, and two books: *Globus*, which was only published after his death, and the draft of the *Star of Redemption*. Among them, of the utmost interest for his archive are the *Paralipomena* that he sent to himself²⁶ and the daily letters that he sent to his parents.²⁷ While the former are more philosophical notes, the latter shed light on the material conditions

24 See RC, II.1, *Notebook*, 989–1016.

25 See Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, "From Relativism to Religious Faith: The Testimony of Franz Rosenzweig's Unpublished Diaries," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 22 (1977): 162.

26 In the archive, the *Paralipomena*—most of which are printed in Franz Rosenzweig, *Zweistromland. Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken*, ed. Reinhold Meyer and Annemarie Mayer (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), 61–124—are present in both original and type-written copies: see RC, II.3D, *Paralipomena*, 225–463.

27 See RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 640–1091.

of Rosenzweig as a young soldier, who had one of the most productive periods of his life at the front.²⁸

The *Paralipomena* are a peculiar form of document—“wissenschaftliche Notizen”²⁹—which Rosenzweig wrote and sent to himself in order to avoid possible dispersion. In a letter to his parents, he instructed them: “Do not open them, but keep and number them so that I can find them later.”³⁰ The need to order and preserve these documents shows Rosenzweig’s awareness of archival practices. The *Paralipomena* are not letters, but rather short essays written on specific and clearly recognisable paper that was used by soldiers. They were sent by *Feldpost* and most of them begin with the place and date of sending: from Lille, Ostende, and Essen to the Balkan front. Even when the date is not given, it would be easy to use the type of paper Rosenzweig utilised as a means of arranging the writing chronologically. Among the *Paralipomena*, it is possible to find excerpts from or comments about Philo in German, Hebrew, and Greek,³¹ as well as Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*, notes on revelation, literature, and music, reflections on Kant’s dualism, thoughts on the war, and drawings explaining the war offensive or tactics.³² Rosenzweig’s impressions of Max Brod’s wonderful romance *Tycho Brahe* are found close to his analysis of the scholastic method or Eckhart’s idea of the self-revelation of God. The books that he excerpted or commented on were sent to him by his parents. In fact, from the outbreak of the war, Rosenzweig wrote to his parents almost every day in order to request, along with the books, mostly food, especially sausages—which he defines many times as a “rescuer in need” (*Retter in der Not*)³³—and chocolates, pens, or pencils; in fact, he was an obsessive writer,

28 Through this direct exchange, it is also possible to see the war from a different perspective. For instance, in April 1916, Rosenzweig admitted that his days were mostly calm and that “you don’t notice anything about the war” (*vom Krieg merkt man nichts*) (RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 713). It noteworthy that Rosenzweig did not consider the war to be “more immoral (or unreligious) than peace” (*unsittlicher [bzw. ‘unreligiöser’] als der Frieden*). According to him, peace would only be possible when human beings had “arrived at the destination of world history” (*ans Ziel der Weltgeschichte gekommen*) (RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 789–90). For this reason, if we remain in the human domain, war remains necessary, since it can achieve what peace cannot.

29 RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 696–97.

30 RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 696–97.

31 As an example of his multilingualism, see RC, II.3D, *Paralipomena*, 311.

32 See, for instance, RC, II.3D, *Paralipomena*, 341, 403, and 407.

33 RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 701. Rosenzweig informed his parents about his alimentary habits; for instance, he said that on Sundays, he usually ate *Schweinekotelett* and also kept it for the next few days. It is interesting to note that the religious Rosenzweig regularly ate and asked for pork, since sausages are easy to store and do not have to be cooked. A wonderful explanation of his eating habits can be found in a letter he sent

hooked on the quality of the paper as well as on his self-made ink, and he was able to write in the worst conditions imaginable.³⁴

The structure of these letters that Rosenzweig sent to his parents was usually a list of requests together with some reports of his ongoing movements from Germany to France, from France to the Balkan front, and even along that same front (*Stellungswechsel*). In these letters, he complained about the weight of his rucksack and about the need to label every object he owned lest it be stolen or lost. On the list of required books, there are journals, newspapers, and novels, as well as philosophical or historical works, from Ricarda Huch to the Qur'an, Augustine and Wagner, Cicero and Bebel, and Averroes and Schopenhauer.³⁵

During the war, Rosenzweig wanted to enforce his knowledge of the Jewish tradition; among the *Paralipomena*, there is also a kind of work plan, which includes reading the Torah, Rashi's commentaries, and the *Megiloth*.³⁶ In addition, from some passages taken from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he developed a comparison between the Greek ethos and the Jewish conception of action. However, even though this was occurring during the gestation of the *Star*, he was not engaging with many Jewish authors.³⁷ In fact, in his letters to his parents from the same period, there are some reflections on the essence of Judaism that are not always presented in a polite way; for instance, Rosenzweig considered the Jewish religion to be an obstacle to proper cultural production. In his view, even if "the race itself is not unproductive" (*die Rasse an sich nicht unproduktiv ist*),³⁸ the most important phenomena are produced only through

to Edith—preserved in the archive—from 13 January 1920, which stated that he did not want his house to become a ghetto; that is, that everyone was welcome to eat: "Eating is compromise. Our Jewishness does not consist in eating or drinking" (see RC, III.1, *Edith Rosenzweig*, 1180).

34 See, for instance, RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 708, where he asked for a particular colour of pencil for drawing, or later RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 1069, where he again asked for pencils.

35 Among his comments on some of his readings, Rosenzweig criticises Simmel several times for being an "empty man" who used his philosophical rhetoric and cleverness to try to impress his publicum: see RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 945. Rosenzweig invented also a verb, *simmeln*, in order to make fun of Simmel (RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 970).

36 RC, II.3D, *Paralipomena*, 292 and 463.

37 It is worth noting that if one looks at his book list, the quantity of books from the German, Greek, and "secular" traditions in general far exceeds that of the Hebrew books, whose number only expanded after WWI. See RC, I, *Booklist*, 6–14. This list is correct as far as 1918. For a complete list of the works in Rosenzweig's library, see Waszek, *Rosenzweigs Bibliothek*.

38 RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 813.

a rupture with Judaism, as in the case of Spinoza, Marx, Heine, and so on. Quite surprisingly, since he does not show much appreciation for Islam in the *Star*, Rosenzweig always displayed great respect for the Arabs, whom he considered as the best among the Semitics, although not comparable with the Greeks, Indians, or Teutons.³⁹ During his time at the front, he was also obsessed with the relationship between language and logic,⁴⁰ comparing the peculiarity of sentence construction in different languages. He defined Hebrew as being “too primitive”⁴¹ for the hypotactic sentences that, in contrast, are common in Arabic. Thanks to his report about his Easter vacations in Usküb in 1917, we know that he was familiar with the Italian language—for this reason, he could understand the local Jewish Sephardi community—as well as with Arabic, since he was able to read a surah before an imam.⁴² As far as the issue of Zionism is concerned, in these letters, Rosenzweig described one of Theodor Herzl’s brochures as provoking constant laughter on reading and also as something that had not truly been written in German: “The language of this brochure is already the first visible part of his state.”⁴³ Nevertheless, he suggested that his parents read Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat*, together with Leon Pinsker, Aḥad Ha’am, and Buber, in order to receive a general overview of Zionism.⁴⁴

2.3 *Archival Sensitivity*

As a scholar, Rosenzweig had carried out a lot of research in library collections and was familiar with archival procedures. As is well known, in 1913, he discovered *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* in the *Königliche Bibliothek zu Berlin*, and for his book *Hegel und der Staat*, he also had to visit many archives.⁴⁵ It is also possible to detect his understanding of archival

39 RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 813. However, in a later letter, he stated that “die Germanen, Griechen und Araber sind die ‘genialen’ Völker” (see RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 967).

40 He uses the verb *versessen*: “to be crazy about something/to be dying to do something.” See RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 914.

41 RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 1066.

42 RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 1014–38. However, in a previous letter, Rosenzweig admitted that his study of Arabic had been disrupted since 1914 (see RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 882).

43 RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 829.

44 RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 977.

45 As proof of this, there is also a “Bestimmung für die Benützer des kgl. Bayer Geheimen Staats Archives,” where Rosenzweig went for his research on Hegel; the notes are preserved in the archive. This regulation states that the users are obliged to submit any copies or excerpts made from the archival records in the State Archives for inspection upon request. See RC, III.2 D, *Hegel und der Staat*, 85.

procedures from some letters preserved in the archive. Rosenzweig knew very well which documents among his correspondence were intended to be public, and for this reason, he needed to compose them in such a way that the writing would be legible to all. For instance, in the section containing his correspondence with Rudi Ehrenberg, there is Rosenzweig's famous letter of 1913, where he stated: "Ich bleibe also Jude."⁴⁶ It is worth noting that in this case, the letter is elegantly written and perfectly readable, and it also has paragraphs in the margins. This means that Rosenzweig was aware of the fact that this letter was not a private affair, but that it would acquire the role of an essay that was destined to be made public. This element is clearly evident if one takes into account the other letters to Ehrenberg preserved in the archive, most of which are unreadable, particularly one written from the front in which Rosenzweig indulges in reflections of a more personal tone, such as what would become of him if he did not find a wife.⁴⁷

In the letters sent to his parents from the front, Rosenzweig discussed the possibility of writing a history of the Rosenzweig family and presenting it to an archive. For this reason, he gave instructions to preserve the family's correspondence and to create a proper collection. For instance, he suggested that his parents could use Steinthal's essay "Über Juden und Judentum" in order to better understand the context of the Jews in Poland, as his ancestors had been.⁴⁸ In addition, after his father's death while he was at the front in 1918, Rosenzweig discussed with his mother the possibility of presenting his estate to the city archive or library.⁴⁹ Both sets of documents, his father's estate⁵⁰ and his family's memoirs, are now preserved in his archive.

2.4 *The Archival Community*

Rosenzweig's archive is not only a precious source for understanding the vivacity of his time; it is also a testimony and record of a century of German Jewry. In fact, in the vast sea of documents, there are some small islands contained in the "Family" section where some important documents belonging to the three

46 See RC, III.2, *Ehrenberg, Rudolf*, 174–86.

47 See RC, III.2, *Ehrenberg, Rudolf*, 206. Other documents in the archive also follow this logic, such as Rosenzweig's important letter to Meinecke—where he distances himself from his master—or his famous letter to Scholem on translation. Edith typed up both of these letters and included them in the archive even though the original copies have been lost, since they were crucial to the development of Rosenzweig's thought. See RC, III.2, *Meinecke, Friedrich*, 344–46, and RC, III.2, *Scholem, Gershom*, 425–26.

48 See RC, III.1, *Adele and Georg Rosenzweig*, 687.

49 See RC, III.1, *Adele Rosenzweig*, 602.

50 See RC, IV.2, *George Rosenzweig*, 17–64.

generations of the Rosenzweig-Ehrenberg family have been preserved.⁵¹ This section contains the list of relatives written by Adele, Rosenzweig’s mother, as well as her memoirs, which—she writes—“are probably not important, but they’re not bothering anyone.”⁵² They are not only autobiographical notes—she gives details of her childhood, her first meeting with her husband, and how glad she was when she met Uncle Adam and her mother-in-law, even if the first years of her marriage were not very happy—but also more general stories about the family: for instance, she gives a detailed description of the figure of Uncle Rinald and tells some stories about Kassel, such as the death of the gallerist Mr Hossfeld.⁵³ In her memoirs, there is also a poem that the young Franz wrote to her, as well as some episodes from his childhood, such as his desire to play the violin or his love of the alphabet.⁵⁴

This section of the archive shows a century of German-Jewish history. In fact, beyond many versions of the family trees, there are precious documents belonging to Franz’s grandfather, Louis Rosenzweig, who was married to Amalia Ehrenberg, the daughter of Samuel Ehrenberg, the famous director of the Wolfenbüttel Beth Midrash. There are some letters belonging to Louis from the Prussian-Danish war, as well as some original poems by Samuel Ehrenberg addressed to his wife (1837), his daughter (1848), and his sister (1852).⁵⁵ There are also letters that Amalia sent from Wolfenbüttel to her brother Philipp Ehrenberg (grandfather of Hans, Victor, and Rudolf). Moreover, there are more than ninety letters that Amalia, whose nickname was Malchen, addressed to Adelheid Zunz.⁵⁶ This relationship—along with Amalia’s friendship with Philipp’s wife Julia, whose letters to her are also preserved in the archive—lasted until Adelheid’s death in 1874, though Louis and Amalia continued writing to the widowed Leopold Zunz in the following years.⁵⁷ Most

51 See RC, IV. In the family portrait section, there are many empty files, but also some images of Louis and Adam Rosenzweig from 1843, as well as portraits of Samuel Ehrenberg, Amalia and Louis, and pictures of the gravestones of the Rosenzweig-Alsberg family, with Hebrew inscriptions.

52 RC, IV.1, *Memoirs (Erinnerungsbuch)*, 915.

53 RC, IV.1, *Memoirs (Erinnerungsbuch)*, 870–923.

54 RC, IV.1, *Recollection on Franz Rosenzweig’s Childhood*, 1–6.

55 RC, IV.3, *Letters to Louis Rosenzweig from the Prussian-Danish War*, 68–75; RC, IV.3, *Poems by S.M. Ehrenberg*, 76–84.

56 RC, IV.3, *Rosenzweig, Amelie, to Adelheid and Leopold Zunz*, 85–271. There is no trace of them in the Zunz archive. Most of these letters were published in Nahum N. Glatzer, ed., *Leopold and Adelheid Zunz: An Account in Letters* (London: East and West Library, 1958).

57 The letters have a personal tone and sometimes wonderful hand-drawn decorations in the margins (see, for instance, RC, IV.3, *Rosenzweig, Amelie, to Adelheid and Leopold Zunz*, 134 and 171). It is noteworthy that once they were married, the letters usually

of these documents are written in German, with the exception of some ritual expressions in Hebrew; for instance, birthday wishes.

It can be said that the intertwining of different stories or persons is a characteristic of every archive that is an interrelated part of a broader narrative discourse. However, in the case of Jewish archives, this connection is more blatant, for a historical reason. In fact, as a people in Diaspora, the Jews did not have their own state-based archive; rather, their archives were hybrid and their stories were embedded in the stories and documentation of other communities.⁵⁸ In the twentieth century, the intertwining of different family stories or persons can be called an “archival community,” since it also stems from the responsibility to continue and complete someone else’s world after it has been annihilated or destroyed, which Paul Celan described in his wonderful verse as “die Welt ist fort, ich muß Dich tragen.”⁵⁹ In this respect, it is worth mentioning a letter that Buber addressed to Margarete Susman concerning a terminological choice for the translation of the *Schrift*, which ends with a question to Rosenzweig.⁶⁰ The original of this letter is not preserved in the archive, but there is a copy that was made by Rosenzweig’s writing assistant. This is a strange document addressed to two people and copied by a third; this piece of paper could belong to three different archives, and therefore it shows the intellectual work of a generation of German-Jewish thinkers to be a collective effort. This link between different authors is not an exception, but in several cases was so decisive that it is not easy to separate the influence of one on the other, such as Max Brod and Franz Kafka, Fritz Mauthner and

contained a *Zuschrift*—an addendum written by their husbands—at the end, especially when the letter was being sent for a special occasion. Moreover, the address was usually written not on an envelope, but on the backs of the letters.

58 See Lustig, “A Time to Gather.”

59 Paul Celan, “Grosse, glühende Wölbung,” in Celan, *Atemwende. Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, ed. Beda Allemann and Stefan Reichert with Rolf Bücher (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 97.

60 See RC, III.2, *Buber, Martin*, 122–24; this letter also appears in another section of the archive, see RC, II.4, *Handwritten Copies of Reviews*, 162. In Rosenzweig’s archive, there are many handwritten copies of letters addressed to Buber. Moreover, there are also some handwritten notes by Buber—not only in the section concerning the reviews of the *Schrift*, but also scattered throughout the archive—that mention Benjamin (who was perhaps writing to him in connection with the publication *Die Kreatur*), and also a postcard bearing some French lines by Paul Desjardins. Many letters to Buber concerning *Die Schrift* were copied by Rosenzweig’s writing assistant, among them many letters addressed to or written by Louise Dumont and Konrad Burdach, Carl Gebhart and Walter Jeremias, and Richard Dehmel and Alfred Mombert. There is also a letter from Klatzkin addressed to Buber and Rosenzweig in which the author defines their translation as a masterpiece and a historical event (see RC, III.3, *Die Schrift—A–K*, 695–790).

Gustav Landauer, or Gershom Scholem and Walter Benjamin, to name just a few. German-Jewish archives mirror these bonds in their material records and build a broader constellation in which identity, belonging, and memory are deeply embedded.

This archival community is also constructed by the documents entrusted with the reception of Rosenzweig’s thought, which impressively show how difficult it is to categorise his figure as representing the harmonious German-Jewish symbiosis—especially after the Nazi seizure of power, which Rosenzweig did not live to see, as he died in 1929. In the next section, we will use reviews and obituaries to analyse these two opposing tendencies that pull Rosenzweig to one side and the other.

3 To Whom Does Franz Rosenzweig Belong?

The profile that emerges from the reviews and obituaries of Rosenzweig presents him as the hero of German Jewry, considered on a different scale: hailed by some thinkers in his lifetime, criticised immediately after his death by Germans and Jews, and rehabilitated—to some extent—after the Shoah.⁶¹ The sick Rosenzweig was celebrated as a legendary figure even during his lifetime. As proof of this, the archive contains a *Festschrift*—both the original version in the form of a portfolio with handwritten contributions and a printed version published later by the Leo Baeck Institute—in honour of his fortieth birthday.⁶² “Die Gabe” or “Die Mappe,” which was edited by Martin Goldner, the secretary of the Lehrhaus, is a collection of portraits of Rosenzweig made by forty-six of his friends and relatives: men and women from different fields, who were students, theologians, philosophers, historians, poets, bankers, and physicians. Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, Joseph Wittig, Leo Baeck, Bertha Badt-Strauss, Margarete Susman, and many other figures were among those who eloquently gave thanks to him.

This line of reception continued immediately after his death, when Rosenzweig’s spiritual strength was eulogised as a combination of Job and Prometheus⁶³ who, despite his illness, was extremely lucid and prolific. As an

61 In what follows, I will confine myself to those reviews of Rosenzweig’s work and the details of his reception that are preserved in his collection. I will not deal with the pivotal role played by Alexander Altmann, Bernhard Casper, Paul Mendes-Flohr, or Stéphane Mosès, to name only a few, whose efforts have consistently contributed to a revival of Rosenzweig’s thought in the last decades.

62 See RC, I.1, *Franz Rosenzweig zum 26. Dezember 1926*, 16–205.

63 See Israel Auerbach’s eulogy of Rosenzweig: RC, I.1, *Obituaries—Bound*, 345.

opening remark in the *Der Orden B'nai B'rith* newspaper in March 1930, Alfred Goldschmidt stated: "A miracle was realised in Franz Rosenzweig; the miracle of creative productivity" (*In Franz Rosenzweig hat sich ein Wunder vollzogen: das Wunder des Schaffens*).⁶⁴ After Rosenzweig's death, in order to keep her husband's memory alive and to show his incredible intellectual activity during the seven years of his illness, Edith, in collaboration with Ernst Simon, published a collection of his letters in 1935 and the *Kleinere Schriften* in 1937, by which time the Nazis were in power. It is interesting to see how the volume of letters was received in the intellectual debates of the time.⁶⁵

All the reviews in German newspapers from the Jewish communities agreed with the view that this volume was more important than the *Star*, since the letters perfectly showed Rosenzweig's effects as a thinker in his concrete circumstances.⁶⁶ In the *Bayerische Israelitische Gemeindezeitung*, a wonderful article—whose authorship is unclear—welcomed this volume as a great legacy of the vibrancy of German Judaism and published a number of letters that Rosenzweig wrote at the front;⁶⁷ in another review, Lutz Weltmann emphasised the relevance of the volume as a political will,⁶⁸ while Margarete Susman, in a magnificent piece of writing published in the *Blätter des Jüdischen Frauenbundes*, stressed the fact that in Rosenzweig's opinion, his Germanness and his Jewishness did not contradict one another.⁶⁹ She emphasised how the image of Rosenzweig as a martyr had been replaced by that of him as an active figure whose pedagogical interests had a concrete effect on German Judaism. Even in her eulogy of Rosenzweig, Susman stressed this aspect with the following statement: "This is how the life of Franz Rosenzweig stands before us: completely

64 See RC, I.1, *Obituaries—Bound*, 240.

65 It is worth noting that reviews from other countries greeted this volume positively, such as the *Diario de Madrid*, which in 1936 defined Rosenzweig as "the genius of Judaism and the translator of Jehuda Halevi, the poet from Toledo" (RC, II.4, *Franz Rosenzweigs Briefe*, 956), or many enthusiastic reviews by the Italian Guido Lodovico Luzzatto, who also stressed the wonderful work of Edith Rosenzweig (see, for instance, RC, II.4, *Franz Rosenzweigs Briefe*, 974–75, or RC, II.4, *Die Schrift—The Translation of the Bible by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig*, 166–69, 528–30, 623); there are also reviews written in Polish (see RA, II.4, *Franz Rosenzweigs Briefe*, 1041) and Romanian (see RC, II.4, *Franz Rosenzweigs Briefe*, 1051). In this section, there is also an essay that Alexander Altmann sent to Edith in 1946 regarding Rosenzweig and Eugen Rosenstock's wartime correspondence about Judaism and Christianity (RC, II.4, *Franz Rosenzweigs Briefe*, 982–94).

66 In the fifth addendum, there is an index—written by Edith—according to which it is possible to organise Rosenzweig's letters by topic, such as Judaism and Zionism, the essence of Judaism, the Bible, Buber, and so on. See RC, VI, *Addendum 5*, 898.

67 RC, II.4, *Franz Rosenzweigs Briefe*, 946–47.

68 RC, II.4, *Franz Rosenzweigs Briefe*, 948–49.

69 RC, II.4, *Franz Rosenzweigs Briefe*, 950–52.

in our time and completely in eternity; it is the life of a great Jewish man, who was at the same time a great German man” (*Wie das Leben Franz Rosenzweigs vor uns steht: ganz in unserer Zeit und ganz in der Ewigkeit, ist es das Leben eines großen jüdischen Menschen, der zugleich ein großer deutscher Mensch war*).⁷⁰

It is not by chance that Eugen Tannenbaum’s article in the *Jüdische Allgemeine Zeitung* dwells on the importance of the hybridity of a generation of German-Jewish thinkers who knew Goethe’s *Faust* or Dürer’s works by heart, along with Bach’s music.⁷¹ Rosenzweig was not only their best representative, but also a fighter, a *Kämpfer*, among them, since he achieved this in a singular way by avoiding becoming a Zionist. However, this eulogy of the German-Jewish tradition, which was published in 1935, appeared alongside an article that perfectly explains the emigration, *Auswanderung*, to Palestine organised by the *Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden* (Relief Organisation for German Jews). The German-Jewish symbiosis was about to end forever, and Rosenzweig’s dual flow—*Zweiströmigkeit*—started to be strongly criticised in two different ways, from both the German side and the Jewish one.

3.1 *A German Thinker*

There is undeniably a legitimately German tendency in Rosenzweig’s philosophy. In fact, Rosenzweig was a well-known pupil of Friedrich Meinecke and a remarkable Hegel scholar. The reviews of *Das älteste Systemprogramm* celebrated the discovery of Rosenzweig as a fundamental figure in the history of German idealism, since—as is well known—it provoked a lively debate on the authorship of the documents.⁷² Rosenzweig recognised Hegel’s handwriting, but he thought that the creator was Schelling, while others—such as Ernst Cassirer⁷³—thought that Hölderlin was the author. Concerning the review of *Hegel und der Staat*, the most important Hegel scholars or great intellectuals of the time—such as Hermann Glockner, Georg Lasson, Gerhard Krüger, Hermann Kantorowicz, and Ferdinand Tönnies—welcomed Rosenzweig’s work.⁷⁴ Even the *Wirtschaftliches Archiv* defined the book as an important contribution to the series of research activities devoted to “German national thought.”⁷⁵

All the reviewers tended to consider Rosenzweig’s “German essays” as something separate from his Jewish works. The only attempt to look at his work

70 RC, I.1, *Obituaries—Bound*, 264.

71 RC, II.4, *Franz Rosenzweigs Briefe*, 1020–21.

72 See RC, II.4, *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, 921–33.

73 See RC, II.4, *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, 927.

74 See RC, II.4, *Hegel und der Staat*, 170–357.

75 See RC, II.4, *Hegel und der Staat*, 347.

as a whole was that of Otto Gründler, who defined the *Star* as the historical and metaphysical roots of Rosenzweig's Hegel book.⁷⁶ The refusal to consider the entirety of Rosenzweig's work and the discrepancies in his reception correspond perfectly to his intention. In this regard, the archive contains a typewritten copy of Rosenzweig's famous 1920 letter to Meinecke, where he told his teacher about his crisis of 1913 and his conversion to Judaism, which he described as a "dark drive"—*dunklen Drang*—of his thoughts.⁷⁷ He admitted that the author of *Hegel und der Staat* was not the same as that of the *Star*. He also underlined his distance from the German universities and their aesthetic or erudite nonsense, which he considered to be far removed from a living discussion with human beings. However, even after his death, he continued to be considered a German philosopher, though this did not exonerate him from criticism; in particular, especially concerning his translation of the *Schrift*, which—beyond its glowing reception as an epochal event—also received some negative feedback.

In fact, Buber and Rosenzweig's translation provoked several anti-Semitic reactions, according to which this work was damaging the German language. One of the most critical reviews was written by Pfarrer Ernst Bublitz with the title "A Jewish Germanisation of the Old Testament" ("Eine jüdische Verdeutschung des Alten Testaments"), which was published in the journal *Hammer. Blätter für Deutschen Sinn* in 1927.⁷⁸ In these pages, the author states that a Jew cannot "Germanise" (*verdeutschten*)⁷⁹ the Old Testament, since German and Hebrew are not only two different languages, but also two different *Sprachdenken* that cannot be compared or connected. Another review that harshly criticised Buber and Rosenzweig's translation was published in *Monistische Monatshefte* in 1928 by Theodor Hartwig, who defined this work as a product of intellectual fascism that stemmed from a pure form of reactionary nationalism.⁸⁰ Since the tone of the review was extremely anti-Semitic, the editor felt compelled to publish a short note in order to distance the journal from Hartwig's words and welcomed the *Schrift* as a revival of mystical thought.

76 See RC, II.4, *Hegel und der Staat*, 222–33.

77 See RC, III.2, *Meinecke, Friedrich*, 344–46.

78 RC, II.4, *Die Schrift—The Translation of the Bible by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig*, 728–38.

79 RC, II.4, *Die Schrift—The Translation of the Bible by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig*, 728.

80 RC, II.4, *Die Schrift—The Translation of the Bible by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig*, 1047–54.

Nevertheless, the translation provoked critical reviews even from the Jewish side. In an article published in *Das Tagebuch* in 1927, Emanuel bin Gorion defined the translation not only as wrong and misleading in many passages, but also as “absolutely superfluous” (*absolut überflüssig*).⁸¹ Buber replied to these accusations with a long essay in which he emphasised the originality and importance of a new translation for anyone needing to be familiar with the Bible written in their own language.⁸² In the same year, the English-language *Zionist Record* underlined that despite its merits, it was not possible to approve the “alterations of certain phrases introduced by the translators.”⁸³

3.2 *A Jewish Thinker?*

The polemics concerning Rosenzweig’s reception started during his lifetime with the publication of the *Star*. As is well known, this book was not as well received as Rosenzweig had hoped it would be.⁸⁴ The difficulty of classifying the *Star*, and therefore Rosenzweig’s philosophy, is underlined in a review by Simon Frank that appeared in *Kant-Studien* in the late 1920s, which defined it as a mystical book and an extraordinary and odd product that could not be classified using current philosophical categories.⁸⁵ Since Rosenzweig’s masterpiece was the source of many misunderstandings, immediately after his death there were many attempts to criticise the complexity of his thought and to call into question whether or not he could be defined as a Jewish philosopher.

On 4 July 1935, *Der Israelit* published an article with the provocative title “Ein Kampftruf gegen F. Rosenzweig.”⁸⁶ In these lines, the author reports the topic of Albert Lewkowitz’s seminar on religion and philosophy in contemporary Jewish thought, where he condemned Hermann Cohen’s extreme idealism and Rosenzweig’s inability to combine religious consciousness and philosophy. As an answer to this article, Else Freund—the first scholar to

81 RC, II.4, *Die Schrift—The Translation of the Bible by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig*, 70–76.

82 RC, II.4, *Die Schrift—The Translation of the Bible by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig*, 77–81.

83 RC, II.4, *Die Schrift—The Translation of the Bible by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig*, 148.

84 Among the documents, there is a report from the *Großloge of B'nai B'rith*—a Jewish service organisation—which discusses the issue of the reprinting of the *Star*. By 1929, less than 1,000 copies of the *Star* had been sold, and for this reason, the document is a kind of exhortation to buy the book, although the note is not entirely comprehensible (see RC, II.4, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 397).

85 See RC, II.4, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 378–80.

86 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 448.

publish a monograph on the existential component of Rosenzweig's thought in the 1930s⁸⁷—rejected this interpretation and defended the fact that his conception of God was not an idea, but rather a revealed experience.⁸⁸ Moreover, Freund defined a Jewish philosopher not as someone who sought to harmonise foreign intellectual property with Judaism, but on the contrary as someone who attempted to approach the whole world from a Jewish perspective. In her article, Freund recognised that Rosenzweig remained an outsider of the Jewish *Geistesleben*, since his work was not easy to grasp.⁸⁹

This polemic inaugurated many attempts to discuss Rosenzweig's legacy. In an issue of the *Jüdische Rundschau*, there is a detailed report of a speech by Lion Feuchtwanger given at the Lehrhaus in Frankfurt in December 1935.⁹⁰ During his speech, Feuchtwanger made a clear distinction between Rosenzweig as a philosopher—whom he criticised—and Rosenzweig as a legendary man whose “path to practical Judaism [was] [...] more essential than its philosophy” (*Weg zum praktischen Judentum [...] wesentlicher als seine Philosophie*).⁹¹ He insisted on considering Rosenzweig as a German philosopher whose critique of idealism was not at all original, but rather fitted into the mainstream of contemporary German philosophy, such as Spengler, Scheler, Barth, and Heidegger. According to Feuchtwanger, even if the *Star* was not remotely a Jewish book—with the exception of its third part—Rosenzweig achieved the true Jewish life not through his philosophy, but rather through his experience of sickness.

3.3 *Against Zionism*

One of the most important factors in the reception of Rosenzweig's thought was his critical stance towards Zionism. Consequently, many obituaries stress the fact that Rosenzweig was a “Nichtzionist,”⁹² which is different from an “Antizionist,” according to what he wrote in his contribution to the *Buberheft* in 1928. In that contribution—for Buber's fiftieth birthday—Rosenzweig stated that even for him, Zionism represented an important enrichment of Jewish

87 Else Freund, *Die Existenzphilosophie Franz Rosenzweigs. Ein Beitrag zur Analyse seines Werkes* Der Stern der Erlösung (Leipzig: Meiner, 1933).

88 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 460–61.

89 Invoking the difficulty of the work, the newspaper's editorial staff wrote a note in order to minimise the polemic concerning Rosenzweig; as an apology, they said that his concept of revelation was very difficult to understand, but that “perhaps Rosenzweig, had he been granted a longer existence here, would one day have gone all the way to Sinai” (RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 461).

90 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 464–65.

91 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 465.

92 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 293–94.

life.⁹³ Playing on this ambiguity, many reviewers tried to rescue Rosenzweig from his own controversial position; for instance, in 1935, Hans Bach, in an article entitled “Franz Rosenzweigs Wiederkehr,” defined him as German Jew who was in favour of the construction of Palestine,⁹⁴ while in the *Jüdische Rundschau*, Leo Hirsch attempted to turn Rosenzweig into a Zionist, or at least to scale down his critical stance towards Zionism.⁹⁵ This artificial attempt was harshly criticised as “inadmissible and unworthy,”⁹⁶ as testified by a copy of a letter of complaint preserved in the archive, whose signature is illegible.

Among the commemorative articles and events, the first trace of Rosenzweig in Palestine is a solemn “Rosenzweig-Feier” on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of his birth at the Schocken Library in Jerusalem in 1936.⁹⁷ I would say that this discussion reveals much about Rosenzweig’s controversial legacy in Israel. Ernst Simon gave the keynote speech in memory of his friend. However, as reported in the article, there was an animated discussion of Rosenzweig’s idea of Judaism and his aftermath in Palestine. The invited speakers, whose arguments are reported in brackets, were unanimous in criticising—and even rejecting—his philosophy for being irrelevant to the current needs of Zionism. The anachronism of Rosenzweig’s position was stressed by Hugo Bergmann, who admitted the huge abyss between a Zionist idea of Judaism and Rosenzweig’s approach: in his view, the two interpretations were polar opposites and could not be reconciled in any way. Moreover, Julius Guttmann stated that Rosenzweig wrote only for people who already had a religious attitude and that for this reason, it was difficult to make him appeal to the Palestinian reader. However—according to Guttmann—even for Diasporic Judaism, Rosenzweig’s notion of history had become unacceptable. Gerhard Scholem—with whom Rosenzweig had a less than idyllic relationship⁹⁸—vehemently emphasised the “new epoch” of a critical stance towards Rosenzweig’s thought, particularly his ideas of redemption and justice. In addition, he considered Rosenzweig’s

93 Franz Rosenzweig, “Briefe eines Nichtzionisten an einen Antizionisten,” *Der Jude. Sonderheft zu Martin Bubers 50. Geburtstag* 10 (1928): 81–86.

94 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 371.

95 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 463.

96 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 463.

97 Report published in the *Jüdische Rundschau*; see RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 467.

98 Rosenzweig’s impression of Scholem is perfectly explained in a letter to Margrit Rosenstock: see Rosenzweig, *Die “Gritli”-Briefe*, letter 4 May 1921, 744–45. In the archive’s first addendum, there is a letter from Edith to Ernst Simon which mentions how difficult it was for Rosenzweig—who was already sick—to deal with Scholem due to his impertinent (*schnodderig*) behaviour (see RC, III.3, *Briefe*, 663–67).

attitude towards Zionism to be an anticipation of a post-Zionist position, by which point it would have revealed itself to be merely a phase.⁹⁹

3.4 *After the Shoah: Rosenzweig's Anachronism*

The interpretation of Rosenzweig as the representative of the obsolete German-Jewish tradition remained mostly the same even in the following decades. While his dual identity was considered anachronistic in the immediate aftermath of his death, he underwent a revival in the 1950s. German intellectuals used Rosenzweig as a perfect synthesis of two traditions in order to bridge the gap with Judaism,¹⁰⁰ while the Jewish reception was twofold: on the one hand, this revival was mainly due to his renaissance in North America thanks to Glatzer's intellectual biography, which was published in 1953, and the translation of the *Büchlein* in 1954;¹⁰¹ on the other, there was a continued tendency to consider Rosenzweig as being outside the contemporary direction of Jewish thought.¹⁰²

99 Later in his autobiography, Scholem once again distanced himself from Rosenzweig's position in the following way: "Our decisions took us in entirely different directions. He [Rosenzweig] sought to reform (or perhaps I should say revolutionize) German Jewry from within. I, on the other hand, no longer had any hopes for the amalgam known as *Deutschjudentum*, i.e., a Jewish community that considered itself German, and expected a renewal of Jewry only from its rebirth in Eretz Yisrael." See Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), 140.

100 The later section, which collects the reviews of the third edition of the *Star* from the 1950s, contains many Swiss journals—such as the *Bücherblatt* and the *Christlich-jüdisches Forum*—celebrating Franz Rosenzweig's comeback. See RC, II.4, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 474–75, 507–9.

101 Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy: A View of Man, World, and God*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Noonday Press, 1954) and Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1953). These two publications made Rosenzweig increasingly popular in the Jewish (English-speaking) intellectual debate.

102 This revival of Rosenzweig's thought is also testified by a letter to the editor sent by the *Gesellschaft für Christlich-jüdische Zusammenarbeit*, which was requesting more than 20,000 copies of the *Star* (see RC, II.4, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 482). It is certainly the case that there was a great difference between the American and Israeli receptions of Franz Rosenzweig's thought. This is mainly due to the fact that when Nahum N. Glatzer emigrated to America, he made great efforts to preserve the memory of his friend and to disseminate his thought. Rosenzweig thus became increasingly studied in the USA. However, Rosenzweig's reception in the US began after the war. Preserved in the archive is a typewritten copy of a speech given by Will Herberg on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Rosenzweig's death at the Habonim Gemeinde in New York on 9 December 1949 with the title "Franz Rosenzweig: Pioneer of the 'New Thinking' in Religion." Herberg, as an American Jew, emphasised the importance of becoming increasingly familiar

Most of the reviews of the *Star*, which were published in German journals in the 1950s, were written by Joachim Günther, who stressed Rosenzweig’s philosophical kinship to German thought: he defined him as a scholar of Hermann Cohen and a thinker in the vein of Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche.¹⁰³ Günther highlights that Rosenzweig was still an almost forgotten thinker twenty-five years after his death. A typewritten copy of a review published in the journal *Literatur* in 1955 stated that “wir Deutschen” could study Rosenzweig in order to mend the break with the Jewish way of thinking.¹⁰⁴ In the same line, an article by a certain O.K. Albert published in *Die Rheinpfalz* in 1955 celebrates Rosenzweig as a German author who returned to Judaism through the study of German philosophy and literature.¹⁰⁵

This interpretation of Rosenzweig as a flower of German philosophy was not only the post-war German view, but also the Israeli one. In a 1955 article published in the journal *Yedioth Hayom* with the title “Juden, Christen, Deutsche,”¹⁰⁶ an anonymous author—or at least, one whose name does not appear in the archive—stated that it was not by chance that Rosenzweig remained a forgotten figure in Israel and that the *Star* was impossible to find, while in Germany—his *Heimat*—it was still in vogue. Rosenzweig’s efforts were directed to the understanding of the spiritual encounter between *Judentum* and *Deutschtum*; however, this was due to the fact that he died before the advent of the Nazis and did not experience any anti-Semitic attacks. The author of the article stated that the German-Jewish symbiosis for which Rosenzweig yearned was completely impossible; for this reason, it would be

with Rosenzweig, as he considered that he had been able to elaborate “a God-centred, Torah-centred, Israel-centred Judaism” free from distortions, fundamentalism, modernism, and Zionism (RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 469). It is worth noting that Herberg’s speech was published in English in the Gemeinde’s journal, though some advertisements were still written in German (RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 471). Both languages were used, as can also be seen from the lecture about Rosenzweig’s work during his sickness given by Martin Goldner, the secretary of the Lehrhaus, at the Habonim in 1952 (RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 486). The archive also contains an invitation from the Habonim congregation to a commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of Rosenzweig’s death, which was held in 1959. This invitation also announces the foundation of a Franz Rosenzweig Fellowship in order to promote the study of Rosenzweig’s thought (RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 417).

103 See RC, II.4, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 491. For other articles by Günther, see RC, II.4, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 489, 500–2.

104 See RC, II.4, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 477.

105 See RC, II.4, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 494.

106 See RC, II.4, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 506.

better to read his work with the help of Adolf Leschnitzer's *Saul und David*,¹⁰⁷ where the encounter between these traditions is described as a process of flattening, alienation, and catastrophe.

In 1954, for the twenty-fifth anniversary of Rosenzweig's death and following Glatzer's publication of the *Büchlein*, the German-Israeli Journal *Mitteilungsblatt Tel Aviv* published a commemorative article by Hugo Bergmann, who, as we have seen, had harshly criticised his philosophy in the 1930s.¹⁰⁸ In this article, Bergmann gave a detailed description of Rosenzweig's thought by inserting many passages from his letters and works, especially regarding Zionism, Jerusalem, his notion of state, religion, life, and so on. At the outset, in order to understand Rosenzweig's idea of revelation, Bergmann uses Blaise Pascal's notion of the encounter between God and men. The explicit intention was to emphasise how Rosenzweig's thought was still alien to Zionism, letting his letters speak; in fact, among the selection of documents that Bergmann chose to publish, there is a letter to B. Jacob (10 May 1927) where Rosenzweig speaks of the Zionistic need for a sunny land as superstition, as well as his famous letter to Hans Ehrenberg (19 April 1927) where he draws a clear line between Diaspora and Zionism.¹⁰⁹

In 1956, for the seventieth anniversary of Rosenzweig's birth, an important issue of the *Mitteilungsblatt Tel Aviv* was published. Among its articles, there was a eulogy by Martin Buber entitled "Rosenzweig und die Existenz," which appeared near the longer article by Else Freund.¹¹⁰ In a commemorative essay with the provocative title "Wieso ist die Philosophie Franz Rosenzweigs Jüdische Philosophie?" Freund underlined the fact that Rosenzweig was a little-known thinker in the Jewish debate, since his thought was deeply connected to German philosophy.¹¹¹ However, in her view, he remained a Jewish thinker, because he combined—and this is the most difficult part of his thought—reason and revelation, faith and philosophy. In the same issue,

107 See Adolf Leschnitzer, *Saul und David. Die Problematik der deutsch-jüdischen Lebensgemeinschaft* (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1954).

108 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 511–12.

109 According to Rosenzweig, this *Luftlinie* was Judaism itself, as he encountered it in 1913 and as he stated in the third part of the *Star*. What Rosenzweig had concretely achieved with his intellectual work and practical engagement (the *Lehrhaus*, the translation, and so on) belonged to the right-hand side of this line, the Diasporic one; on the other side, the left-hand side, was the current Palestine. As Bergmann reports, Rosenzweig concluded this letter by saying that both sides should be aware of the existence of the *Luftlinie*. See Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, N° 1137, 1133–37. The original of this letter has not been preserved in the archive.

110 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 516.

111 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 517.

Hans Tramer’s contribution entitled “Franz Rosenzweig: Zum Denken und Gedenken”¹¹² praised the work of Ernst Simon, who edited the first Hebrew volume on Rosenzweig—to which Bergman, Fleischmann, and Rotenstreich also contributed—for shaping the image of him as a great pedagogist.¹¹³ One of the most inspiring essays in this special issue is that of Pinchas Rosenblueth, who describes Rosenzweig’s idea of Judaism by shedding light on his conception of Jewish life as the form that makes life as a Jew bearable and the basis for understanding his negative attitude towards Zionism.¹¹⁴ Rosenblueth stressed how Rosenzweig’s reflection on the Jewish people could be helpful for understanding the current times, since he believed in the possibility of choosing between a Jewish life in the Galut or in Palestine.

A pivotal contribution to the rehabilitation of Rosenzweig’s memory after the Holocaust was made by Schalom Ben-Chorin, who described him as a “complete Jew” by stressing a certain unity or totality in his conception of Judaism that could not tolerate partitions such as liberalism, orthodoxy, or Zionism.¹¹⁵ In another contribution for the fortieth anniversary of Rosenzweig’s death, Ben-Chorin described him as “der letzte deutsche Jude” (“the last German Jew”), who, despite the fact that he wrote in German, was “*morenu*, our teacher.”¹¹⁶ In addition, the archive’s addenda contain some articles from the 1970s that testify to a progressive recognition of Rosenzweig’s thought in German and Jewish circles, even if he remained a difficult thinker to categorise.¹¹⁷ The difficulty of classifying Rosenzweig also has to do with the difficulty of defining

112 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 519.

113 The book he mentioned was published for the twenty-fifth anniversary of Rosenzweig’s death: *Beit Hillel Discussions on Franz Rosenzweig* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1956). As late as 1969, Hans Tramer wrote an article emphasising the importance of Rosenzweig, even though he had long been forgotten, for contemporary Jewish thought. The archive also contains a typewritten copy of his long essay devoted to Rosenzweig’s life and thought (RC, I.1, *Tramer, Hans, “Franz Rosenzweig: Entwicklung und Leben,”* 636–66).

114 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 520.

115 See RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 384. This article was published in a German-language Israeli newspaper entitled *Jedioth Chadashoth*.

116 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 369–70.

117 For instance, in the archive’s first addendum, there is a typewritten account of a 1979 radio programme hosted by Oscar Schatz with guests Dr Klaus Dethloff and Peter Kampits, which discussed Rosenzweig’s idea of revelation (see RC, VI, *Addendum 1*, 659); concerning the Jewish side, there are some writings by Schalom Ben-Chorin (see RC, VI, *Addendum 1*, 652 and 655) and an essay by Lionel Kochan published in the Jewish chronicle literary supplement in June 1978 which emphasised the importance of the progressive republication of Rosenzweig’s work as an “opportunity to reconsider the outlook of one of the greatest thinkers that twentieth-century Jewry has so far produced” (see RC, VI, *Addendum 1*, 654).

what Jewish philosophy is. Can a kind of philosophical thought according to which the Diaspora is the ontological and metaphysical characteristic of the Jewish people still exist? Furthermore, on what basis should one interpret the relationship between the German and Jewish traditions after Auschwitz?

In his famous 1939 article entitled “The End of the German-Jewish Symbiosis” (“Das Ende der deutschen-jüdischen Symbiose”), Martin Buber spoke of “examples of true cross-fertilization”¹¹⁸ between the German and Jewish spirits. Despite the fact that “many fine Jews gave themselves all too whole-heartedly and unreservedly to the German nation,” the failure to grasp the tragedy of Galut and the “destruction of genuine synthesis” were blatant.¹¹⁹ This end also affected the use of the German language and led to the death of an intellectual world that had been extremely active throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After the Shoah, the language of Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat* had become “lingua non grata” in Israel.¹²⁰

The decline of the German language and culture and the progressive hostility towards it played a role in how Rosenzweig, whose thought can be seen as a metaphor for the German-Jewish symbiosis, was received. In fact, from a materialistic point of view, the majority of the documents and artefacts in Rosenzweig’s archive, including obituaries and commemorative articles, were written in German, aside from a few documents in Hebrew, English, Italian, Romanian, Dutch, Polish, and Spanish.¹²¹ The hypothesis that the absence of documents in Hebrew could be read as an omission on Edith’s part cannot be considered, since Rosenzweig’s reception in Israel is documented in the archives and is largely recorded in German, bemoaning the lack of Hebrew reception. It is no coincidence that in a letter to Fred Cruber of the Leo Baeck Institute

118 Buber’s article was published in *Jüdische Weltrundschau* on 10 March 1939. The English translation is taken from Curt D. Wormann, “German Jews in Israel: Their Cultural Situation since 1933,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 15 (1970): 74.

119 Wormann, “German Jews in Israel,” 74.

120 Arndt Kremer, “Brisante Sprache? Deutsch in Palästina und Israel,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 6 (2015): 35–41, <https://www.bpb.de/apuz/199904/brisante-sprache-deutsch-in-palaestina-und-israel>. Not surprisingly, Schalom Ben Chorin—who praised Rosenzweig’s work from the 1950s onwards—recalled the difficult situation of German-speaking Jews in Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s and spoke of an inflicted hatred due to the confusion between state and language. See Ben-Chorin, “Sprache als Heimat,” in *Sprache als Heimat: Auswanderer erzählen*, ed. Peter Nasarski (Berlin: Westkreuz, 1981), 15.

121 One of the few documents written in Hebrew in the whole archive was written by Leo Baeck after Rosenzweig’s death. This document—a certain certificate of honour—was transliterated and traduced into German: “Let this document serve as a testimony to him in the presence of the whole community of Israel” (RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 604–6).

from 16 May 1972, Edith complained about an article published in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* where Rosenzweig was described as a “German theologian.”¹²² This episode shows that in the 1970s, the figure of Rosenzweig—many years after his death and despite Edith’s efforts—was still lesser-known, misunderstood, or forgotten.

4 Conclusion: Archival Spectres

In Rosenzweig’s magmatic production, there are some documents that have been incorrectly catalogued or preserved without apparent reason, as happens in all archives. There are several incongruences: for instance, the section titled *Held*—a wonderful, brief, and little-known essay by Rosenzweig devoted to the work of Shakespeare and Calderon—is catalogued twice;¹²³ the *Paralipomena* and his exchange with his parents from the front sometimes do not follow chronological order; and Eugen Rosenstock’s poem, which according to an archival note is not in the file, is, on the contrary, present in the section that includes Rudi Ehrenberg’s correspondence.¹²⁴ Among the interloper documents, there is a typewritten letter from Scholem addressed to a certain Rosa (mistaken for Rosenzweig) in which he criticises Oskar Goldberg’s *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*¹²⁵ and a postcard that Friedrich Meinecke sent to Max Lenz, another historian, in 1910.¹²⁶

There are also other hidden documents that are worth mentioning, such as a notebook that begins with Rosenzweig’s 1918 essay “Die Wissenschaft und das Leben” and towards the end contains letters that he sent to his friends,¹²⁷ or the *Philippica* section, where there is a typewritten copy of his poem entitled “Das Haupt”—which begins with “Wir sind am Ziel,” as he writes in the *Star*—followed by an imaginary theatrical dialogue.¹²⁸ Hidden among the reviews of the *Schrift*—most of which have been copied into a notebook—there is a poem by Buber entitled “Gewalt und Liebe.”¹²⁹

122 See RC, VI, *Addendum 1*, 631.

123 See RC, III.2 D, *Held*, 149–86; and RA, III.2 D, *Heroes*, 200–24.

124 See RC, III.2, *Ehrenberg, Rudolf*, 210.

125 See RC, III.2, *Scholem, Gershom*, 429–33.

126 See RC, III.2, *Meinecke, Friedrich*, 330.

127 See RC, III.2 D, *Die Wissenschaft und das Leben*, 889–919.

128 See RC, III.2 D, *Philippica*, 466–72.

129 See RC, II.4, *Handwritten Copies of Reviews*, 67.

The archive also contains a long essay written in a notebook that—as far as I know—is still unpublished and has been completely neglected by critics.¹³⁰ This is a long study of the Baroque that does not correspond to the long excursus contained in Rosenzweig's diary devoted to the same issue, which is usually quoted by scholars. Attached to this essay as proof of its importance, there is a letter—catalogued as unknown—from Hans Ehrenberg, who usually commented on the writings that Rosenzweig considered important.¹³¹ Moreover, there is a fascinating collection of twelve autobiographical, ironic, and fantastic short stories that Rosenzweig conceived for his son Rafael, handwritten by the assistant who helped Edith in the last years of Rosenzweig's life.¹³²

Among the documents, there are some that have a closer connection to Rosenzweig's illness; in fact, there is a precious typewritten copy of Dr Richard Tuteur's long and detailed report on the development of his disease concerning even his diet and medication up until the description of the last instants of his life.¹³³ Moreover, Dr Tuteur selected some of Rosenzweig's letters where he described his vulnerability and his painful existence.¹³⁴ The archive does not lack a touch of the macabre, as it also includes a picture of Rosenzweig's death mask.¹³⁵

Concerning the documents that have been preserved without apparent reason, there are several items such as some exemplars of 1000 mark banknotes in the fourth addendum;¹³⁶ a handwritten copy of a chronicle that tells of the death of a gardener in Paris;¹³⁷ and a strange document concerning the use of bromine and chlorine for stink bombs in 1914 in the section entitled *Varia*. Among the reviews of the *Star*, there are two final elements that are worthy of consideration. The first is a page present in many copies of the corrected drafts of the book on which Rosenzweig wrote some verses by Else Lasker-Schüler. Most likely, he wrote them from memory, because it is not possible to find these verses among Lasker-Schüler's work.¹³⁸ As far as I know, this is a hapax

130 See RC, II.3 D, *Baroque Notes*, 846–1021.

131 See RC, II.3 D, *Baroque Notes*, 1023–2031. The archive describes this as “unknown handwriting,” but from the signature “H.” and the letterhead reading “Otto Ehrenberg,” it is clear that the writer is Hans Ehrenberg.

132 See RC, II.3 D, *Stories for Rafael Rosenzweig*, 766–81. In the fifth addendum to the archive, there is also a poem that Rosenzweig wrote to his son; see RC, VI, *Addendum 5*, 897.

133 See RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 528–57.

134 RC, I.1, *Obituaries and Commemorative Articles*, 546ff.

135 See RC, VI, *Addendum 1*, 578.

136 See RC, VI, *Addendum 4*, 868–75.

137 See RC, II.4, *Die Schrift—The Translation of the Bible by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig*, 109.

138 See RC, II.4, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 457–66.

legomenon in the work of Franz Rosenzweig, who did not quote Lasker-Schüler on any other occasion even though he had two copies of her *Meine Wunder* and *Die Nächte der Tino von Bagdad* in his library.¹³⁹ The second document is a typewritten essay that may have been written by either Buber or Rosenstock, which was sent to Edith.¹⁴⁰ In this short essay, there is a detailed discussion of Scholem’s review of Rosenzweig’s work.

However, among the archive’s more than 8,000 pages, two short articles, apparently preserved without reason, could be used as a path that brings us to Edith’s hidden work. They are two reviews of Julius Schmidhauser’s *Mnemosyne*, a novel written in 1956 that considers the mother of the Muses from a feminist standpoint.¹⁴¹ Why does the archive contain these two documents that apparently have nothing to do with Rosenzweig? In Edith’s letter to Fred Cruber of 16 May 1972, she explained that Rosenzweig’s correspondence from the last years of his life had been written by a writing assistant, who followed her dictation of her husband’s intentions, expressed via a complicated mechanism, even though he paid attention to each grammatical and semantic nuance until the end.¹⁴² The different handwritings are perfectly recognisable in the archive starting from 1926, from which point at least two different people helped her with the writing, but not with the interpreting, for several years. Even if other people wrote the letters, the signature was always the same.

Edith was the custodian of Rosenzweig’s voice, and her husband wanted her to sign all his letters as a recognisable mark of his intellectual production. As Derrida stated in *Margins*, the signature implies the presence of the author and at the same time entails the actual or empirical non-presence of the signer.¹⁴³ However, Edith’s spectral signature is not just the testimony of the presence and non-presence of her husband. The enigmatic originality of her act of

139 See Waszek, *Rosenzweigs Bibliothek*, 102.

140 See RC, II.4, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 467–71.

141 See RC, II.4, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, 507; Julius Schmidhauser, *Mnemosyne. Gedenken und Dank. Die Taten der Mütter und Väter für das Kind Mensch* (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1954).

142 See RC, VI, *Addendum 1*, 630–31.

143 Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), 326: “By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But it will be said, it also marks and retains his having-been present in a past now, which will remain a future now, and therefore in a now in general, in the transcendental form of nowness (maintenance). This general maintenance is somehow inscribed, stapled to present punctuality, always evident and always singular, in the form of the signature. This is the enigmatic originality of every paragraph. For the attachment to the source to occur, the absolute singularity of an event of the signature and of a form of the signature must be retained: the pure reproducibility of a pure event.”

signing consists in the seal of a successful translation and an effort to keep his memory alive. These two reviews of Schmidhauser's novel, preserved in the archive without apparent reason, could serve today to remind us of Edith's crucial work. She could be called Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, who gave immortality to her husband's legacy by creating the archive. Edith's translation of Franz's silence was a symptom of dedication and love, the same love that belongs to the grammar of eternity in the *Star of Redemption*, since it endows life with a meaning that death cannot erase. Rosenzweig's archive is a blossom of this genuine and eternal act of love.

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“The Divine Philosopher”

Rebbe Pinhas of Korets’s Kabbalah as Natural Philosophy

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Abstract

This study analyses the teachings of Rebbe Pinhas of Korets, an eighteenth-century Ukrainian preacher and holy man, and proposes that his system of thought may be considered a form of natural philosophy. Using the extensive library of manuscripts that has so far been largely ignored by scholars and rejecting the assumption that Rebbe Pinhas was a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, this study challenges such contradictory conceptions of Rebbe Pinhas as exclusively an ethicist, a passionate devotee of Maimonides’s *Guide of the Perplexed*, and a student of philosophy-cum-kabbalist. Instead, the analysis shows how Rebbe Pinhas integrated philosophical and proto-scientific forms of thinking with kabbalistic ones in order to create an entirely new theocosmology on which he based his system of ethics, while remaining personally torn between the religious demands of intellect and piety.

Keywords

Pinhas of Korets – Hasidism – Kabbalah – natural philosophy – science

1 Introduction

Since the first academic studies of Hasidism, Rebbe Pinhas of Korets has been acknowledged as key to understanding the movement and its beginnings,¹ and

¹ At the same time, there has been debate, though recently forgotten, over how or even whether Rebbe Pinhas fitted into the movement and the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, the

in the most recent history of Hasidism, he was listed—along with (only!) “the Besht, the Maggid [...] and Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye”—as one of “the iconic figures of early Hasidism.”² However, after a century of academic research on Hasidism, of these four figures, only Rebbe Pinhas has yet to receive his own full-length study, and he remains an obscure figure.³

The aim of this study is to begin to paint an intellectual portrait of Rebbe Pinhas of Korets, which is meant to complement the historical one treated in my earlier study,⁴ by identifying the unique elements of Rebbe Pinhas’s path pointed out by both Hasidic and academic sources. This portrait will highlight an approach to the integration of Kabbalah with philosophy, ethics, and even magic and science that has hitherto not appeared in our understandings of early Hasidism.⁵ The current study differs from all earlier scholars’ analyses in two fundamental ways: it does not view Rebbe Pinhas through the lens of his purported master, the Baal Shem Tov, and it is based on the massive

purported “founder of Hasidism.” On this, see below. See Avraham Kahane, *ha-Ḥasidut* (Warsaw: Tsefirah, 1922), 269–76; Samuel Abba Horodecky, *Ha-Ḥasidut we-ha-Ḥasidim* (Jerusalem: Dvir, 1923), 1:143–45; Simon Dubnow, *Toldot ha-Ḥasidut* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1944), 104–5; Joseph Weiss, “Via Passiva in Early Hasidism,” in Weiss, *Studies in East European Jewish Mysticism and Hasidism*, ed. David Goldstein, 69–94 (originally published in *Journal of Jewish Studies* 11, no. 3–4 [1960]: 137–55); Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Le-Toldot Rabbi Pinḥas mi-Koreś,” in *Alei Ayin: The Salman Schocken Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1948–1952), 213–44; published in Yiddish as Heschel, “Reb Pinkhes Koritzer,” *YIVO Bletter* 33 (1949): 9–48, and in English as Heschel, “Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec,” in *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov: Studies in Hasidism*, ed. Samuel H. Dresner (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1985), 1–43. The body of the English version is slightly expanded and all citations are taken from it. I have not included the work of Isaak Markus Jost and Heinrich Graetz among the academic studies because of their decidedly negative slant towards Hasidism as a whole.

- 2 David Biale et al., *Hasidism: A New History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 242.
- 3 I am currently working on just such a study; until its publication readers can turn to my dissertation, “R. Pinhas Shapira and His School: A New Path” (PhD diss., Ben-Gurion University, 2023) and “The Image(s) of Israel Baal Sghem Tov in Koretser and Bershider Literature: A Reception History of the Besht” (*Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 47 [2021]: 125–174).
- 4 Jeffrey G. Amshalem, “The Image(s) of Israel Baal Shem Tov in Koretser and Bershider Literature: A Reception History of the Besht,” *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 47 (2021): 125–74.
- 5 As historians of these fields often stress, in past centuries these were not discrete categories, or if they were, the lines between them were blurry and not always where we might place them now (see Gad Freudenthal, ed., *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012]; David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001]). Rebbe Pinhas is a paradigmatic example of a thinker who rarely distinguishes between them. At the same time, elements that we would today dub “scientific” or “philosophical,” which were largely ignored by his peers, were integrated into his thought, as I will show.

manuscript literature of Rebbe Pinhas’s own school of disciples rather than late print anthologies. Not surprisingly, the result is an entirely new understanding of this thinker and his school, as well as a more nuanced depiction of the intellectual landscape of early Hasidism, which reveals a greater variety of beliefs and intellectual stances that in turn allows us to identify intellectual possibilities that were rejected by that movement as it developed in the decades following Rebbe Pinhas’s death.⁶

2 Impressions of Rebbe Pinhas in Hasidic and Scholarly Narratives

We know next to nothing of Rebbe Pinhas’s early biography, though Hasidic lore has attempted to fill in the gaps, especially regarding his youth and his “conversion” to the way of the Besht.⁷ These legends notwithstanding, Rebbe Pinhas Shapira appears fully formed on the stage of history in the mid-eighteenth century with his arrival in the market-town of Korets in Volhynia, where he quickly acquired fame as a *šaddiq*, a teacher of Torah with miraculous powers of prayer and knowledge.⁸ It was from this time that he gained the moniker “Rebbe Pinhas Koretser,” though he left Korets in the 1780s for Ostroh, a nearby town where he spent the remaining years of his life until his death in the summer of 1790.⁹ In both locales, he gathered a small circle of disciples and also

6 In doing so, I hope to continue to respond to Weiss’s call for renewed attention to Rebbe Pinhas’s “historical relationship to Israel Baalshem [which] is in need of clarification [since] to understand the figure of Israel Baalshem in the context of a group of itinerant enthusiasts of popular pantheism is one of the urgent tasks of historical research” (Weiss, “*Via Passiva* in Early Hasidism,” 92 n. 18).

7 See the legends collected in Elimelekh Elazar Frankel, *Imrey Pinhas ha-Šalem* (Bney Brak, 2003), 2:108–94.

8 According to family tradition, he was born in Shklov, Lithuania, in 1725, and as a youth moved with his family to Volhynia, a region now in Ukraine but at that time part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Yehoshua Heshil Rabinowitz, *Torat Avot* [New York, 1926], *Erekh Avot* §8).

9 The conventional timeline is that Rebbe Pinhas left Korets for Ostroh in 1770 or earlier and died in 1790 or 1791 (for the most recent and relevant examples, see Benjamin Brown, “The Ostroh conflict and the circle of the BESHT: a ‘dress rehearsal’ of the conflict between Hasidim and Misnagdim?” [Hebrew], *Zion* 86, no. 1 [2020]: 57–97, and Benjamin Brown, “Rise of the Maggid of Mezeritch to the helm of the Hasidic movement” [Hebrew], *Zion* 87, no. 1 [2021]: 37–102, in which this timeline plays a critical part in the studies’ main arguments). Such a timeline, however, conflates the two separate times that Rebbe Pinhas left Korets—once temporarily, in 1770, to flee the plague, and then permanently at some point in the 1780s, to avoid communal strife. The error, as well as the dating of his death to 1791, derives from Menachem Mendel Biber’s chronicle *Memorial for the Great Men of Ostroh* [Hebrew] (Barditshov, 1907), 211–13, but Biber was mistaken in his reading of the historical documents. See Amshalem, “R. Pinhas of Korets and His School: A New Path,” chapter 2.

served as a public figure, attracting broader audiences for Sabbaths and holidays and becoming a destination for those seeking aid in healing, earning a living, and having children.

Rebbe Pinhas associated with many of the figures who played key roles in the early Hasidic movement and bears many similarities to them. For this reason, and because of scholarly reliance on later print sources, he is identified as a Hasidic master and as a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, though the truth is much more complicated; it would be more accurate to say that despite some similarities, he was independent in both the theoretical and socio-political realms and cannot merely be subsumed under the rubric of “the circle of the Besht.”¹⁰

One of the few pieces of conventional wisdom shared by academicians and Hasidim alike is that even accounting for the great variety within early Hasidism, something set Rebbe Pinhas apart. Simon Dubnow wrote that he “held a unique place in the circle of the Besht’s companions” and that he “understood [Hasidism] in his own way.”¹¹ S.A. Horodecky stated flatly that “he was not a student of the Besht, as some have thought”; rather, he was “a self-taught Hasid” who “blazed his own trail in service of God.”¹² Joseph Weiss wrote that “his teaching does not seem to be derived from Israel Baalshem. He appears rather to be one of a number of exponents of a wild popular pantheism current in the Ukraine.”¹³ Even Abraham Joshua Heschel, who as we shall see composed the most elaborate scholarly narrative of Rebbe Pinhas as a disciple of the Besht, wrote extensively on his differences from his “fellow disciples” and other contemporaries.¹⁴

Traditional Hasidic sources also include several references to Rebbe Pinhas’s unique mind and teachings, usually expressed through statements such as “Rebbe Nahum of Chernobyl called Rebbe Pinhas of Korets a divine

10 This term provides the title of Heschel’s collection of essays on Rebbe Pinhas and his contemporaries and appears as a major paradigm in two recent biographies of the Besht: Immanuel Etkes, *The Besht: Magician, Mystic, and Leader*, trans. Saadya Sternberg (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 194–95; and Rachel Elior, *Israel Baal Shem Tov and his Contemporaries* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2014), 1:644, 2:30–31, 75, and esp. 118, 276. For a more extensive analysis of Rebbe Pinhas’s relationship to the Baal Shem Tov and the Hasidic movement, see Amshalem, “The Image(s) of Israel Baal Shem Tov.”

11 Dubnow, *Toldot ha-Hasidut*, 104–5.

12 Horodecky, *Ha-Hasidut ve-ha-Hasidim*, 1:143–45.

13 Weiss, “*Via Passiva* in Early Hasidism,” 92 n. 18.

14 Heschel, “Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec.” At the same time, however, all of these scholars seemed unable to extricate Rebbe Pinhas from the Besht’s shadow and attribute his religious character to the Besht’s influence.

philosopher [*filosof eloqi*] from above. And I heard that Rebbe Pinhas of Korets studied Maimonides’s book *Guide of the Perplexed* a thousand times.”¹⁵ Likewise, a collection of family lore describes Rebbe Pinhas as a “divine scientist” (*hoqer eloqi*),¹⁶ while a turn-of-the-20th-century chronicle from Ostroh describes his thought as “wisdom of the Kabbalah and divine investigation [*haqirah*]” and “the meeting of Kabbalah and divine philosophy as one.”¹⁷

This association with Maimonides’s *Guide* and with philosophy as a whole clearly caused anxiety among the Hasidim. Avraham Kahane records a Hasidic oral tradition that describes the dire consequences of Rebbe Pinhas’s engagement in this study: “They say that Rebbe Pinhas became a *ṣaddiq* through his study of the *Guide of the Perplexed*, and even though he was not personally punished for engaging in such extensive study of philosophy, he was punished through his sons, who did not have faith in the sages.”¹⁸ In the same way, we may understand the cryptic statement by Abraham Baer Gottlober, a nineteenth-century Hasid-cum-Maskil, that “the Hasidim used to say that [Rebbe Pinhas] walked a dangerous path, but did not fall into danger.”¹⁹

In nineteenth-century Hasidic culture, both “philosopher” and “scientist” were generally terms of derision reserved for non-Jews (and later, non-traditional Jews) with advanced secular educations who would challenge the rebbes’ claims and seek to tempt loyal Jews away from the faith,²⁰ as we see here. Similarly, while Maimonides the legal decider was well-respected in

15 Alter Shapira, *Ohaley Ṣaddiqim* (Chernovits, 1936), 48. See also Pinhas Rabinowitz, *Bet Pinhas* (Peterkov, 1926), 7, §4. Rabbi Yehoshua Heshil Rabinowitz, another descendant of Rebbe Pinhas, also provides a series of similar traditions, in an abridged form, in his work *Torat Avot* (*Erekh Avot* §8): “All his holy words [...] were full of the splendour of the intellect and shone with the aura of investigation [...] lofty, intellectual teachings [...] divine investigations. [...] He dearly loved the books of Maimonides.”

16 Rabinowitz, *Bet Pinhas*, 7, §4. The term *hoqer* does not denote a scientist in the modern, experimentalist sense, but it does denote the employment of logic and speculation, especially regarding the natural world.

17 Biber, *Memorial*, 211–12.

18 Kahane, *ha-Ḥasidut*, 269. The phrase “faith in the sages” (*emunat ṣaddiqim*) specifically refers to faith in the Hasidic rebbes as the new, divinely sanctioned leaders of the people, which is to say that Rebbe Pinhas’s study of philosophy was antithetical to the new spiritual authority of Hasidism. Given that these traditions are paradigmatic examples of history written “against the grain,” we may assume that their linking of Rebbe Pinhas to philosophy reflects a historical reality, since there would be no reason for a hagiographer to create such a link only to immediately warn of its spiritual dangers.

19 Reuven Goldberg, ed., *Zikhronot u-Masa’ot* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1976), 2187. Gottlober’s father was a devotee of R. Rafael of Bershid (d. 1827), a primary disciple of Rebbe Pinhas and the continuator of his ethical teachings.

20 In Koretser-Bershider literature itself, for example, the term “philosopher” is used to denigrate the spiritual accomplishments of the Vilna Gaon (MS Karlin 9, 76b, §162). Elsewhere,

Hasidic circles, Maimonides the Aristotelian was generally shunned.²¹ However, those were precisely the terms by which Hasidim praised Rebbe Pinhas of Korets, creating a contradiction of values that demands our attention.

3 Rebbe Pinhas of Korets in Academic Scholarship

The most influential study of Rebbe Pinhas to date was Abraham Joshua Heschel's monograph, in which he identified many of the central issues and made a number of lasting claims. Though Heschel sought out new manuscript material,²² greatly expanding the sources on Rebbe Pinhas in both quantity and quality, he also relied heavily on late print and especially legendary material. Based on such sources, he broke with those historians who had questioned Rebbe Pinhas's discipleship of the Baal Shem Tov and instead fully embraced and even elaborated upon the traditional narrative.²³ Heschel also adopted the notion that Rebbe Pinhas was a devotee of Maimonides's *Guide* and of philosophy in general, but contended that he turned away from philosophy at a certain point, abandoning it for study of the *Zohar*²⁴ and Cordoveran and Lurianic Kabbalah.²⁵ Despite Rebbe Pinhas's deep engagement with such esoterica, Heschel writes that he "did not expound on the secrets of the Torah. He preferred to teach his students honesty and humility rather than *yihudim* and *kavanot*."²⁶ Heschel offers little explanation as to why he presents these three roles—philosopher, kabbalist, and ethicist—as mutually exclusive.

In Heschel's retelling, Rebbe Pinhas's unique system of thought is instead understood as being representative of the Besht's teachings and as reflecting

these figures were often literary foils, recruited in hagiographical tales to challenge the rebbes and provide them with a chance to prove themselves.

- 21 See Allan Nadler, "The 'Rambam Revival' in Early Modern Jewish Thought," in *Maimonides after 800 Years*, ed. Jay Michael Harris (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 36–61, esp. 54–61 (the reader will realize that I would take issue with his use of Rebbe Pinhas in his conclusion).
- 22 See Heschel, "Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec," 2 n. 3, where he describes the four manuscripts he was able to access in part due to his family connections (Heschel was a descendant of Rebbe Pinhas). Three of these remain extant; one (MS Cincinnati) cannot be located today, although largely parallel versions are extant.
- 23 Heschel, "Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec," esp. 10–19. For Heschel's use of legendary material, including *Šivḥey ha-Bešt*, as historical fact, see, *inter alia*, Heschel, "Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec," 3–4, 8–9, 11, 13, and 183–84.
- 24 Heschel, "Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec," 4–5. This contention stands as an interesting counterpoint to the motif of heresy and punishment.
- 25 Heschel, "Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec," 7.
- 26 Heschel, "Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec," 20.

especial loyalty to his way, in contrast to Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezritsh, who “introduced the method of the Ari (Rabbi Isaac Luria) into the teaching of the Besht and taught his students mysteries of the Kabbalah, expositions on the writings of the Ari, *kavanot*, and *yihudim*.”²⁷ These two “interpretations” of the Besht’s teachings are presented as “two forms of Hasidism—the one [the Maggid’s], scholarly, speculative, and aristocratic; the other, that of the Ukrainian tzaddikim [including Rebbe Pinhas], poetic, moralistic, and popular”—that continued to battle one another for generations.²⁸

Scholars who followed Heschel accepted this portrait and frequently cited this study as authoritative, but rarely continued his efforts to use new manuscript sources,²⁹ nor, with one notable exception,³⁰ did they check the reliability of his claims. Rebbe Pinhas was treated almost exclusively as a representative of the Besht’s teachings and of Hasidism as a whole,³¹ with little attention paid to him as a thinker and leader in his own right.³²

Despite the general recognition of Rebbe Pinhas’s centrality in understanding the genesis of the Hasidic movement, then, he has rarely been treated on his own terms, and every treatment has been hobbled by two related methodological handicaps: the adoption of the Hasidic metanarrative of Israel Baal Shem Tov as the founder of the movement and Rebbe Pinhas’s master, and the use of late print anthologies as the primary sources on Rebbe Pinhas and his school. Following the groundbreaking work of Moshe Rosman and others and

27 Heschel, “Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec,” 19–20; see the development of the argument, 21–29, 33.

28 Heschel, “Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec,” 26.

29 This task was taken up by the National Library of Israel and R. Elimelekh Elazar Frankel, editor of *Imrey Pinhas ha-Šalem*. I wish to express my deep gratitude to R. Frankel for his generosity of spirit and time.

30 Ada Rapoport-Albert is the only person to have scrutinised Heschel’s claim (“Hasidism after 1772: Structural Continuity and Change,” in *Hasidism Reappraised*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert [Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1996], esp. 90–94). As we saw above, Joseph Weiss questioned the general narrative, though he buried his doubts in a footnote and did not develop them in a dedicated study (see above and below).

31 See my discussion in Amshalem, “The Image(s) of Israel Baal Shem.” Some scholars have treated Heschel’s work as so final and definitive that they cite only this study in their treatments of Rebbe Pinhas, thus basing their conclusions on historically inaccurate bases: see Etkes, *The Besht*, 190–91; Elior, *Israel Baal Shem Tov*, 2:644, 2:30–31, 75, esp. 118, 276.

32 Ron Margolin is the only one to do so, in his monograph *The Human Temple: Interiorization and the Structuring of Inner Life in Early Hasidism* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005) and a more recent article on the Baal Shem Tov’s conception of faith, “Faith is Cleaving” [Hebrew], in Roe Haran, ed., *The Baal Shem Tov: The Man Who Came from the Forest* [Hebrew] (Rishon le-Zion: Yedioth Ahronoth, 2017), 58–93. However, he accepts the bulk of Heschel’s portrait (and at times Horodecky’s) and uses a recent print anthology as his primary source (see *The Human Temple*, esp. 140–44 and 256), and so my current critiques of this methodology and his conclusions apply.

the new historical awareness they engendered,³³ however, scholars no longer need to rely on Hasidic hagiography to recount the history of the movement. Likewise, there is no reason to continue to use print anthologies as the primary sources of information about the master and his fellowship given the discovery, collection, and even digitisation of hundreds of pages of manuscript material written by Rebbe Pinhas's very own disciples and their school.³⁴

4 The Koretser and Bershider Literatures and a Methodology for Reading Them

The Koretser-Bershider manuscript library is truly an embarrassment of riches. While most Hasidic books have no manuscript record, the Koretser-Bershider library contains at least thirty-six codices totaling several hundred pages, including not only notes from the masters' sermons, but also liturgical practices, stories, and personal anecdotes, providing insight on a level hitherto unknown in the study of early Hasidism.

The collected teachings of Rebbe Pinhas and his disciples can be broadly divided into two genres with distinct milieus and editorial histories. The first, dubbed Koretser literature,³⁵ is composed of the teachings of Rebbe Pinhas as recorded by his disciples, whom I refer to as the Koretser fellowship. These teachings derive from his time in Korets and Ostroh; that is, from

33 Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013); see also, *inter alia*, Biale, *Hasidism: A New History*; Chaim Elly Moseson, "From Spoken Word to the Discourse of the Academy: Reading the Sources for the Teachings of the Besht" (PhD diss., Boston University, 2017); and the many books and articles by David Assaf, Gad Sagiv, Uriel Gellman, and Marcin Wodzinski.

34 Many of the manuscripts cited here can be accessed in the original, on microfilm, or digitally through the National Library of Israel: MS Kitvey Qodeš 5216; MS Torot Emet/Paris-Rudi F 3383; MS Ketavim 5277; MS Rochel 3759; MS Liguṭim Yeqarim Rimanov 3591; MS Liguṭey Amarim Kalov 6280; MS Venhard 5278. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the National Library of Israel and particularly the manuscript department for their work in preserving these treasures and making them accessible. Others are held privately, such as MS Monastritsh and MS Uman Monastritsh; I wish to express my deep gratitude to R. Gedalyah Aharon Rabinowitz, the Rebbe of Monastritsh, for his generosity in sharing his time and his family's manuscripts with me. All translations of these manuscripts are my own.

35 In referring to the two genres as Koretser and Bershider literature, I am following the lead of E.E. Frankel; for this terminology and a worthwhile survey of the literatures, see his *Imrey Pinhas ha-Šalem*, 2:524–44. See also Amshalem, "The Image(s) of Israel Baal Shem," 128–32, for a periodisation of the literatures.

the mid-eighteenth century to 1790. It is extremely inwardly focused, almost exclusively recording the teachings of Rebbe Pinhas and his interactions with his circle.

The second genre, Bershider literature, was recorded by the Bershider fellowship, that is, the students of R. Rafael of Bershid (d. 1827), one of Rebbe Pinhas's primary disciples and the continuator of his teachings. Bershider literature is focused on the oral teachings of R. Rafael, many of which are given in the name of Rebbe Pinhas, and also includes a great deal of material copied directly from Koretser manuscripts. The core of Bershider literature derives from the first part of the nineteenth century and the regions of Volhynia and Podolia, though in totality it is much more expansive in its range of vision, as it also records hundreds of teachings by and stories about other Hasidic figures from across Eastern Europe and into the mid-nineteenth century.

Until now, this entire body of literature has been viewed as a single, monolithic source, with traditions in one layer used to make conclusions about another with no regard for the chronological or sociological distance between them. This methodology is a direct result of the use of print anthologies, which have not only introduced typographical errors but also conflated, cut, and rearranged the manuscript texts, thereby removing them from their original context, obscuring information as basic as the identity of the speaker and disallowing any possibility of diachronic comparison. This only compounds the existing obstacles to reading the massive Koretser-Bershider literature, which, like most of its contemporaries, does not present the masters' teachings in a systematic or even consistent way (which is not to say that there is no consistency of thought). This is a commonplace in the study of Hasidic literature, which is focused on delivering homiletic inspiration attuned to its audience.

What has been less discussed in scholarly treatments of Hasidic homilies is their omnivorous and synthetic use of traditional material. Not only is much of that material itself a *mélange* of centuries of contradictory traditions, but the Hasidic preachers also use the concepts and language found there in a way quite reminiscent of the contemporary *melis̥* style of rhetoric, which strings together phrases from biblical, rabbinic, and other Jewish literatures, resulting in new compositions that are heavy on allusive meaning but light on clarity and that prioritise locating their original claims within the discourse of the accepted tradition over foregrounding their originality.³⁶

36 This being the case, I am sceptical of the value of labeling various Hasidic preachers as "pantheists" or "panentheists," labels that might easily be used in the discussion that follows. The alternative offered by Tsippi Kauffman, that we "map out" the Hasidic preachers according to more particular sub-criteria of pantheism and panentheism, such

If we go looking for texts to suit a pre-existing agenda, we are likely to find them in Rebbe Pinhas's teachings, or almost any Hasidic source, but this would not help us to understand those sources any better. Rather than using an etic approach that attempts to impose foreign categories onto unruly texts or to find a particular feature within their wildly diverse expressions, here I will use an emic approach that allows the texts to suggest the central terms and concepts and set the conditions of inquiry as a whole.

I will offer one example that was fundamental in the genesis of this study. Although Koretser-Bershider literature contains a number of texts discussing the supernal realms in language typical of both the classical Kabbalah and contemporary Hasidic teachings, a review of the entire corpus reveals that Rebbe Pinhas in fact focused his attention on objects and actions in the material world. This propensity is much more visible when reading the Koretser manuscripts rather than print anthologies, which, following the interests of their Hasidic editors and readers, give preference to the more stereotypically "Hasidic" subjects; even the rather thorough *Imrey Pinhas ha-Šalem*, which contains a version of most of Rebbe Pinhas's teachings, nevertheless achieves the same effect by mixing Koretser and Bershider texts and organising them into topics, which—again—are aligned with the paradigms of its editor and intended readers, so that more typically "Hasidic" teachings appear in the early sections on the weekly portion and in such thematic sections as "Torah," "Prayer," and "Service of God," while Rebbe Pinhas's teachings on the material world appear in the final and smaller sections, "Man" and "The World and the Fullness Thereof."³⁷

as a personalisation of God versus an impersonal divinity; determinism, necessity, and contingency; acosmism, monism, dualism, or pluralism; pure immanentism or partial transcendence, and the like (*In All Your Ways* [Hebrew] [Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2009], ch. 1, esp. 34–35 and 40–43) may generate a more productive discussion about the figures under discussion, but it still rarely allows for any kind of meaningful categorisation, since these subcategories are also frequently inapplicable to the subjects and, even if they are applicable, clarity remains hard to come by for the reasons discussed above.

37 Frankel himself is quite forthcoming in explaining that his anthology is not a critical edition and is not meant to meet the needs of scholars, but is rather a collection of teachings aimed at the contemporary Hasidic reader who is seeking religious inspiration (personal conversation, November 2019). This is not to say that the work serves no academic purpose; on the contrary, it is a priceless tool, but it must be used properly, which is to say that scholars must do the same kind of textual legwork that Frankel himself did in editing the anthology. It should also be pointed out that Frankel himself notes Rebbe Pinhas's unique focus on this-worldly phenomena (*Imrey Pinhas ha-Šalem*, 2:463), though the silent impact of the anthology's structure remains.

By approaching Rebbe Pinhas through a thorough study of the manuscript library and allowing the texts themselves to define the issues, we can achieve a much clearer image of the master and his school and offer more accurate answers to the central questions of this study, which we are now ready to address: 1) What is the meaning of Rebbe Pinhas's unique status as a “divine philosopher” and “divine scientist”? 2) How does Rebbe Pinhas model his unique approach to the integration of Kabbalah, philosophy, science, and ethics, and how does this manifest in his relationship to the material world? 3) What ramifications do the answers to the first two questions have for our understanding of the development of Hasidism?

5 Rebbe Pinhas of Korets, the “Divine Philosopher” and “Divine Scientist”

While Hasidic writers frequently equate philosophy with Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, I would suggest that this reveals more about those writers' notions of Jewish philosophy than about Rebbe Pinhas's actual reading habits. If Rebbe Pinhas was so effusive about the *Guide's* formative role in his development, we should expect to find direct evidence to that effect in his teachings and in his disciples' personal recollections of him. I have found nothing in the Koretser-Bershider literature akin to the statements from later Hasidic tradition cited above. In fact, my review of the literature has revealed minimal references to the *Guide* (addressed below); only one of them is explicit, which only names the *Guide* in order to contradict it.³⁸ Nor do we find the technical language of the *Guide* or its philosophical sources in these teachings.³⁹

At first glance, this seems to be in keeping with Heschel's claim that Rebbe Pinhas abandoned his study of medieval philosophy.⁴⁰ However, in support of this claim, Heschel cites a long and tortuous text that cannot, to my mind, withstand Heschel's reading for multiple lexical and semantic reasons. Despite its length, I will cite the text almost in full here, since it is relevant not only to

38 MS Vertman 6, 226.

39 Maimonides plays a much more visible role as a legal authority in the Koretser and Bershider circles, but Jewish readers had for centuries separated Maimonides the legalist from Maimonides the Aristotelian, and the one does not necessarily reflect on the other (see Nadler, “The Rambam Revival”).

40 Heschel writes that Rebbe Pinhas “devoted himself to the study of the philosophical works of the Middle Ages, but found little solace in them. He later observed that philosophy was no longer worthy of his consideration.” (Heschel, “Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec,” 4).

contesting Heschel's claim, but also to the new portrait of Rebbe Pinhas I will subsequently offer:

He spoke at great length on the matter of those who study the writings of Isaac Luria, warning them not to corporealise [the concepts] at all, heaven forbid [...] for there is no corporeality there at all, and one should rather join thought to thought, as when a man studies the *Zohar* or the *Tiqqunim*, sometimes he feels tremendous pleasure, and the pleasure of this unification is more spiritual above (and he said that Maimonides wrote that even women should be warned against imagining that there is fire or water or any corporeal thing above, heaven forbid, and it is forbidden!) and he said that it is stated in the book *Ševiley Emunah* that a man came to [the author] and that it seemed to him that the man stood in his thought [...] and spoke to him. [...] But how is it possible that anything corporeal like a man could appear in thought? And he said as follows: "In my youth, I would study the books related to the matter mentioned above and I would warn the community very, very severely, and many, many times, and now it is of little value to me" (these were his words [in Yiddish]: "It is now beneath me"), and he also said that it is written in *Ḥovot ha-Levavot* that when a person conducts himself as prescribed there, then he will see with an eye that is no eye and hear with an ear that is no ear. He also said, "Once I saw the entirety of *'Eš Ḥayyim* on a single page of *Sefer ha-Yašar*."⁴¹

Of the many objections to Heschel's reading,⁴² I will limit myself here to pointing out that this very text cites Maimonides's *Guide* as authoritative,⁴³ uses the medieval moral-philosophical work *Ḥovot ha-Levavot* of Baḥya ibn Paqudah to resolve the metaphysical quandary under discussion, and even equates

41 MS Liqūṭim Yeqarim Rimanov, 28a–b. The manuscript versions (cf. MS Liqūṭey Amarim Kalov, §187–189) differ slightly from the version Heschel was using—*Midraš Pinḥas* (Bilgoray, 1927)—which, in keeping with its reputation, had omitted and misprinted a number of words.

42 From this long source, Heschel cites only a single Yiddish phrase and its translation—"Atzund tzu nidrik far mir" (now beneath me)—obscuring the particular connection (or lack thereof) between the text and the conclusion he draws from it. However, it seems clear that he reads the phrase "the matter mentioned above" as referring to the possibility of a man appearing in someone's thought, and by extension understands "the books related to the matter" to be books of medieval philosophy, of which Rebbe Pinhas purportedly said, "it is now beneath me."

43 This is the only such instance I have encountered in the literature.

the medieval work of natural philosophy *Ševiley Emunah*⁴⁴ with Lurianic Kabbalah!⁴⁵ Rather than abandoning the study of medieval philosophical works, Rebbe Pinhas continued to quote them and integrated them into his system of thought.

Beyond his use of discrete philosophical texts, however, even more central to my presentation of Rebbe Pinhas’s thought is its very mode of inquiry, in which it functions as a form of natural philosophy.

6 Rebbe Pinhas’s Kabbalah as Natural Philosophy

To begin my presentation of Rebbe Pinhas’s worldview, we must start with a text that has yet to be addressed in scholarship on his thought, despite the fact that he quotes it repeatedly: *Sefer Yeširah*. A leading scholar has described this work as the “earliest attempt [by a Jewish author] to articulate what can be called a comprehensive [...] natural philosophy,”⁴⁶ and it provides the foundational proof-text for Rebbe Pinhas’s explanations of the cosmos, in which the distinctions between natural and supernatural, physics and metaphysics, and human and divine dissolve, such that all phenomena are treated as expressions of the same singular divine existent. Rebbe Pinhas articulates this theocosmology through a phrase from *Sefer Yeširah* 1:7, which we may translate as “Ten *sefirot* of nothingness, their end embedded in their beginning and their beginning in their end, joined like the flame within the coal, as one Lord with no other, and before one, what will you count?”⁴⁷

This line has been applied throughout kabbalistic history to the *sefirot* of *keter* and *malkhut* (usually understood as the highest and lowest of the decad respectively) in order to describe *malkhut* as the final expression of the divine Will within *keter*.⁴⁸ Rebbe Pinhas, however, identifies the two entities as one in unequivocal terms: “*malkhut* is *keter*.”⁴⁹ For him, these two entities are not

44 On Meir ben Isaac Aldabi’s *Ševiley Emunah* (Riva de Trento, 1518), see Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 44–45, 52, and F.S. Bodenheimer, “On Some Hebrew Encyclopedias of the Middle Ages,” *Archives internationales d’histoire des sciences* 6 (1953): 3–13.

45 It is also worth noting that on another occasion when Rebbe Pinhas researches the same matter, he consults the Lurianic *Ša’ar ha-Yihudim* (MS Kitvey Qodeš 5216, 32a, §141).

46 Y. Tzvi Langerman, “Natural Philosophy, Jewish,” in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Springer Online, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9729-4_351.

47 *Sefer Yeširah* 1:7 (my translation).

48 For a classic articulation, see Eliyahu de Vidas, *Rešit Hōhkmah, Ša’ar ha-Anawah*.

49 MS Rimanov 13b, MS Kalov §73; for possible adumbrations of such an identification, see *Tiqquney Zohar* 4a; Moses Cordovero, *Tomer Devorah*, chs. 2 and 9; for a treatment

only more intimately connected to each other than the other *sefirot* are (as in the *Tiqqune Zohar*), still less the “top” and “bottom” of a hierarchy (as in most medieval Kabbalah); they are in fact *the exact same entity*. What is more, Rebbe Pinhas identifies *keter* with *ein sof*, the divine Naught and the *deus absconditus*, meaning that the ineffable source of all existence and the most concrete manifestation of that source are but different experiences of the exact same *ontos*.⁵⁰ This being the case, for Rebbe Pinhas, *malkhut* is not the dimmest but—reversing centuries of kabbalistic tradition—the fullest expression of divine reality: “In all the worlds, there is no revelation of divinity as in this world, which is called ‘lowly.’”⁵¹

Nowhere is Rebbe Pinhas’s apotheosis of the physical world so clear as in his interpretation of the rabbinic phrase *ke-hadeyn qamša’ de-levušey miney u-vey*. Meaning “like the snail [or locust], whose clothing is part of it,” this expression was originally used to explain why the angel in Ezekiel’s vision is described as wearing clothes; that is, the clothing is not something separate that the angel wore, but rather part of the angel, just as the shell is an organic part of a snail or the exoskeleton part of a locust.⁵² This rather bizarre image was taken up by several kabbalists and used to explain the relationship between various levels of the Godhead. Though the transfer of this image from angel to God was rather daring, it was accompanied by a conservative shift: while the midrash used the image to stress the unity of angel and garment and to remove any consideration of a separate layer of clothing, in kabbalistic literature this image is inevitably accompanied by a qualifying statement precisely stressing the difference between God and His garments, in which He is to be found, but with

that also ontologically links *malkhut* more closely to *keter* than the other *sefirot*, see Yaakov Koppel, *Ša’ar Gan ‘Eden*, treated in Shaul Magid, *Hasidism Incarnate: Hasidism, Christianity, and the Construction of Modern Judaism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), ch. 4. It should be noted that there is an entire history of philosophical and scientific commentaries on *Sefer Yeširah*, which unfortunately exceed the bounds of this article (see Raphael Jospe, “Early Philosophical Commentaries on the *Sefer Yeširah*: Some Comments,” *Revue des études juives* 149 [1990]: 369–415, and the bibliography in Yehuda Leibes, *Torat ha-Yeširah šel Sefer Yeširah* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 2000).

50 “*Alef* is the *ein sof* [...] and *keter* is *alef*” (MS Monashtrits, 96a, §3). Rebbe Pinhas rarely addresses the theory of *ein sof* and *keter* directly, preferring to speak of their manifestations in *malkhut*; this identification, however, is supported by his oblique references to *keter* and *ein sof*, which are too vague to be helpful here. Two basic positions have existed since the medieval Kabbalah: that *Keter* is either the first emanation of *ein sof* or is coexistent with it.

51 Frankel, *Imrey Pinhas ha-Šalem*, 459, §7.

52 *Gen. Rab.* 21:5.

which He is not to be identified; what is more, this differentiation is always made at some cosmic level far above the material world.⁵³

The image, along with its new kabbalistic valence, was employed by early Hasidic preachers, some of them in Rebbe Pinhas’s immediate environment, such as the Besht, R. Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye, and R. Moshe Haim Efraim of Sudytkov. These are generally in line with their medieval predecessors, using a number of kabbalistic phrases and circumlocutions in order to maintain a firm distinction between God and the world.⁵⁴ One formulation by R. Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye seems to approach identifying God with the world: “There is nothing

53 Menachem Recanati writes: “Everything is made through Him, and they are called garments [...] nevertheless there is a difference between He who blesses and those that are blessed” (*Commentary on the Torah* [Venice, 1523], Ber. 1:3). Cordovero reads this as describing the *sefirot* themselves, specifically the relationship between the “vessel” and the “essence” of each *sefirah*: “The *ḥesed* that is the essence requires the *ḥesed* that is the vessel in order to act, and the *ḥesed* that is the vessel requires the *ḥesed* that is the essence, and they are utterly united, and this is [the meaning of] ‘like the snail, whose clothing is part of it,’ for the clothing by itself is like an inanimate stone, while without the clothing the actions of [the essence] are nonexistent” (*Pardes Rimmonim* [Cracow, 1591] 4:9); elsewhere, he uses the analogy in a similar fashion to describe the relationship between the *sefirot* and the divine Throne (*ibid.*, 16:3) and the divine Names (*ibid.*, 20:1). On one occasion, Yosef Karo stresses the unity of the subject, but his subject is the Divine Presence and the *sefirot* (*Maggid Mešarim* [Lublin, 1646], 2); when the discussion moves from the divine *sefirot* to the worlds below, the stress on distinction is unmistakable, and Karo actually uses the image of the snail to stress that distinction: “All the worlds depend on His utterance, but they are not His essence like the ten *sefirot*. Between the world of total unity and the world of total separation there is a world with a side of unity and a side of separation [...] and it is separated from the ten supernal *sefirot* like the snail whose clothing is part of it” (*ibid.*, 22). Hayyim Vital applies the unity of the image only to the World of *Ašilut*, where “its garment is not separate, as it is in the world of *Bri’ah* and *Yeširah*” (Hayyim Vital, *Eš Hayyim* [Korets, 1785], 4:3).

54 R. Moshe Haim Efraim applies the image to the connection of Jacob the Patriarch’s soul to the *ein sof* (*Degel Maḥaneh Efrayim* [Korets, 1810], *Wa-Yeše*, s.v. *wa-yehi ha-‘aṭufim*). R. Yaakov Yosef, expanding upon some of the Besht’s teachings, explains the saying in a number of ways: “The power of the Maker is in the made [...] and in every form of suffering there is a holy spark from Him, but it is within many garments” (*Toldot Ya’akov Yosef* [Korets, 1780], *Wa-Yehi*, §1; compare the similar explanation in *Šemot*, §17). Elsewhere, R. Yaakov Yosef quotes an immanentist teaching from the Besht and then continues: “This being so, *all the angels and all the supernal chambers* were created and made, as if it were possible, from His essence, like the snail [...]” (*Ben Porat Yosef* [Korets, 1781], *Miqeš*, s.v. *pan bet ‘al pi diber mori pesuq wa-yehi mi-qeš*, emphasis added). This teaching would be reprinted in *Keter Shem Tov*, with Yaakov Yosef’s addition appearing as the words of the Besht (1:39). The opening of the next teaching implies that the Besht had a radical reading of the phrase similar to Rebbe Pinhas’s—“there is nothing separate from God, for the creation of the world and its fullness is like the snail [...]”—but then Yaakov Yosef walks back the radicality and concludes with a rather conservative interpretation: “If so, then

in the world that is separate from Him [...] and everything is one unity, like the snail. And this is a great secret not to be revealed to everyone.” However, in its context we see that the great secret here is that one’s wayward thoughts come from God, in order to be “raised up” and returned to God.⁵⁵ That is to say, this teaching has nothing at all to say about the physical world.

No one else explains the image of the snail with the plainspoken boldness of Rebbe Pinhas, who declares on more than one occasion: “The world *is* the Blessed Holy One. Understand this.”⁵⁶ Contra the qualifications of the medieval kabbalists, the original daring of this rabbinic image is allowed to stand, equating the “snail” with its “clothing” rather than distinguishing between the two; furthermore, it is now applied not to an angel, nor to various gradations in the higher worlds, but to God Himself and the very material world around us, which are pronounced to be one and the same.⁵⁷ This is a level of divine manifestation, referred to in recent scholarship as “incarnation,” usually reserved for such things as the letters of the Torah, the human soul, or, in rare cases, a single individual.⁵⁸ Rebbe Pinhas, however, sees the entire world as an incarnation.

Rebbe Pinhas claims that sharing this vision of existence is the singular goal of his teaching: “All my words are to show in all things that the Blessed Holy One is there, and in this way to bring the messiah.”⁵⁹ Such a display of divine embodiment, down to the smallest degree, is a messianic act because Rebbe Pinhas sees divine revelation in the lowest world—and the human comprehension of it—as the very purpose of creation: referring to the midrash that

the spirit of the Omnipresent One *and the spirit of created beings* are united in their root” (*Ben Porat Yosef, Wa-Yehi*).

55 *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef, Wa-Yaqhel*, §2, s.v. *ba-pesug wa-yaqhel*.

56 MS Liqueim Amarim Kalov, §94, and *Midraš Pinhas, quntres 2*, §6 (my emphasis); all translations of the Koretser-Bershider literature are my own. This is precisely the original definition of pantheism offered by the Irish philosopher John Toland (1670–1722), the self-proclaimed pantheist who apparently coined the term (Toland, *Socinianism Truly Stated, by a Pantheist* [1705]).

57 For this reason, I heartily disagree with Margolin’s characterisation of Rebbe Pinhas’s use of this image as being “in the spirit of Cordovero” and all the more so with his identification of it with Cordovero’s concept of essence and vessel in the *sefrot* (*The Human Temple*, 262–63).

58 See, *inter alia*, Elliot R. Wolfson, “Judaism and Incarnation: The Imaginal Body of God,” in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. Tivka Frymer-Kensky et al. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 239–54; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), ch. 5; Magid, *Hasidism Incarnate*, chs. 1–3.

59 *Ge'ulas Yiśro'el* (Ostroh, 1821), §10. Note that he says—in a locution that could easily be lost for the sake of a smoother translation—not “I show that the Blessed Holy One is in everything” in a general way, but specifically, “I show in every thing that the Blessed Holy One is there.”

God created and destroyed many worlds before creating our own, he explains that “since the purpose of creation was to comprehend His divinity, the worlds that could not be comprehended by thought were part of the mystery of ‘[creating] and destroying,’ for this is not the essential purpose of creation. Understand this.”⁶⁰ For Rebbe Pinhas, this not only applies to the worlds that preceded ours in time, but also to the supernal worlds that are the focus of most kabbalistic literature, including that of many of his Hasidic peers; these worlds, being beyond comprehension, do not achieve the purpose of creation and so are secondary in importance to the physical world around us.⁶¹ This ethos, even more than Rebbe Pinhas’s explanation of the image of the snail, reveals the differences between him and his Hasidic contemporaries in the extent to which he sees the world as an embodiment of the divine.

In this vein, Rebbe Pinhas explicitly forbids the bifurcation of reality into a “sacred” realm worthy of our attention and a “profane” one that was to be ignored, saying: “Whoever says that Torah matters are one thing and worldly matters are another is a heretic.”⁶² Based on this radical equation, Rebbe Pinhas proceeds to offer explanations for an incredible variety of natural phenomena, in the mode of a proto-science. This is not the rational science inherited from the Greeks; however, as Gad Freudenthal has insightfully pointed out, we should not reduce interest in science and philosophy to the pursuit of their Greco-Arabic forms, for “the absence of reception of the rationalist tradition does not imply a lack of interest in nature and its workings.”⁶³

What is especially striking about Rebbe Pinhas’s strongly worded declaration is that it not only overturns the traditional rabbinic hierarchy of values, but it also directly contradicts the “conscious attempt” by previous figures, most especially the Maharal of Prague, “to disentangle physics from metaphysics, the secular from the sacred, science from theology.”⁶⁴ It was this “epistemological restructuring of knowledge” that “formulated a theological structure whereby Jewish faith was safeguarded from [rationalist] science and science protected from the unwarranted intrusions of Jewish faith,” allowing

60 MS Liqutey Amarim Kalov 36, §44, citing *Gen. Rab* 3:7.

61 Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer makes a similar point (*Hasidism as Mysticism: Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth-Century Hasidic Thought*, trans. Jonathan Chipman, 232), but it seems that because of the limits imposed by her view of Rebbe Pinhas as a representative of the Besht’s teachings, she was unable to follow her own logic to the end and recognise the truly original worldview this teaching represented.

62 MS Kitvey Qodeš 5216, 69a, §175.

63 Gad Freudenthal, “Introduction,” *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 8 (2009): 19.

64 Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 369.

both to coexist within the Jewish world.⁶⁵ Rebbe Pinhas effected precisely the opposite, joining physics to metaphysics, the secular to the sacred, and science to theology, thus formulating a theological structure in which the pursuit of knowledge of the natural world, rather than being a threat to the Jewish faith that must be kept at bay or an entirely unrelated endeavor, is viewed as essential to it and to the messianic enterprise.

This is highlighted by a contrast with how Rebbe Pinhas viewed “external wisdoms”; that is, secular knowledge that is not aimed at recognising the divinity in its subject matter. Rebbe Pinhas himself engaged (extensively, by his own admission) in such studies: in his youth, which according to family tradition was spent in Shklov, Lithuania, he was “fully learned and expert” (*mušlam u-baqi*) in such subjects as grammar, mechanics, astronomy, geometry, and possibly meteorology.⁶⁶ Their value, however, was instrumental as a vehicle to Torah study and spiritual leadership: “In general, one becomes a chariot for the other, and it is like the way a child only loves fruit and dairy foods. [...] And because [Rebbe Pinhas] learned all kinds of wisdoms in his youth, he has a connection with people and can raise them up in his adulthood.”⁶⁷ This paradigm is much closer to the Maharal’s, which compares secular studies to a ladder by which one ascends to Torah study.⁶⁸

However, when these subjects are no longer seen as discrete and external bodies of knowledge but are synthesised into Rebbe Pinhas’s “divine science,” they themselves become a form of Torah study, as we saw above. By recognising words, shapes, and weather patterns as the embodiment of *keter/ein sof*, Rebbe Pinhas transforms such “external” bodies of knowledge into the “innerness” of the divine form embodied in *malkhut*.

Rebbe Pinhas’s continuing engagement with secular learning in general, along with his approach to elevating it to the level of Kabbalah, is on full display in the following tradition:

On all nights other than Hanukkah, he insisted that shutters must be closed at the start of the night and that the shutters must be on the outside and not the inside, for it is written in the *Zohar*, *Raya Mehemna*, *Pinhas*, that at night, the gates of the Garden of Eden are closed, and the eyes, the gates of the heart, are closed so that they will not see the demons. Thus far [the language of the *Zohar*]. And just as windows have

65 Ruderman, 82, 90.

66 MS Kitvey Qodeš 5216, 81a; §62, MS Rochel, 124a.

67 MS Rochel, 124a.

68 *Netivot ‘Olam, Netiv ha-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1980), 59–60.

doors known as *ladin*, so too the eyes have eyelids, and just as the eyes are closed, one must also close the shutters [...] and so one sleeps at night and his vitality remains only in the heart, where a quarter measure of blood gathers, and this is the *qista' de-ḥayyuta'* [...]. And so the shutters must be on the outside and not on the inside, like eyelids.⁶⁹

Thus far, Rebbe Pinhas has brought theosophical texts from the *Zohar*⁷⁰ and Vital's writings and applied them to his medical theory. It is worth noting that Vital was himself likely applying medical theory to Luria's theosophy when he spoke of the *qista' de-ḥayyuta'* or sixtarius of vitality that remains in *ze'ir anpin* when He sleeps and in the sleeping human body.⁷¹ He is also reflecting a commonly held belief about the ability of such physical barriers to act as shutters that block the entrance (or exit) of demons, as explained in the contemporary text on end-of-life issues, *Ma'avar Yaboq*.⁷²

However, Rebbe Pinhas then offers what he sees as the conceptual underpinning of his advice:

And he said, “For everything that is in a person is also in a house. The windows are the eyes, the oven bakes like the stomach, and there is a vessel that takes away the waste, etc. And so the windows must be closed with doors from the outside like eyelids, and if they are on the inside, it is like a person with the blindness that they call *štar* [glaucoma] [...].”⁷³

The shift from man as a microcosm to man as a house is sudden and unexplained. The microcosm paradigm is so deeply engrained in the Kabbalah that it is rare that one encounters a deviation from it. The commentary on *Sefer Yeširah* attributed to Avraham ben David does compare the organs of the body to cooking vessels, and *Raya Mehemna*, in what could be seen as a continuation of the passage cited above, adopts this metaphor, but primarily within the broader context of comparing the parts of the body to the cosmos

69 MS Kitvey Qodeš 1841, 14a.

70 *Zohar* 3:222a.

71 See Vital, *Pri 'Eš Ḥayyim*, Recitation of the Shema before Retiring, 3:6–7; Rosh Hashannah, 5:29; 'Eš Ḥayyim, 41:2. For Vital's application of medical theory to theosophy and vice versa, see Assaf Tamari, “The Bodily Discourse in Lurianic Kabbalah” [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Ben-Gurion University, 2016).

72 Aharon Berekhiah of Modena, *Ma'avar Yaboq* (Amsterdam, 1732). See his discussion on the need to open the windows in a room with a dead body in it so that the demons can leave (part 1, *Šiftey Šedek*, ch. 26).

73 MS Kitvey Qodeš 1841, 14a.

as represented by the Zodiac, the four faces of the angels in Ezekiel's vision, and the divine form.⁷⁴ Moreover, details from *Raya Mehemna* are repeated by Cordovero and Vital—in fact, in the very chapter following the one cited by Rebbe Pinhas above.⁷⁵ The particulars of Rebbe Pinhas's language, however, do not match the language there.

We can immediately see the reason for the shift from microcosm to house, however, as well as the source of Rebbe Pinhas's language, if we compare his teaching to the scientific encyclopedia *Ma'aseh Tuvyah*, which was written by the polyglot Jew Tobias Cohen. In his introduction to the medical portion of the work, entitled "A New House," Cohen writes:

The sages of old called man a small world [...] and King Solomon [...] compared man to a small city [...] but I, of little worth, ask what good is it to be compared to the world or a city [...] it is enough that man be one of the towers or houses [...] as I have shown you that [the structure of man is like] the structure of the house and its vessels [...] his eyes are two windows [...] and the stomach the baker's oven [...] and from the stomach, the spleen takes away the thick blood and the waste.⁷⁶

Here, the house metaphor dominates and, even more tellingly, the details and language match precisely, as can be seen more clearly in the original texts. This verbal description is followed by a visual depiction of the human body alongside a house built in parallel form, showing windows for eyes, an oven for a stomach, and a vessel taking away the waste.

Tobias Cohen was a Polish Jew who graduated from medical school in Padua in 1683. Twenty-five years later, he published *Ma'aseh Tuvyah*, which made its way through Eastern Europe, introducing the medical and philosophical concepts taught in the Italian colleges to the Jewish audience there and primarily serving as a medical textbook for healers of all kinds.⁷⁷ Rebbe Pinhas was one of those healers who absorbed the concepts, terminology, and remedies found therein.

Often referred to as a medical treatise, it in fact contains much more: while the second half is devoted to medicine, its first half offers classical and

74 *Zohar* 3:223a–b, 234b–235a.

75 Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 23:19; Vital, *Eṣ Ḥayyim*, 40:10, 49:5.

76 Tobias Cohen, *Ma'aseh Tuvyah* (Amsterdam, 1732), 105–6.

77 The single best treatment of the book, its context, and its impact is David Ruderman's chapter "On the Diffusion of Scientific Knowledge within the Jewish Community: The Medical Textbook of Tobias Cohen," in his *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe*, 229–55; other sources are adduced there.

contemporary treatments of metaphysics, astronomy, geography, ethnography, and alchemy, establishing its medical theory on the basis of natural philosophy. It also shares many classical elements with Kabbalah, as evident in the similarities mentioned above. These shared elements, along with Cohen's efforts to make the “new sciences” both palatable and accessible to traditional Jews, certainly made the work a prime candidate for Rebbe Pinhas's synthesising thought. Indeed, it should be noted that despite the existence of kabbalistic passages (some close at hand) that could have been cited, Rebbe Pinhas chose here to draw from *Ma'aseh Tuvyah*, seeing this work of “outside wisdom” as most clearly illustrating the divine truth manifest in eyelids and eye disease.

The system of thought that results from such a “theological structure,” though sui generis in all of its particulars, resembles the pre-Socratics's search for the fundamental element(s) as well as modern-day physicists's search for a “theory of everything.” It also bears certain resemblances to previous efforts to synthesise Kabbalah, philosophy, and science, such as in Provence and Padua, but with a critical distinction: Rebbe Pinhas did not seek to synthesise Kabbalah with philosophical systems of thought and their bodies of literature, such as Neoplatonism or Aristotelianism.⁷⁸ Rather, in his teachings, Kabbalah itself functions as a form of natural philosophy. Specifically, it does so in three key aspects: its attempts to explain natural phenomena, its use of empirical evidence, and its comprehensive scope.

7 Attempts to Explain Natural Phenomena

Rebbe Pinhas's teachings attempt to explain the nature of the physical world and the causes of natural phenomena. He expresses interest in questions that simply do not arise in the sermons of his peers, but rather are more typical of natural philosophical and pre-scientific inquiry. For example, in addition to his query regarding the vision experienced by the author of *Ševiley Emunah* mentioned above, upon hearing the gossip that a certain R. Yeruham from his town had been lifted up by the souls of the dead, Rebbe Pinhas

⁷⁸ On these efforts, see, *inter alia*, Freudenthal, *Science in Medieval Jewish Cultures*; Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*; Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Moshe Idel, “The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance” [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 4, no. 1 (1982): 60–112; Boaz Huss, “Mysticism versus Philosophy in Kabbalistic Literature,” *Micrologus* 9 (2001): 125–35.

investigated the matter: how souls, which are entirely spiritual, could have lifted up a physical body. Afterwards, he said that perhaps it had occurred on the night of the New Moon, for at the New Moon souls become slightly embodied. And he investigated this and found that it was in fact on the night of the New Moon.⁷⁹

Rather than capitalising on the obvious moralistic features of this tale, Rebbe Pinhas focuses on the event's scientific workings.

In a similar vein, he posits a thoroughly scientific question: "If it is the nature of the element of fire to ascend, how does the warmth of the sun warm the world?"⁸⁰ It is not unusual in and of itself that Rebbe Pinhas should have adopted the originally pre-Socratic concept of the elements; such basic cosmological concepts had been integrated into Jewish thought in the Middle Ages⁸¹ and occasionally appeared in the sermons of his fellow preachers. However, while they generally take these concepts at face value and use them for their own homiletic purposes, Rebbe Pinhas seeks not only to use the paradigm of the elements, but also to understand it as a scientific concept on its own terms.

To answer his own question, Rebbe Pinhas draws not only on Maimonides's presentation of Aristotelian cosmology in his *Mishneh Torah*,⁸² but also apparently on ideas in the *Guide*: "It is because the spheres are completely intellectual in nature, and it is the will of the Creator that [the sun's fire] should warm the world. This is the secret of the angel appointed over it. Understand."⁸³ Though citing the midrashic image of the appointed angel,⁸⁴ the reference to

79 MS Kitvey Qodeš 5216, 32a, §141. The concept of souls becoming slightly embodied on the night of the New Moon appears in Hayyim Vital's Lurianic text *Ša'ar ha-Yihudim*, ch. 4. Another tradition records a personal anecdote shared by Rebbe Pinhas: "I dreamed that I searched through every Torah scroll, and a person from that world [of the dead] came [...] and I began to feel him to investigate whether or not there was something real to him, something of this world (for he [i.e., Rebbe Pinhas] investigated this extensively, how it is that a man of spirit can take on a body and come to this world), and the dead man said, 'I have not come for that purpose [...]' (MS Kitvey Qodeš 5216, 44b). Aside from repeating the reference to Rebbe Pinhas's extensive investigations into the matter, this anecdote reveals that his initial expectation was that this man had come from the world of the dead specifically to tell him how the spiritual can manifest as physical.

80 MS Ketavim 29a, §119, referring to Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah, 3:9–10, 4:2.

81 See, *inter alia*, *Sefer Yeširah* 3:3, and *Zohar* 1:3a.

82 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah, 3:9–10, 4:2.

83 MS Ketavim 29a, §119, referring to Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah, 3:9–10, 4:2.

84 Salomon Buber, ed., *Midraš Tehillim* (Vilna, 1891), 440, §104. The concept of the appointed angel was central to the cosmology of the German Pietists (see, *inter alia*, *Sefer Hasidim* 305, 1160; Elazar of Worms, *Ḥokhmat ha-Nefeš* [Lemberg, 1876], 18a).

that image’s “secret” clearly implies an esoteric meaning behind it, that meaning likely being Maimonides’s explanation of angels as in fact being “all the forces of nature” and “even the elements, as in the verse, ‘Who makes winds His angels, the flaming fire His ministers.’”⁸⁵

Elsewhere, Rebbe Pinhas relies on kabbalistic concepts such as divine Names rather than philosophical ones in order to explain the natural world, but again his focus is on matters that simply do not interest his peers:

He said seventy-two winds blow every day, and he said that this parallels the Name of Seventy-Two, which has the numerical value of *hesed* (faithfulness), and this is the meaning of “God’s faithfulness never ceases,” for, if not for the winds, the world could not endure, and so the Blessed Holy One created birds, for they stir the winds with their wings. [...] And so there are fish in the water, so that it does not stagnate, for they move their fins this way and that. And the proof of this is that in a well, where there are no fish, one must constantly draw water so that it does not turn stagnant.⁸⁶

Though Rebbe Pinhas’s explanations might strike us as naive, at times understanding the process of cause and effect in ways very different from or even contrary to our current understanding, the key point is that it is precisely these processes that are of primary interest to him.

Rebbe Pinhas did not only address such lofty matters as the sun and the winds. On the contrary, no matter was beneath the dignity of his theological gaze and, what is more, it seems that he took a special interest in pointing out the cosmic significance of the smallest details. For example,

fleas always bite on the back side of the body, for things from the outside derive their vitality from the back side of divinity, but they cannot derive vitality from the head, where the mind is, and so you will not find fleas on the head. And if a man is flea-bitten on his head, it is because of his wicked thoughts, heaven forbid, may the Merciful One protect us.⁸⁷

85 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2:6, citing Ps 104:4.

86 MS Paris-Rudi 82b, §341, citing Ps 52:3. The Name of Seventy-Two is an ancient Name of God that appears in two basic forms, one derived from an atomistic reading of Ex 14:19–21 and the other from a spelling out of the letters of the Ineffable Name such that their numerical value equals seventy-two (see, *inter alia*, Rashi on *b. Sukkah* 45a; Vital, *‘Es Hayyim*, 1:5).

87 MS Liqūṭim Yeqarim Rimanov 12a, §8. †.

Here, Rebbe Pinhas expands upon the kabbalistic concept that the “inside” or “front” of the divine form, as well as its upper regions, are holier than the “outside” or “back side,” which, like the lower regions, are less holy. A person, whose physical body is in every way a microcosm of the divine macrocosm, is thus afflicted by such “outside” creatures as fleas on the correlating parts of his body.

Consider too the following explication of human gastrointestinal issues, based on the double-meaning of the words for “big” and “small,” which in Lurianic terms describe psycho-spiritual states of maturity and immaturity, expansion and constriction, in both the divine and human realms (*gadlut* and *qatnut*) and in common parlance refer to defecation and urination (*gedolim* and *qetanim*): “One must serve God in *qatnut* and in *gadlut*. And when a man is frequently sad, he lacks the state of *gadlut*, and so they take away his *gedolim* and he suffers from constipation. The opposite is also true: when he is only frivolous, they take away his *qetanim*.”⁸⁸

While Rebbe Pinhas often trades on the affinity between the human and the divine, he just as often speaks of humans as being on a spectrum with all created things, whether discussing their sleep habits, eating habits, or, as we will see in the next teaching, even the sexual habits of people and animals: “Camels mate back to back, and so there is no beast so dumb as the camel; cattle mate front to back, and so they have a bit of wisdom [...] while people couple face to face, and so they possess great wisdom. And even though fish may also mate face to face, they do not kiss.”⁸⁹

While Rebbe Pinhas’s statements about the natural world derive from his theology and often lead to ethical directives, knowledge of creation is not merely instrumental but is itself essential, possessing religious value in its own right. In the language of philosophy, it is not only *techne*, but a true *scientia*,⁹⁰ and so we encounter statements that are purely informative, with no explicit ethical ramifications. Among such statements are a number comparing the nature and habits of clean and unclean animals; for example: “All unclean animals see in the night and the dark, unlike people and clean animals, who cannot see in the dark but only in the day. This is because in the daytime, the power of the Garden of Eden rules, and it is a great intellect, and they cannot receive the great light of that mind.”⁹¹ Also: “The calls of clean birds are more pleasing than those of the unclean birds; because their song is from a high

88 MS Paris-Rudi 58b, §308.

89 MS Liqutim Amarim Kalov, §65.

90 Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 20.

91 MS Kitvey Qodeš 5216, 71b, §197, referencing *Zohar* 1:82b.

world, they are higher. Even chickens fly about in the air before the evening, and all singing animals fly in the air, for song is from the world of the angels.”⁹² Here, Rebbe Pinhas uses kabbalistic concepts as scientific axioms, with which he explains derivative phenomena.

Rebbe Pinhas expresses an interest in the categorisation of living things, particularly those that seem to defy categorisation. For such things, he uses the term *memušaʿ* or “intermediary,” taken from a similar term found in *ʿEš Hayyim*, the classic work of Lurianic cosmology; there, Hayyim Vital discusses the mediating entities “as written about by the sages of nature: between inanimate objects and plants are the corals, and between plants and animals are the *adney ha-šadeh* mentioned in Tractate *Kilʿayim* [...] and between animals and people is the ape.”⁹³ We know that for centuries, natural philosophers and natural historians posited the existence of intermediary categories for such things as coral, mushrooms, moss, and the like, knowledge of which clearly reached Vital, either directly or indirectly;⁹⁴ for Vital, this knowledge provided the perfect model for his discussion of the intermediation between the worlds, which is the true topic of the chapter.⁹⁵ Rebbe Pinhas’s interest, however, lies precisely in the original discussion from the “sages of nature,” which he revives, though likely without any direct access to the original texts. When he does so, he elaborates on the original idea, apparently seeking out as many examples from as many categories as he can: “In all things in the world there is a *memušaʿ*: between plants and inanimate objects, mushrooms; between plants and animals, the *adney ha-šadeh*; between animals and humans, the ape”;⁹⁶

92 MS Paris-Rudi 101b, §7.

93 Vital, *ʿEš Hayyim* 42:1, citing *m. Kil.* 8:5. The *adney ha-šadeh*, according to the *Or Zaruaʿ* commentary, are mythical creatures that are attached to the earth by their umbilical cord, a description repeated in *ʿEš Hayyim*. For some background, see Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (Mansfield Center, CT: Martino Publishing, 2013), 181–82.

94 The confusion over how to classify corals, the example used by Vital, dates back to Aristotle, who wrote of certain forms of sea life: “It is impossible to draw a boundary and determine their category” such that we “are at a loss to know whether they are animals or plants” (*Historia animalium* 8 [4–10], 588b; translation from James Bowen, *The Coral Reef Era: From Discovery to Decline* [New York: Springer, 2015], 175). These ideas were still being actively discussed in Vital’s time. For a discussion of which sources Vital was able to access, see Assaf Tamari, “The Body Discourse in Lurianic Kabbalah” [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2016), 26–40.

95 This is not to say that Vital, a physician and quite scientifically literate, was not engaged in his own scientific inquiry elsewhere (see Tamari, “The Body Discourse,” 26–40), but rather that such inquiry is not the point of the passage in *ʿEš Hayyim*, which was the source available to Rebbe Pinhas.

96 MS Kitvey Qodeš 5216, 25b, §73.

“between cultivated and wild-sewn, the *kwassen* that people eat”;⁹⁷ “between domesticated beasts and wild animals, the *kewi* [...] between vegetables and trees, the citron; look and you will find many such examples.”⁹⁸

For the sages of the Mishnah, the need to categorise the *kewi* and the *adney ha-šadeh* is entirely instrumental, in order that they may know which laws apply to their slaughter, eating, breeding, and so on. Likewise for Vital: though he too mentions a number of examples, they all serve as models for the medieval kabbalistic concept of entities that mediate between worlds, which is his focus. In Rebbe Pinhas’s teachings, however, the material is transformed into a far-reaching paradigm the focus of which is this world, not the supernal ones; as we will see below, he applies the concept of the *memuša‘* not only to living creatures, but to all forms of existence.

8 Use of Empirical Evidence

Rebbe Pinhas’s system of thought relies not only on theory but also on empirical evidence, which is to say that it employs both deductive and inductive reasoning; while he often follows the traditional order of kabbalistic thinking, beginning with a hermeneutically derived principle and applying it to various natural phenomena, as we saw above he quite often uses empirical evidence to articulate a theory of the cosmos and encourages his audience to seek out more empirical evidence on their own, as in the end of the last citation. In a particularly striking teaching, he even presents Moses, the ideal master and teacher, as originally transmitting the Torah to the Jews on the authority of empirical evidence: “Moses said [...] if you do not believe, ‘May my discourse come down as the rain’—draw evidence from the rain.”⁹⁹

The manuscript traditions have Rebbe Pinhas offering inductive arguments even when there are authoritative texts available. For example, when discussing the concepts of *qatnut* and *gadlut*, he could have quoted any number of Lurianic texts, but instead pointed to the biological nature of people and animals:

97 MS Paris-Rudi 77a, §265.

98 MS Liqutim Amarim Kalov, §19. The *kewi* (also vocalised *koy*) is an animal mentioned in the Mishnah and Talmud (see *b. Hul.* 80a for the fullest discussion).

99 MS Ketavim, §25. It is interesting to note that in the above-cited anecdote of Rebbe Pinhas reassuring the troubled reader of the *Guide* that God does indeed exist, he skips biblical proofs and logical argument and instead offers an argument from induction: “The proof is, how else would I know what you are thinking?” While this anecdote is likely apocryphal, it is nonetheless noteworthy that the collective memory of Rebbe Pinhas shows him arguing from empirical evidence.

In everything there is *qaṭnut* and *gadlut*, and the *qaṭnut* is according to the *gadlut*. For a one-day-old bull is already a bull in every respect and will not gain any qualities it does not already possess, and among all creatures there is nothing so lowly in its infancy (*qaṭnut*) as the human being, for an infant is helpless and immobile and the like, but in adulthood (*gadlut*) he rules over all creatures and even over the heavenly angels if he merits it.¹⁰⁰

At times, Rebbe Pinhas chooses empirical evidence over rabbinic and even biblical proof texts. For example, foregoing the locus classicus for Torah as primordial wisdom,¹⁰¹ he argues: “The Torah is at the centre of all wisdoms, and the proof is that when a Torah scholar wishes to learn any form of wisdom, he is able to understand it, but when a sage of secular wisdom wishes to learn Torah, he cannot.”¹⁰²

Rebbe Pinhas holds to this methodology even when arguing for the exclusive truth of the Jewish religion: after complaining about the stench of the local Ukrainian churches, he argues: “We need bring no greater proof of the truth of our faith than the fact that, even when thousands of Jews gather together in a synagogue, there is no foul smell among them.”¹⁰³ That is to say, it is not the chain of tradition going back to the revelation at Sinai (per Maimonides),¹⁰⁴ nor the communal memory of the miracles performed during the exodus (per Yehudah Halevi and Nahmanides),¹⁰⁵ nor even the wonders performed by living sages (as in the introductions to *Šivḥey ha-Bešṭ*)¹⁰⁶ that is the strongest proof of Judaism’s claim to truth, but rather the lack of odor of Jewish bodies in contrast to the stench of non-Jewish ones.¹⁰⁷

100 MS Liqūṭim Amarim Kalov, §22–23.

101 Proverbs 8 and the abundant rabbinic commentaries on it.

102 MS Ketavim, 53a. The idea of the Torah being the source of “all wisdoms” appears in Yehudah Halevi’s and Nahmanides’s writings—yet more authoritative sources he could have chosen to cite, but passed over in favour of empirical evidence (see Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery*, 30–36; Y. Tzvi Langermann, “Acceptance and Devaluation: Nahmanides’ Attitude towards Sciences,” *Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 [1992]: 233–45).

103 MS Liqūṭim Yeqarim Rimanov, 50b.

104 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah, 8.

105 See Halevi’s *Ha-Kuzari* 1:10–25 and, *inter alia*, Nahmanides’s explication in *Torat Hašem Temimah*.

106 Published in Kopyst in 1814.

107 For multiple discussions of the shift towards a focus on the body in the modern period, see Giuseppe Veltri and Maria Diemling, eds., *The Jewish Body: Corporeality, Society, and Identity in the Renaissance and Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). For a discussion of body focus in medieval Ashkenaz, see David I. Shyovitz, *A Remembrance of His*

Rebbe Pinhas's followers also seem to have adopted his esteem for empirical evidence. One tradition begins by quoting his interpretation of the verse "the way to come to God is very close" as applying to prayer, "for the Blessed Holy One contracts His Presence into every single utterance." The transmitter of that tradition then concludes, "And I know that it is so, for there is no greater sign than one's senses. Understand."¹⁰⁸ While Rebbe Pinhas's fellow preachers occasionally use real-life examples as support for their homiletical claims, none to my knowledge use empirical evidence and inductive reasoning with anywhere near the same frequency or to the same extent, prioritising it over such traditional forms of religious argument as the use of proof texts, received dogma, or traditional methods of textual interpretation, as he does.

There is a definite precedent for such an approach, however, which has only recently been identified by David I. Shyovitz. In his revisionist analysis, *A Remembrance of His Wonders: Nature and the Supernatural in Medieval Ashkenaz*, he disputes the governing paradigm that in medieval Ashkenaz, "the universe [was] [...] empty of harmony and beauty, and above all of *meaning*. No image of God is to be found there," arguing instead that "such a claim is belied by the consistent tendency to invest natural causation, empirical observation, and prosaic objects and phenomena with spiritual profundity."¹⁰⁹ In support of his claims, Shyovitz cites a statement that is stunningly close to Rebbe Pinhas's in that it leverages evidence from the basest details of bodily existence as proof of the highest truth claims: Yehudah ha-Hasid writes: "If one places hot ash on hot excrement, it will cause harm to the one who produced [it] [...]. Thus there must be some connection between the two which is too subtle to see [...]. Just as this connection is real, even if it cannot be seen by the eye, so too our Creator [...] is a real entity."¹¹⁰

9 Comprehensive Scope

As we have already had the opportunity to see, Rebbe Pinhas's system of thought is comprehensive in its treatment of all levels of reality, from the

Wonders: Nature and the Supernatural in Medieval Ashkenaz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2017), esp. chs. 2–5.

108 MS Paris-Rudi 89a, §452. Other examples abound.

109 Shyovitz, *A Remembrance of His Wonders*, 43 (emphasis in original), quoting Haym Soloveitchik, "The Midrash, *Sefer Hasidim*, and the Changing Face of God," in *Creation and Recreation in Jewish Thought*, ed. Rachel Elior and Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 173.

110 Shyovitz, *A Remembrance of His Wonders*, 21, citing *Imrot Tēhorot Ḥišoniyot u-Penimiyot*.

profundity of the divine Naught to the particulars of a man’s bowel movements and a flea’s feeding habits, which, according to Rebbe Pinhas, are in fact all one and the same. Rebbe Pinhas’s view of all phenomena as multiple existents of the same existence led him to address all aspects of reality—natural, historical, and intellectual—seeing none as beneath the dignity of his theocosmology.¹¹¹

The scope of Rebbe Pinhas’s explanations extends beyond physical phenomena, as evidenced by the number of teachings that begin: “In all things there is [...]” For example, he applies his concept of the *memuša*’ or intermediary not only to living things, but also to ethnic groups, religious practice, time, and space:

In all things in the world there is a *memuša*’ [...] between Gentiles and Jews, converts; between the written Torah and the oral Torah, the way the written Torah is written and the way it is read; between the Sabbath and the week, the time added to the Sabbath; between this world and the next, Elijah [...] between the holy tongue and other languages, the translation of the Bible; between the Land of Israel and other lands, Gilead and the far side of the Jordan.¹¹²

And the list goes on.

This tendency is especially evident in Rebbe Pinhas’s treatment of sleep and dreams, which synthesises past intellectual traditions from rabbinic

111 It is worth noting here Rebbe Pinhas’s theories of health and medicine as part of his understanding of the natural world. Like many philosophers, including Maimonides, whose *Hilkhot De’ot* is replete with medical advice, Rebbe Pinhas saw health and sickness as paradigmatic examples of cosmic nature and medicine as one of the sages’ primary realms of knowledge. For Rebbe Pinhas, as was typical of his time and place, medicine is a *mélange* of Greek and medieval theories, herbal remedies, kabbalistic secrets, magic, bloodletting, and practical folk knowledge. He seems to have made no distinction between these fields, attributing them all to the same source, whatever their final form. This subject exceeds the bounds of this paper, but I plan to return to it at length elsewhere. For a general treatment of medical traditions in Ashkenazi culture, see Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 193–207. For a more culturally specific treatment, see Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, “You Will Find It in the Pharmacy: Practical Kabbalah and Natural Medicine in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, 1690–1750,” in *Holy Dissent: Jewish and Christian Mystics in Eastern Europe*, ed. Glenn Dynner (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 13–55; Nimrod Zinger, “‘Who Knows What the Cause Is?’ ‘Natural’ and ‘Unnatural’ Causes for Illness in the Writings of Ba’alei Shem, Doctors, and Patients among German Jews in the Eighteenth Century,” in Veltri and Diemling, *The Jewish Body*, 127–58.

112 MS Kitvey Qodeš 5216, 25b, §73.

literature, Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism, the writings of the German Pietists, and the Kabbalah into a paradigm in keeping with his own natural philosophy. In our first source, the Neoplatonic idea that the sleeper's soul can ascend to heaven—already absorbed into medieval kabbalistic and Ashkenazic sources¹¹³—is subjected to Rebbe Pinhas's characteristic tendency to apply his concepts to every phenomenological category:

In all things in the world there is the aspect of sleep, even plants, and through sleep their vitality is renewed each morning. So man, who possesses more vitality, sleeps more, for in his sleep he gives himself over to the supernal well in the mystery of "They are renewed every morning—ample is Your grace!", which is an acronym for Rachel, which is the "well" [i.e., *ein sof*], the acronym for which is derived from "Into Your hand I entrust my soul."¹¹⁴ And cattle, which possess little vitality, sleep little. Even water sleeps, for if it did not it would spoil and it would be impossible to drink it. [...] And even the letters sleep [...] losing their intellect, and they arouse the divine energy as a woman arouses her husband, ascending from world to world, and in this way the intellect of all things is renewed.¹¹⁵

Sleep allows a person to ascend to the Naught of *ein sof* because sleep is also a form of *ayin*, nothingness, in that the sleeping person is unaware of his existence.¹¹⁶

Elsewhere, Rebbe Pinhas describes the reverse of this process, as the soul returns to the body:

113 See Jan Wehrle, "Dreams and Dream Theory," in *Handbook of Medieval Culture, Volume 1*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 329–46, esp. 335–36; Elliot R. Wolfson, *A Dream Interpreted within a Dream: Oneiropoiesis and the Prism of Imagination* (New York: Zone Books, 2011); Joseph Dan, "The Teachings on Dreams of the Hasidei Ashkenaz" [Hebrew] *Sinai* 68 (1971): 288–93; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 230–48; Moshe Idel, "Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance," in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. Lenn E. Goodman (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), 319–22; Dror Kerem, ed., *Migwan De'ot we-Haškafot 'al ha-Ḥalom be-Tarbut Yiśra'el* (Rehovot: Miśrad ha-Ḥinukh, 1995).

114 "Rachel" is a classic kabbalistic term for the *sefirah* of *malkhut*, which, as we see here again, Rebbe Pinhas equates with *keter* and *ein sof*: "When a person sleeps he entrusts his soul to the supernal well [...] and the well is the *ein sof*, which flows unceasingly" (MS Uman Monastritsh 98b).

115 MS Liqūṭim Yeqarim Rimanov, 26a, citing Lam 3:23 and Ps 31:6.

116 "And when he sleeps he becomes *ayin*, nothing, and he gives himself over to the *ein sof*" (MS Karlin 9, 46a, §9).

When a person wants to sleep and he entrusts his soul [...] he ascends [via the supernal worlds] unto *ein sof*, and from there he descends, resulting in the unification of [the Names] YHWH and Adonai, rendering the numerological value of the word *mal'akh* [angel]. This is what they said [in the Talmud]: “Here [a prophetic dream is brought] by an angel, and here [a false dream is brought] by a demon.”¹¹⁷

The very ascent and descent of the soul in sleep unifies *keter/ein sof* (represented by the Name YHWH) and *malkhut* (the Name *Adonay*),¹¹⁸ a unification that results in the creation of the word “angel” and thereby the creation of an actual angel, since the letters are the very essence of every created thing. With this creation, Rebbe Pinhas shifts seamlessly from the topic of sleep to that of dreams, which he addresses at greater length in multiple teachings. In the following source, we see him begin to recombine elements from dream theories found in various traditions.

A dream is the refuse of thought. And the finer the thought, the better the dream. And in the case of the very righteous, a dream is brought by an angel created by his own thought, as it is written in the Talmud, “Here by an angel,” etc. So it is written regarding Jacob, “He had a dream: a ladder was set on the ground [and its top reached to the sky] and angels of God were ascending and descending”—they ascend first because those angels were his very thought, and then they descend to him in his dream. And in the very righteous, whose thought is particularly sublime, his thought becomes an angel and that angel comes to him in a dream, for there are ten ranks of angels, “valiant ones” and “men,” etc., and they are called “men” because they are created from men.¹¹⁹

Elsewhere, Rebbe Pinhas is even more explicit in equating the thoughts of the righteous with angels: “He explained that the protecting angels *are* one’s holy thoughts.”¹²⁰ Thus, the angelology of the Talmud is ultimately understood in intellectual terms more akin to Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism (a process already occurring to varying degrees in the *Guide* and the writings

117 MS Kitvey Qodeš 5216, 74b, §238, citing *b. Ber.* 55b; cf. *b. Ber.* 9b; *Tanḥuma*, *Wayeše’* 6:2 (Buber).

118 The attribution of divine Names to various *sefirot* is a flexible practice; in Rebbe Pinhas’s case, the operative entities are *keter/ein sof* and *malkhut*.

119 MS Paris-Rudi 79a, §269.

120 MS Liqūṭim Yeqarim Rimanov, 2b (my emphasis).

of the German Pietists),¹²¹ but with a decidedly materialist element. Both Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism posit the genesis of dreams from bodily functions; however, whereas the classical Neoplatonist scheme contrasts physically derived dreams with those from psychological or divine sources,¹²² while Aristotle sees all dreams as being physically induced and devoid of prophetic meaning, Rebbe Pinhas synthesises the physical, psychological, and divine causes in an explanation very reminiscent of Aristotle's biological explanation that nevertheless retains the prophetic nature of dreams:

Good thoughts come from the intellectual mind, and evil thoughts come from the liver [...] and when the intellect departs then the vapours of the liver grow strong and evil thoughts ascend to the mind. For when intellect spreads through the body, then it stands above and does not allow the evil thoughts to ascend.¹²³

This theory of mental processes draws from the *Tiqquney Zohar*,¹²⁴ however, whereas that text mythologises contemporary Aristotelian theories of anatomy, saying that Samael (i.e., Satan) dwells in the liver, Rebbe Pinhas demythologises the *Tiqquney Zohar*, just as he had demythologised the rabbinic tradition of the demon, locating the process within a psychosomatic arena that matches the ontological unity of *keter/ein sof* and *malkhut*, creating a continuous process reaching from the bodily organs to *ein sof*.¹²⁵

121 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2:6; see the discussion of Elazar of Worms and the manuscript sources in Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 236, 287.

122 Wehrle, "Dreams and Dream Theory," 329–46.

123 Frankel, *Imrey Pinhas ha-Salem*, 384, §22.

124 *Tiqquney Zohar* 52a.

125 I differ quite drastically from the explanation offered by Elliot Wolfson (*A Dream Interpreted within a Dream*, 267–68), who writes that according to Rebbe Pinhas, "the dream lifts one above nature." Even with his caveat that "To be above nature [...] is not to inhabit a supernatural realm; it is to perceive nature for what it is, the metaphysical within the physical, the transcendent within the immanent," Wolfson's characterisation does not befit Rebbe Pinhas, who never once uses the phrase (however common in Hasidic literature) "above nature," since his paradigm of ontological identity (rather than immanence) does not allow for such a concept. The basis of Wolfson's interpretation is, in fact, not a teaching by Rebbe Pinhas at all, nor even R. Rafael—as is clear from the manuscript, it is included in a series of traditions from figures outside the Koretser-Bershter fellowships (MS Kitvey Qodeš 1841, 1b, in the addendum following the manuscript proper). While Wolfson notes that the tradition he cites is "perhaps preserving the teaching of another disciple of the Besht, Shmeril of Virchivkeh," he nevertheless cites it as "a tradition transmitted in the name of Phinehas of Korzec" and then proceeds to treat it as Rebbe Pinhas's own teaching, using it as the basis for interpreting a series of Rebbe Pinhas's authentic

At the same time, at no point does Rebbe Pinhas ever deny any of the statements or theories appearing in these traditions; rather, he continues, for example, to use the language of angels and demons while explaining that angels and demons are good and bad thoughts that are derived from different organs in the body. In doing so, he once again evokes Maimonides’s explanation of angels as natural forces and the term itself as an “equivocal term” that allows for multiple applications, the root meaning of which is “messenger”; that is, something that transfers something else.¹²⁶ He thus subsumes all earlier sources into his system of thought, absorbing past intellectual trends and rearticulating them within his own rubric, without ever departing from traditional language.

10 Rebbe Pinhas’s Natural Philosophy as an Extension of Lurianic Kabbalah

Recently, scholars of Lurianic Kabbalah have pointed to its graphic descriptions of the divine form, which were offered alongside a meticulous focus on the details of the actual human body.¹²⁷ Thus, the Godhead was presented as not only having a body in precisely the same detailed form as a human, as the zoharic *Idrot* had described, but also as undergoing processes of insemination, embryonic development, birth, maturity, sexual desire, copulation, giving birth, breastfeeding, ageing, and even death, in far greater detail than had ever been articulated. Because the human body is the link between God and man (as Hayyim Vital, the primary recorder of Luria’s teachings, repeatedly stresses), all of these processes, especially the governing paradigms of *qaṭnut* and *gadlut*, also manifest in human beings on the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual levels, particularly in the elevated individuals known as *qedošim* or *ṣaddiqim*, holy figures who were at that very time claiming a much

statements and interpreting them along lines completely contrary to his thought. For a discussion of the frequent misuse of statements by R. Shmeril of Virchivkeh to characterize Rebbe Pinhas, see Amshalem, “The Image(s) of Israel Baal Shem Tov,” 163–64.

126 Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 2:6 and 2:42; translation taken from Shlomo Pines in Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963), 2:262.

127 I refer primarily to Lawrence Fine’s *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Roni Weinstein, *Kabbalah and Jewish Modernity* (Oxford: Littmann Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016); and Tamari, “The Body Discourse in Lurianic Kabbalah.”

more central role in Jewish life.¹²⁸ This was more than metaphor or symbol: as Vital concludes his descriptions on multiple occasions, these processes are *mamaš*—real, even literally so. One of these scholars, Roni Weinstein, also highlights another major shift effected by Lurianism, which he dubs “a Copernican revolution in theology”: “In traditional Jewish thought, the human body is believed to reflect the divine (Gen. 1: 27), but in Lurianic theology the relationship is reversed: ‘everything is derived from the human body’. [...] The human body was the vehicle to reach divine realms.”¹²⁹

This shift in scholarly focus allows for a revised understanding of Rebbe Pinhas’s relationship to Lurianic Kabbalah. I want to suggest that Rebbe Pinhas, in pursuing knowledge of all material and phenomenal existence, seeking to understand it in terms of divine forms and processes, and using his knowledge of divine embodiment as a vehicle to reach and serve God, was extending the Lurianic method of inquiry into the human body to the entirety of existence, especially the material world. This is made most explicit by such expressions as “there is *gadlut* and *qatnut* in all things,” but I would suggest that Rebbe Pinhas, even when not using Lurianic terms, is operating in a Lurianic mode.

In his analyses of material forms and phenomena, Rebbe Pinhas sought to effect messianic redemption, much as Luria had in his analyses of individuals’s bodies and souls. At the same time, it must be noted that the focus has shifted: whereas Lurianic Kabbalah speaks at length of the divine body above in parallel terms to the human body below, Rebbe Pinhas rarely speaks of the supernal realms in anthropomorphic terms; instead, he treats them indirectly by speaking at length about divine embodiment in the lowest realm. A remark by Rebbe Pinhas reveals that he was aware of this dynamic: “I know that these words of Torah being revealed now have not been revealed for many years, not even in the days of R. Isaac Luria, and nobody pays attention, for it is garbed [i.e., in obscure language and metaphor]. But when I speak words of Torah, they see that it is so.”¹³⁰ If Hasidism, then, is “Kabbalah made ethos” through the psychologisation of kabbalistic and especially Lurianic concepts, then Rebbe Pinhas’s thought is Kabbalah made ethos through their corporealisation.¹³¹

128 See especially Weinstein, *Kabbalah and Jewish Modernity*, 44–66, and Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 300–366.

129 Weinstein, *Kabbalah and Jewish Modernity*, 104. Weinstein is referring here to a teaching found in Hayyim Vital’s *‘Eš Ḥayyim*.

130 MS Ketavim, 32a–b, §136.

131 The famous phrase “Kabbalah made ethos” is Martin Buber’s (“Jewish Mysticism,” in *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, trans. Maurice Friedman [Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press Intl.], 3–17). For Buber and this concept, see Peter Sajda, “From Acosmism to Dialogue: The Evolution of Buber’s Philosophical View on Mysticism,” *Spirituality Studies* 6,

This is not the corporealisation of Lurianic descriptions of the Godhead, however, against which Rebbe Pinhas severely and repeatedly warns. We may at first be taken aback by such warnings—have we not just seen countless examples of Rebbe Pinhas describing the various corporealizations of God in great detail, with messianic fervour? Yet for all his expressions of ontological unity, we must remember the persistence of epistemological duality: *ein sof*, as Rebbe Pinhas frequently reminds us, “cannot be grasped,”¹³² and so must be embodied in the lowest realm. In a paradigm of radical ontological unity, it is this epistemological duality that underlies the uniqueness and vital importance of the material world, in which God can reveal Himself so fully and achieve the divine goal of being known. Allowing corporealisation to creep into the supernal realms through a literal reading of Lurianic language would render the teleological import of God’s embodiment as the material world and the messianic import of Rebbe Pinhas’s revelation of it meaningless. Rather than undercutting the embodiment of God below, then, Rebbe Pinhas’s insistence that “there is no corporeality above” is in perfect keeping with it and underscores its importance.¹³³

11 “Lest I Be More Wise than Pious”

However seamlessly Rebbe Pinhas was able to weave together such disparate sources and systems of thought, and however unified the result, he himself was apparently less unified, and his statements about his own teachings reveal tears in the seams of his own personality. Consider the following:

no. 1 (2020): 35–41. For a brief overview of the underlying ideas, see Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1988), 146–53. It seems to me that the recent scholarship on Lurianism itself reduces the level of innovation by Hasidic masters (in addition to the studies listed above, see Jonathan Garb, *Yearnings of the Soul: Psychological Thought in Modern Kabbalah* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015], 22–77; Garb, *History of Kabbalah from the Early Modern Period to the Present Day* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020], 30–66).

132 This is of course taken from the famous passage in the Zoharic text *Raya Mehemna, Pinhas*.

133 I have been assisted in this articulation by Avinoam Stillman, through personal conversation and his piece “Transcendent God, Immanent Kabbalah; Prologomena to the Hasidic Teachings of R. Avraham *haMalakh*,” in *Be-Ron Yahad: Studies in Jewish Thought and Theology in Honor of Nehemia Polen*, ed. Ariel Evan Mayse and Avraham Yitzhak Green (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019), 311–30. I extend my thanks to him for his ongoing spirit of generosity.

A resolution to the difficulty raised in *‘Eš ha-Ḥayyim* as to why God did not create this world earlier: he said to us that the Blessed Holy One creates worlds without ceasing, and it is possible that in this very moment there is a world in which Moses is giving the Torah, and if so, one cannot ask why the world was not created earlier, because it is being created again and again. Afterwards, he said to us, “I believe with perfect faith that God is Truth, so what need do I have for resolutions?” And another time, he told us several resolutions to this problem that I do not remember.¹³⁴

This brief tradition contains one startling statement after another. First, Rebbe Pinhas’s resolution of positing infinite parallel universes is unlike anything I have encountered in Jewish literature;¹³⁵ it reveals the proximity of his thought to philosophical and scientific speculation as well as the sheer originality of which he was capable. Second, his questioning of the need for his own resolution is the first instance we have encountered of any internal tension within him between faith and understanding. Third, the fact that he continued to offer multiple resolutions after having already dismissed the need for any at all reveals the powerful drive he felt to continually speculate upon such questions, even when they challenged his notions of devotional propriety.

This passage helps us to understand Rebbe Pinhas’s most revealing statement: “I have but one fear: lest I be more wise than pious.”¹³⁶ On another occasion, he described this fear as “constant.”¹³⁷ If we accepted the characterizations of Rebbe Pinhas’s teachings as primarily ethical,¹³⁸ we might read this

¹³⁴ *Imrey Šefer* (Peterkov, 1900), 3b, §3.

¹³⁵ Although Kabbalistic literature discusses the existence of the ten *sefirot* themselves each containing all ten *sefirot*, with the possibility of repeating that pattern *ad infinitum*, this model of infinite worlds is hierarchical, with the infinity resulting from smaller and smaller gradations between the different levels in the hierarchy. Rebbe Pinhas’s vision of infinite parallel worlds always coming into existence is of a totally different ilk, comparable only to the modern scientific conception first proposed by Hugh Everett III in his 1957 doctoral thesis at Princeton University (on this, see B. de Witt, *Science and Ultimate Reality* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003]). The fact that these worlds are like Everett’s model in being different results of the infinite possibilities inherent in the universe (rather than identical iterations of the same universe) is evidenced by Rebbe Pinhas’s statement that “*it is possible* that in this very moment there is a world in which Moses is giving the Torah there,” *Imrey Šefer* (Peterkov, 1900), 3b, §3.

¹³⁶ *Ner Yišro’el* (Vilna, 1822), §82.

¹³⁷ MS Ketavim, 19b, §55.

¹³⁸ For an example in addition to Heschel, Horodecky writes that “virtue was in his eyes the essence of Judaism”; “From all that we have said, the ethical nature of Rebbe Pinhas is obvious [...] he preached his ethical doctrine before his *Ḥasidim* [...] urging them to be virtuous and upright, for this, and only this, is the entirety of a person” (*Ha-Ḥasidut*

statement solely as a principled clarification of values; however, by returning to the manuscript sources and seeing that the bulk of Rebbe Pinhas’s teachings were in fact revelations of his own wisdom, we can read it for what it is—a deeply personal admission of the constant tension in which Rebbe Pinhas lived, pulled between the two poles of wisdom and piety, intellect and faith.

We saw above one of the keystones of Rebbe Pinhas’s thought, that “*malkhut* is *keter*.” This statement continues: “and it is the aspect of humility.”¹³⁹ God as *keter/ein sof* reveals His humility in His willingness to become this “lowly” world, in order to be revealed to and understood by humankind; people respond in kind by humbling themselves, becoming *ayin* (nothing) and therefore like the divine Naught, paradoxically ascending to God through lowering themselves—since, in Rebbe Pinhas’s interpretation of *Sefer Yeširah* 1:7, moving “down” to *malkhut* is in fact moving “up” to *keter*. Thus, the very same dynamic from which Rebbe Pinhas derives the divine nature of the world and the religious significance of understanding it also warns him against the dangers of wisdom, lest it lead him away from humility and piety. This, I suggest, is the “dangerous path” that Rebbe Pinhas walked.

As communal memory suggests, it seems that Rebbe Pinhas never “fell into danger” by letting his wisdom supersede his piety. One statement of his offers insight into how he avoided this: “From the time that I began to serve the Creator, I have not pursued anything in the world in order to understand it, but only what the Blessed Holy One has Himself given to me. For I fear God.”¹⁴⁰ He explains further: “The point can receive all things, and so the pupil is constricted and black and so it can see everything that is in the world.”¹⁴¹ That is, Rebbe Pinhas prioritised imitating God through humility over understanding God through the intellect, and in so doing came to greater intellectual understanding.

This does not mean that the tension was ever resolved, however. In one of his most unequivocal statements about how to serve God, Rebbe Pinhas said that “the essence of service is [the verse] ‘The righteous lives in his faith’ and

we-ha-Ḥasidim, 144, 146–47). Horodecky makes no mention of his theocosmology or the dependency of his ethics upon it. Hasidic tradition also remembers him primarily as an ethicist, the few statements about his being a “philosopher” notwithstanding. It is true that ethics play a much more central role in his thought than in the works of his Hasidic peers: as he explains himself, “People think that I became a *šaddiq* in this way or another, but the essential thing was that I strove to improve my own character” (MS Kitvey Qodeš 5216, 78a, §1). It would be incorrect, however, to reduce his thought to ethics, as I hope this study has made abundantly clear.

139 MS *Liquṭim Yeqarim Rimanov*, 13b; MS *Liquṭey Amarim Kalov*, §73.

140 MS *Ketavim* §42, 17b; *Ner Yišro’el* §46, 22b.

141 MS *Ketavim* 17b, §42.

[the rabbinic teaching that] it is better to be a fool all of one's days for God's sake,¹⁴² but he immediately followed this with a rather personal admission: "But the heart does not want to be a fool."¹⁴³

Although Rebbe Pinhas continued to live in the tension between faith and understanding, humility and intellect, and even advocated for it as a devotional path, his disciple and successor R. Rafael unequivocally promoted simple faith and a total devotion to the humble service of God, proclaiming that "the essential thing is faith: to be a fool all of one's days,"¹⁴⁴ with no qualifiers. Rebbe Rafael, unlike his master, put aside metaphysical speculation and devoted himself almost entirely to the moral improvement of his audience. Though a reader versed in Rebbe Pinhas's theology can easily see that his metaphysical concepts underpin R. Rafael's ethical teachings, the latter very rarely addresses them, instead turning his genius to finding new ways to explain and reform the human personality.¹⁴⁵

The extent of the shift is evident in two parallel conversations recorded in Bershider literature:

An explanation of what is written in *Hovot ha-Levavot*, the Gate of Trust, that one who disobeys God and yet trusts in Him is a fool (look there), though in the midrash it is written that even a wicked person who trusts in God is surrounded by divine kindness. He explained that *Hovot ha-Levavot* speaks of one who disobeys willfully, while the midrash deals with one who follows the path that is written in the *Sefer ha-Yašar* of Rabbeinu Tam, that one must first correct his thought and afterwards his deeds. So we find that while he is correcting his thought he is still wicked in deed, and this is the wicked person who trusts in God and is surrounded by divine kindness.¹⁴⁶

142 MS Paris-Rudi §116, 99b, citing Hab 2:4 and m Ed 5:6.

143 MS Paris-Rudi, 99b, §116, citing Hab 2:4 and *m. Ed.* 5:6. It is clear that Rebbe Pinhas includes himself in speaking of the heart not wanting to be a fool, for he continues: "Only the rabbi [Yaakov Yosef] of Polnoye can be a fool for God." Rebbe Pinhas did not hesitate to declare his own achievements when he believed it to be accurate, for example: "There are some men who are close to truth, but when it comes to complete truth, there is no one in the world but me" (MS Kitvey Qodeš 5216, 78a, §2).

144 MS Kitvey Qodeš 5216, 12a, §46.

145 For a fuller discussion of the relationship between intellect and faith in both Rebbe Pinhas's thought and R. Rafael's, see Amshalem, "R. Pinhas of Korets and His School: A New Path," chapters 6 and 7.

146 MS Ketavim, 84b, §94.

It is unclear whether the speaker here is Rebbe Pinhas or R. Rafael, but regardless, it is Rebbe Pinhas’s legacy on display—correct thought, that is, proper theological understanding—is the foundation of service, for, in the words of *Sefer ha-Yašar*, “faith comes from reason.”¹⁴⁷ Elsewhere, however, when presented with the same contradiction, R. Rafael abandons reason and holds only to faith. His disciples ask him:

“How can we trust that God will give us our livelihood when we know that we are full of sin? For it is written in *Hovot ha-Levavot* that one who trusts in God while disobeying Him is a fool.” And R. Rafael said, “Is it written in *Hovot ha-Levavot* that he is wicked? It is only written that he is a fool. One must certainly trust in God and ask for one’s living.” And he said, “I am a fool and I want to trust in God!”¹⁴⁸

Gone is the clarifying comparison to *Sefer ha-Yašar*; gone, even, is the demand of *Hovot ha-Levavot* that one justify one’s faith through reason; R. Rafael upends both works’ hierarchy of values so that only “foolish” faith remains.

12 Conclusion

We can surely understand, then, how approaching Rebbe Pinhas through the print sources, in which he is conflated with his disciple R. Rafael, could easily lead a reader also to view the master as primarily an ethicist with little interest in Lurianic (or any other kind of) speculation, and all the more so could the reader be misled if approaching those sources with the assumption that Rebbe Pinhas was a disciple of the Besht and a representative of his doctrine. However, having viewed Rebbe Pinhas’s teachings in manuscript, with no such assumption in mind, we may say that the master has been hiding in plain sight. Even with only the handful of sources I have adduced here, it is not difficult to see how markedly he differed from the Besht and his disciples. We may return, then, to the questions raised above and summarise the (preliminary) answers I have offered here.

147 *Sefer ha-Yašar*, ch. 3. The fact that “correcting his thought” refers to intellectual thought used in the pursuit of understanding and not to purifying one’s thoughts so as not to sin is clear from the referenced text of *Sefer ha-Yašar*: “The service of God, blessed be He, cannot endure except after there is knowledge of Him.”

148 Frankel, *Imrey Pinhas ha-Salem*, 358, §55.

While Rebbe Pinhas's unique status as a "divine philosopher" and "divine scientist" is frequently accompanied by expressions of his purported love of Maimonides's *Guide*, I would suggest that the *Guide* is shorthand for the general category of philosophy and even science.¹⁴⁹ Even beyond the philosophical influences that Jewish esoteric and ethical literature had already absorbed over the centuries, specific works with distinct philosophical elements, such as *Hovot ha-Levavot*, *Sefer ha-Yašar*, and even *Ševiley Emunah*, appear throughout Koretser-Bershider literature, refuting the claim that Rebbe Pinhas ever abandoned their study.

More importantly, Rebbe Pinhas's system of thought is characterised by a natural philosophical mode of inquiry, with the goal of explaining natural phenomena through both inductive and deductive logic. This mode of inquiry is deeply informed by the empiricism of the German Pietists and the body-focused methodology of Lurianic Kabbalah. Rather than positing a turn from philosophy to Kabbalah, then, I would suggest that Rebbe Pinhas's thought is a fusion of the two, with Kabbalah put at the service of natural philosophy and natural philosophy articulated in kabbalistic terms; likewise, rather than positing him as an ethicist or a Zoharist as opposed to a Lurianist, I would suggest that what makes Rebbe Pinhas unique is his integration of all these and more into a unified and comprehensive system of thought, one that is devoted to the messianic mission of revealing God's embodiment in this world in all of its detail.

While I have repeatedly stated my position that if we are to understand Rebbe Pinhas, we cannot allow him to be entirely subsumed under the rubric of Hasidism, it is important to note that, historically speaking, this is exactly what happened: the Bershider fellowship was literally absorbed into the Hasidic movement, becoming "Bershider Hasidim," and their master Rebbe Pinhas was posthumously absorbed as a disciple of the Besht and a model of Hasidic piety.¹⁵⁰ In this process, much of Rebbe Pinhas's legacy was left behind, most obviously his approach to the material world. Some of this was an internal process, driven by Rebbe Pinhas's esotericism and even more so by R. Rafael's ethical turn. However, Rebbe Pinhas's teachings remained available and ever more accessible as manuscripts were copied, circulated, and printed, yet this aspect of his thought seems to have made very little impact

149 It is interesting to note that Moshe Cordovero uses the term *ha-ḥoqer ha-filosof ha-eloqi*—obviously the basis for the terms applied to Rebbe Pinhas to refer to Maimonides (*Šivur Qomah* [Warsaw, 1883], 67).

150 For a full treatment of this process, see Amshalem, "The Image(s) of Israel Baal Shem Tov," esp. 125–68, 171–74, and Amshalem, "R. Pinhas of Korets and His School: A New Path," chapter 7.

on the Hasidic movement. Hasidic leaders preferred different theologies and foci; even those figures who frequently sang Rebbe Pinhas's praises or cited his teachings rarely addressed the aspects highlighted here. Hasidic editors revealed their own biases and their expectations of the Hasidic reading public by focusing on other elements of his teaching; even when most of his teachings had been printed, those texts treating the material world were largely ignored. This reflects a long and active process (still ongoing) of selecting which forms of theology and practice would—and would not—be accepted and promoted within the Hasidic movement, as opposed to a natural outgrowth of the variety of religious personalities in “the circle of the Besht.”

Hasidim, of course, have every right to make such choices in the formation of their own religious ethos. Scholars, however, should not be bound by those choices, and with the historical turn in the study of Hasidism and the current availability of Koretser-Bershider manuscript material, they have no need to be. I would like to call for a renewed treatment of Rebbe Pinhas of Korets and his school, to which this study is only a prologue. Directions of research should be immediately evident. Speaking only of potential influences, we should look backwards and ask which unidentified sources may have informed Rebbe Pinhas's thought: possibilities include non-kabbalistic commentaries on *Sefer Yeširah*; medieval encyclopaedias; specific writings by the German Pietists; the writings of figures in Provence, Prague, Altona-Hamburg, or Padua who synthesised Kabbalah, science, and philosophy; the medical encyclopaedias circulating in his milieu; and Yaakov Koppel. Looking forwards, we should ask whom R. Pinhas may have influenced, especially through his Lurianically inflected natural philosophy: obvious possibilities include the scientific compendium *Sefer ha-Brit*, composed as a commentary on Vital's *Ša'arey Qeḏuṣah*, and the leaders of the Ziditshov and Komarno Hasidic dynasties, along with R. Zvi Elimelekh Shapira of Dinov, all of whom frequently cite Rebbe Pinhas' teachings.

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Questioning Traditions

Readings of Annius of Viterbo's Antiquitates in the Cinquecento: The Case of Judah Abarbanel

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Abstract

This article focuses on the philosopher Judah Abarbanel, best known as Leone Ebreo, and addresses the origin of his concept of (Jewish) tradition in his *Dialoghi d'amore* (1535). It analyses how he re-elaborates the controversial and multi-layered concept of tradition conceived by the Dominican friar Annius of Viterbo in his *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII* (1498). By showing how Judah is immersed in the antiquarianism and reformation programme of his time and also how he shares the same intellectual framework as his Christian contemporaries, this study argues that his re-elaboration of the Annian idea of Jewish tradition provides an intriguing example of how the authentication of an ancestral sacred past is not only instrumental in legitimating the superiority of Jewish antiquity, but also in creating a certain distance from it and bringing about a philosophical renewal of ancient authority.

Keywords

Leone Ebreo – Annius of Viterbo – tradition – history – antiquarianism – ancient wisdom – revelation – philosophy

1 Introduction¹

One of the major issues in interpreting the *Dialoghi d'amore* (*Dialogues of Love*) (1535) by Judah Abarbanel (ca. 1470–1534) is understanding in what way, and to what extent, Judah, as a Jew and a scholar in Italy, was rooted in his surrounding intellectual framework.² Undoubtedly, the relationship between Jewish and Christian intellectuals in early modern Italy was a complex, intense and, to a certain extent, contradictory and conflictual one. Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, after their expulsion, Jews came to Northern Italy from France and Germany and to the Kingdom of Naples from Spain, the Spanish dominions in Southern Italy, and Portugal, establishing new communities alongside the local ones. However, blood libel cases, virulent predications by Franciscan friars, and a popular anti-Hebraism fuelled accusations, trials, restrictions, expulsions, and violent outbursts in a general climate of turbulence across all of Italy. For example, in Northern Italy, by the end of the fifteenth century, most of the Jewish communities were scattered in a few areas in the Northeast and Savoy territories, while in the Papal States, tougher restrictions were imposed from the pontificate of Pope Paul IV onwards. The unstable vicissitudes of the Kingdom of Naples severely affected the local Jewry and those who had converted to Christianity, resulting in a sequence

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- 1 This article was written during my Max Weber Fellowship at the Department of History and Civilisation at the European University Institute. I wish to thank my mentor at the European University Institute, Giancarlo Casale, and the HEC Writing Group at the Max Weber Programme for reading an early draft of this paper and for their helpful suggestions. I also owe my gratitude to Guido Bartolucci, who, during my previous postdoctoral research stay at the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies in Hamburg, encouraged me to further investigate the reference to Annius's *Antiquitates* in the *Dialoghi d'amore*. Finally, I would like to thank my friend Duccio Guasti, who helped me with the translation of an intricate Latin passage of Annius's *Antiquitates*.
 - 2 Since the earliest studies of the *Dialoghi*, scholars have discussed whether it is a work of Jewish philosophy or a philosophical work written by a Jew. For example, Colette Sirat has argued that it is the latter: see Sirat, *La philosophie juive au Moyen Âge selon les textes manuscrits et imprimés* (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1983), 450. In contrast, Julius Guttmann defined Judah as the only Jewish Renaissance philosopher: see Guttmann, *Die Philosophie des Judentums* (Munich: Reinhardt, 1933), 271. Giuseppe Veltri has shown that medieval, early modern, and modern Jewish scholars, including Judah himself, never referred to themselves as Jewish philosophers: see Veltri, *Alienated Wisdom: Enquiry into Jewish Philosophy and Scepticism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 106. Veltri's analysis was the starting point for my doctoral and postdoctoral studies, in which I examined Judah's relationship with Christian intellectuals both as a Jew and as a philosopher. I have also used this approach in this article.

of expulsions in 1496, 1510, 1514–1515, and 1541.³ Yet in this age of persecutions and the creation of ghettos in the Italian peninsula,⁴ exchanges between Jewish and non-Jewish intellectual groups crossed the formal socioeconomic fences and cultural boundaries established by Christian society.⁵ Considering the social conditions of the Jews, one of the thorniest questions in the field is whether Jewish intellectuals could actively participate in Renaissance intellectual life or whether they could only echo some of the intellectual

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- 3 It is beyond the scope of this article to provide an exhaustive list of the vast literature on the social conditions of the Jews in Renaissance Italy. For an overview, see Marina Caffiero, *Storia degli ebrei nell'Italia moderna. Dal Rinascimento alla Restaurazione* (Rome: Carocci, 2014). For the Kingdom of Naples, see the seminal work by Nicola Ferorelli, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia meridionale. Dall'età romana al secolo XVIII*, reprint ed. (Bologna: Arnaldo Forni, 1999). For Northern and Central Italy, see Shlomo Simonsohn, "La condizione giuridica degli ebrei nell'Italia centrale e settentrionale (secoli XII–XVI)," in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. 11:1, *Gli ebrei in Italia. Dall'alto Medioevo all'età dei ghetti*, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), 97–120. For Rome, see Kenneth R. Stow, *The Jews in Rome*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1995–1997). For the persecution of converts or New Christians in Southern Italy, see, for example, Nadia Zeldes, "Legal Status of Jewish Converts to Christianity in Southern Italy and Provence," *California Italian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010): 1–17, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/91z342hv>.
- 4 For a historical overview of the Venetian ghetto, see Riccardo Calimani, *Storia del ghetto di Venezia* (Milan: Rusconi, 1985); Giovanni Favero and Francesca Trivellato, "Gli abitanti del ghetto di Venezia in età moderna: Dati e ipotesi," *Zakhor. Rivista di storia degli ebrei d'Italia* 7 (2004): 9–50; Dana E. Katz, *The Jewish Ghetto and the Visual Imagination of Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2017). For Venetian Jewry more broadly, see Cecil Roth, *Venice* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1930); Gaetano Cozzi, ed., *Gli ebrei e Venezia: Secoli XIV–XVIII. Atti del convegno internazionale organizzato dall'Istituto di storia della società e dello Stato veneziano della Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia, Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, 5–10 giugno 1983)* (Milan: Edizioni Comunità, 1987); and Robert C. Davis and Benjamin C.I. Ravid, eds., *The Jews of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). On the Roman ghetto, see Attilio Milano, *Il ghetto di Roma: Illustrazioni storiche* (Rome: Staderini, 1964); Kenneth R. Stow, *Theater of Acculturation: The Roman Ghetto in the Sixteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001); and the recent work by Serena di Nepi, *Surviving the Ghetto: Toward a Social History of the Jewish Community in 16th-Century Rome*, trans. Paul. M. Rosenberg (Leiden: Brill, 2020).
- 5 For the problematic issue of the Jews' official participation in the intellectual academies of their own time, see, for example, Giuseppe Veltri and Evelien Chayes, *Oltre le mura del ghetto. Accademie, scetticismo e tolleranza nella Venezia barocca. Studi e documenti d'archivio* (Palermo: New Digital Press, 2016). In the vast literature on Jews as both students and teachers in Christian universities, see, for example, Vittore Colorni, "Sull'ammissibilità degli ebrei alla laurea anteriormente al secolo XIX," *La rassegna mensile di Israel* 16, no. 6/8 (1950): 202–16; Robert Bonfil, "Accademie rabbiniche e presenza ebraica nelle università," in *Le università dell'Europa*, ed. Gian Paolo Brizzi and Jacques Verger, vol. 2, *Dal Rinascimento alle riforme religiose* (Trieste: RAS, 1991), 132–51; and Saverio Campanini, "Jews on the Fringes: Universities and the Jews in a Time of Upheaval (15th–16th Centuries)," *Annali di storia delle università italiane* 24, no. 1 (2020): 21–33.

transformations of the surrounding Christian intellectual environment within their own circles. Scholars have widely discussed whether, and in what way, we can properly speak of a Jewish Renaissance.⁶ Shifting from this perspective, I will ask whether Jewish intellectuals shared a common intellectual space, “a neighbourhood of the mind,”⁷ with Christian scholars during the Renaissance, despite social inequalities.

The present article will focus on a specific case and aims to show the features of this non-spatial and non-temporal intellectual community. It will shed light on the idea of tradition that was widely disseminated in the sixteenth century thanks to a work by the Dominican friar Annius of Viterbo (1437–1502), the *Antiquitates* (*Antiquities*) (1498), and will address the astonishing impact of this oeuvre on the Renaissance idea of an ancient Jewish (historical) tradition among Christian intellectuals, as well as the Jewish literati, to whom scholars have not paid much attention.⁸ The second section will introduce and frame this text and its success among Christian and Jewish scholars within the

6 See, for example, for a multidisciplinary overview, Giulio Busi and Silvana Greco, eds., *The Renaissance Speaks Hebrew* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2019); Robert Bonfil, *Cultural Change among the Jews of Early Modern Italy* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Bonfil, “Lo spazio culturale degli ebrei d’Italia fra Rinascimento ed Età barocca,” in Vivanti, *Gli ebrei in Italia*, 413–73; Bonfil, *Les juifs d’Italie à l’époque de la Renaissance: Stratégies de la différence à l’aube de la modernité* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995); Bonfil, *Gli ebrei in Italia nell’epoca del Rinascimento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1991); Alessandro Guetta, *Les juifs d’Italie à la Renaissance* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2017); Guetta, *Italian Jewry in the Early Modern Era: Essays in Intellectual History* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014); Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959); David B. Ruderman, ed., *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 252–79; Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri, eds., *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Giuseppe Veltri, *Il Rinascimento nel pensiero ebraico* (Turin: Paideia, 2020); Veltri, *Renaissance Philosophy in Jewish Garb: Foundations and Challenges in Judaism on the Eve of Modernity* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

7 Here, I am using the expression employed by Lauro Martines when delineating the common intellectual space that humanist poets established by reading one another’s works and letters, despite their physical or temporal distance: see Lauro Martines, “A Neighbourhood of the Mind: Latin Poets in the Quattrocento,” in *From Florence to the Mediterranean and Beyond: Essays in Honour of Anthony Molho*, ed. Diogo Ramada Curto, Eric R. Dursteler, Julius Kirshner, and Francesca Trivellato (Florence: Olschki, 2009), 1:211–34. Recently, Shulamit Furstenberg-Levi has referred to Martines’s terminology in order to explain the networks of the Accademia Pontaniana and the interactions and links between humanists in Naples, Rome, and Florence: see Furstenberg-Levi, *The Accademia Pontaniana: A Model of a Humanist Network* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1–16.

8 An exception is Joanna Weinberg, “Azariah de’ Rossi and the Forgeries of Annius of Viterbo,” in Ruderman, *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture*, 252–79.

broader context of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century antiquarianism, while the following section will bring to the fore the case of Judah Abarbanel, best known as Leone Ebreo, and will focus specifically on his acquaintance with Annius's *Antiquitates* as a lens through which to enquire into his dialogue with the contemporary generation of Christian scholars. In the fourth section, I will explain how and why Judah employs the Annian notion of the Jewish tradition by suggesting an alternative interpretation of the function that this concept fulfils in his work. Overall, this article will contextualise Judah's reference to Annius's *Antiquitates* in the intellectual and religious landscape of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy. By situating Judah's work and his notion of tradition in a historical perspective, it will put forward the theory that Judah shared the same intellectual interests as his Christian colleagues and constructed his philosophical identity in response to and in dialogue with them. It thereby aims to broaden our understanding of Judah's *Dialoghi d'amore* and its intellectual context.

2 The Concept of Tradition(s) in Annius of Viterbo's *Antiquitates*

From the end of the fifteenth century, the Jewish and Christian literati alike began to read the *Commentaria super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatibus loquentium* (*Commentaries on the Works of Divers Authors Who Speak about Antiquities*). Best known as the *Antiquitates*, this work was published in Rome in 1498.⁹ Its author was the Dominican friar Giovanni Nanni, more famously known as Annius of Viterbo,¹⁰ and it was a sixteenth-century Latin bestseller. It is, however, a historiographical counterfeit, which includes translations of, and extensive commentaries on, ancient texts that were intentionally fabricated

9 See Giovanni Nanni, *Commentaria fratris Ioannis Viterbiensis theologiae professoris super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatibus loquentium* (*Commentaries by Friar Annius of Viterbo, Professor of Theology, on the Works of Divers Authors Who Speak about Antiquities*) (Rome: Eucharius Silber, 1498). In this article, I use the 1515 Parisian edition: Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII* (Paris: Jean Petit and Josse Bade, 1515). In the transcriptions and spelling of the Latin text, I have silently expanded all abbreviations, standardised punctuation, and italicised and capitalised book titles. All English translations from the Latin text are my own. Unless otherwise specified, words or brief phrases enclosed in square brackets in the English translation have been added to clarify the English text.

10 For his life, see Roberto Weiss, "Traccia per una biografia di Annio da Viterbo," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 5 (1962): 425–41; Riccardo Fubini, "Nanni, Giovanni (Annio da Viterbo)," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 77 (2012): 726–32, available online at https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-nanni_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/.

by its author. Early criticism of its legitimacy notwithstanding,¹¹ this forgery had an extraordinary influence on Renaissance conceptions of history and tradition. Indeed, Annii's work was reprinted in at least eighteen editions up to 1612, translated twice into the Italian vernacular in 1543 (reprinted in 1550) and 1583, and extensively used by numerous scholars throughout Europe and beyond.¹²

11 Among the first scholars to denounce Annii's *Antiquitates* was Pietro Crinito (1474–1507) in his *De honesta disciplina* (1504) and Lefèvre d'Étaples (ca. 1455–1536) in his commentaries on Aristotle's *Politics* contained in the work known as the *Hecatonomia* (1506). On this criticism, see Walter Stephens, "When Pope Noah Ruled the Etruscans: Annii of Viterbo and His Forged 'Antiquities,'" *Modern Language Notes* 119, no. 1 (2004): *Italian Issue Supplement: Studia Humanitatis, Essays in Honor of Salvatore Camporeale*, 201–23, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2004.0152>. See also Eugène Tigerstedt, "Ioannes Annii and Graecia Mendax," in *Classical, Mediaeval, and Renaissance Studies in Honor of Berthold Louis Ullman*, ed. Charles Henderson (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1964), 2:293–310; Christopher R. Ligota, "Annii of Viterbo and Historical Method," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 50 (1987): 44–56.

12 Amongst the vast literature on Annii of Viterbo, for analysis of his work, sources, and intellectual context, see, for example, Tigerstedt, "Ioannes Annii and Graecia Mendax," 293–310; Walter Stephens, *Giants in Those Days: Folklore, Ancient History, and Nationalism* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 98–138; Stephens, "When Pope Noah Ruled the Etruscans," 201–23; Stephens, "From Berossos to Berossus Chaldaeus: The Forgeries of Annii of Viterbo and Their Fortune," in *The World of Berossos: Proceedings of the 4th International Colloquium on the Ancient Near East between Classical and Ancient Oriental Traditions (Durham, 7th–9th July 2010)*, ed. Johannes Haubold, Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, Robert Rollinger, and John Steele (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 277–89; Anthony Grafton, "Invention of Traditions and Traditions of Invention in Renaissance Europe: The Strange Case of Annii of Viterbo," in *The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Grafton and Ann Blair (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 8–38; Grafton, "Annii of Viterbo as a Student of the Jews: The Sources of His Information," in *Literary Forgery in Early Modern Europe, 1450–1800*, ed. Walter Stephens and Earle A. Havens (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 147–69; Ingrid D. Rowland, *The Culture of the High Renaissance: Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth-Century Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Riccardo Fubini, "Gli storici nei nascenti Stati regionali d'Italia," in Fubini, *Storiografia dell'umanesimo in Italia da Leonardo Bruni ad Annio da Viterbo* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003), 3–38; Fubini, "Lebraismo nei riflessi della cultura umanistica: Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti, Annio da Viterbo," in Fubini, *Storiografia dell'umanesimo in Italia*, 291–331. For an overview of Annii's fortunes, see Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). For Annii's specific fortunes in sixteenth-century Florence, see Erik Schoonhoven, "A Literary Invention: The Etruscan Myth in Early Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Studies* 24 (2010): 459–71, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-4658.2010.00662.x>. See also Caroline S. Hillard, "Mythic Origins, Mythic Archaeology," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 69 (2016): 489–528, <https://doi.org/10.1086/687608>. For Annii's fortunes outside Europe, for example, in the Quechua historian Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, see Giuseppe

In his *Antiquitates*, Anniius's main objective is to offer a providential reinterpretation of the local and territorial history of his city, Viterbo, and the surrounding region, Tuscia, by evoking their glorious Etruscan past and the superior splendour of the Etruscan culture over the Greek nation. Earlier medieval and humanist Christian historians had already acknowledged the role of the Etruscans alongside the Romans in the foundation of some Italian cities.¹³ Anniius, however, claims the superiority of Italy's pre-Roman Etruscan past by establishing a Jewish foundation for Viterbo and other cities in Tuscia. By means of the meticulous fabrication of ancient archaeological and historical records, Anniius's *Antiquitates* names the Etruscans as the direct heirs of an ancient and antediluvian tradition that the biblical patriarch Noah, whom he identifies with the pagan god Janus, handed down to them after settling in Italy: "Father Janus taught the Etruscans, his sons, physics, astronomy, divination, and ceremonials. He wrote rituals and committed everything to writing."¹⁴ Through invented chronologies and etymologies,¹⁵ Anniius aimed to deprive the Greek historians of authority and to disclaim any revival of Greek models in contemporary political institutions in defiance of Hellenising humanists and historians.¹⁶ As Eugène Tigerstedt and Albano Biondi have pointed out,¹⁷ by rejecting the authenticity of Greek pagan historiography and tracing a sacred Jewish origin for the Etruscans, Anniius serves not only the patriotic and regional objective of exalting his native town, but also the major religious and political purpose of envisioning a proto-Christian history of Italy and Europe: "In my writings, I speak out in favour of my birthplace and Italy, and, thus, of all Europe. I do not claim to have elegance or grace, but only the simple truth."¹⁸

Marcocci, *The Globe on Paper: Writing Histories of the World in Renaissance Europe and the Americas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 80–111.

- 13 For an overview, for example, in the historiographical tradition on Florence, see Giovanni Cipriani, *Il mito etrusco nel Rinascimento fiorentino* (Florence: Olschki, 1980).
- 14 Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina XVII*, 122b. The original text reads: "Janus pater Ianigenas Razenuos docuit physicam, astronomiam, divinationes, ritus, et rituales scripsit, et omnia litteris mandavit."
- 15 For Anniius's chronographies, onomastics, and euhemeristic methods, see Ligota, "Annius of Viterbo and Historical Method," 44–56.
- 16 For Anniius's criticism of Hellenising historians, see Riccardo Fubini, "L'umanista: Ritorno di un paradigma? Saggio per un profilo storico da Petrarca ad Erasmo," *Archivio storico italiano* 147 (1989): 435–508.
- 17 See Tigerstedt, "Ioannes Anniius and Graecia Mendax," 293–310; Albano Biondi, "Annio da Viterbo e un aspetto dell'orientalismo di Guillaume Postel," *Bollettino della società dei Valdesi* 132 (1972): 49–67.
- 18 This passage appears in the dedication letter to the Spanish monarchs in the *editio princeps* of the *Antiquitates* (1498): Nanni, *Commentaria fratris Ioannis Viterbiensis*. The

Among the works that Anniius claims to have discovered, he includes the writings of Philo of Alexandria, Fabius Pictor, Metasthenes of Persia (his version of Megasthenes), and Berosus, a Chaldean priest and scribe from Babylonia. Berosus's *Defloratio caldaica* (*Chaldaic Collection*) is Anniius's main forged text, which he uses to provide a comprehensive proto-Christian Jewish history of the entire Mediterranean.¹⁹ Under Berosus's authority, Noah becomes not only Janus and Vertumnus for the Etruscans and Latins, but also Proteus for the Egyptians and Ogyges for the Phoenicians:

The one who lived for seventy years before the first Flood, before Deucalion, and who was the ancient father of all gods and human beings after the Flood was properly called Noah. Then, before Deucalion, a man named Ogyges lived for seventy years before the Flood; [...] and the Latins give Janus Noah's own personal epithets [...]. Thus, Noah, Ogyges, and Janus are simultaneously the same person. But his proper name is Noah, because Ogyges, or Janus, and Proteus, who is Vertumnus, are only his appellations.²⁰

Noah represents the guardian of an ancient, prediluvian Jewish tradition—namely, that of the Chaldeans—that is more ancient than the Mosaic teachings and from which, in fact, the veracity of Moses's Genesis stems. Accordingly, as Anniius declares, “it is not surprising that Berosus and Moses agree, since they drank from the same source.”²¹ The constellation of material evidence, public records, chronologies, and etymologies in Berosus's books lends historicity to Noah, purging him and his tradition of any mythological uncertainties and displacing, in a sense, both biblical and Greek authorities. By stressing Noah's historical authenticity, Anniius also confirms the legitimacy and truthfulness

original text reads: “Ego in his meis scriptis pro patria et Italia, immo et Europa tota profiteor. Ornatum vero et elegantiam non profiteor, sed solam et nudam veritatem.”

- 19 For the relevance of Berosus, see Walter Stephens, “*Berosus Chaldaeus*: Counterfeit and Fictive Editors of Early Sixteenth Century,” *Dissertation Abstracts International* 40 (1980): 1–24.
- 20 Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina xvii*, 104b–5a. The original text reads: “Nam qui praefuit primo diluvio ante Deucalionem annis septigentis, et pater antiquissimus deorum et hominum post diluvium, fuit nomine proprio dictus Noa. Porro ante Deucalionem annis septigentis praefuit diluvio Ogyges cognomine; [...] et ad idem Iano epitheta propria Noae a latinis tribuuntur [...]. Quare iidem et eodem tempore sunt Noa, Ogyges et Ianus. Sed Noa fuit proprium, Ogyges vero Ianus et Proteus id est Vertumnus sunt solum praenomina eius.”
- 21 Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina xvii*, 107a. The original text reads: “Non est igitur mirum si Moyses et Berosus conveniunt, qui ex eodem fonte historiae combiberunt.”

of the knowledge that he taught to the Etruscans. Thus, he does not merely express a deep-rooted anti-Greek prejudice and extol the superiority of the Jewish historical tradition against the Greek one, but he also exalts an ancient Jewish sapiential tradition, a *prisca theologia* (“ancient theology”),²² by rejecting its Jewishness and conceiving it as both proto-Christian and a prefiguration of the Roman Church: “I already dealt with the rest in the *Historia Hetrusca pontificia*, which I call ‘pontifical’ because it started with the *pontifex maximus* Noah, known as Janus, on the Vatican hill and returned once more subordinated to the pope and the Apostolic See.”²³

The fifteenth- and sixteenth-century interest in historical chronologies and genealogies belongs to the Renaissance culture of antiquarianism. By fabricating texts and historical accounts as well as inscriptions and epigraphs, Annius’s *Antiquitates* both satisfied the philological demand for ancient sources and pursued the theological and philosophical quest for the original sources of an ancient pre-Christian wisdom.²⁴ Although the *Antiquitates* soon came to be doubted, it is not surprising that Annius’s account of Noah-Janus and his triumphal imagery of biblical-Etruscan mysteries became particularly popular as propaganda for legitimising political power and cultural supremacy

22 For the relationship between the Etruscan myth and *prisca theologia*, see Walter Stephens, “The Etruscans and the Ancient Theology in Annius of Viterbo,” in *Umanesimo a Roma nel Quattrocento*, ed. Paolo Brezzi and Maristella de Panizza Lorch (Rome: Istituto di Studi Romani; New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 309–22. For Marsilio Ficino’s original concept of *prisca theologia*, which Annius revisited, see, among others, Michael J.B. Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation* (Florence: Olschki, 1998), 1–49; Cesare Vasoli, “Da Giorgio Gemisto a Ficino: Nascita e metamorfosi della *prisca theologia*,” in *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Claudio Varese*, ed. Giorgio Carboni Baiardi (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2001), 787–800; Vasoli, “Dalla pace religiosa alla *prisca theologia*,” in *Firenze e il Concilio del 1439. Atti del convegno di studi (Firenze, 29 novembre–2 dicembre 1989)*, ed. Paolo Viti (Florence: Olschki, 1994), 3–25; Stéphane Toussaint, “Alexandrie à Florence: La Renaissance et sa *prisca theologia*,” in *Alexandrie la divine*, ed. Charles Méla and Frédéric Möri (Geneva: Editions de la Baconnière, 2014), 2:971–90.

23 Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina xvii*, 152b. The original text reads: “Reliqua tractavimus in *Historia hetrusca pontificia*, quam iccirco pontificiam dicimus quod a pontifice maximo Noa qui et Ianus in Vaticano coepta, iterato ad pontificem maximum et sedem apostolicam subiecta rediit.” For the relationship between Annius and the papacy, in particular that of Alexander VI, see Giacomo Ferraù, “Riflessioni teoriche e prassi storiografica in Annio da Viterbo,” in *Principato ecclesiastico e riuso dei classici: Gli umanisti e Alessandro VI. Atti del convegno (Bari, Monte Sant’Angelo, 22–24 maggio 2000)*, ed. Davide Canfora, Maria Chiabò, and Mauro De Nichilo (Rome: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, Direzione generale per gli archivi, 2002), 151–93.

24 For a partial discussion of this matter, see Nick Temple, “Heritage and Forgery: Annio da Viterbo and the Quest for the Authentic,” *Public Archeology* 2 (2001): 151–62, <https://doi.org/10.1179/pua.2002.2.3.151>.

well beyond Viterbo. Especially in Florence, after the coronation of Cosimo de' Medici as duke of Tuscany in 1537, humanists belonging to the Accademia Fiorentina such Pier Francesco Giambullari (1495–1555) and Giambattista Gelli (1498–1563) promoted the myth of the city's biblical-Etruscan origins, stressing its independence and its cultural hegemony.²⁵ Similarly, the uniqueness of Florence's artistic production, as well as the superiority of the Florentine vernacular over the other vernaculars, was a dominant narrative among the humanists of the time, and the Etruscan myth, which Anniius had contributed to spreading widely, encouraged these debates.²⁶

Among Jewish scholars, Azariah de' Rossi (ca. 1511–1578) selected and produced Hebrew translations of a wide range of authors and material from the 1554 Lyons edition of Anniius's *Antiquitates* in his *Me'or 'Enayim (Light of the Eyes)* (1573–1575).²⁷ As Joanna Weinberg has stated, he “was no exception, nor was he the first or the last Jew to make use of the texts”²⁸ that Anniius produced. In fact, before de' Rossi, Obadiah Sforno (ca. 1470–1550) had twice referred to Berosus when discussing Noah in his commentary on Genesis.²⁹ Like de' Rossi, Sforno appeals to Anniius's *Antiquitates*. However, Anniius's Christianisation of Jewish historical accounts creates a number of theoretical issues when shifting the perspective from Christian to Jewish scholars. Why did Jewish intellectuals use Anniius's Christianising interpretations of Jewish history and the Jewish sapiential tradition, and why did they accept the authenticity of Anniius's forgeries? In de' Rossi's case, Joanna Weinberg has suggested that the Annian

25 See Hillard, “Mythic Origins, Mythic Archaeology,” 489–528; Anne Moyer, “Historians and Antiquarians in Sixteenth-Century Florence,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64 (2003): 177–93, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2003.0027>; Moyer, “‘Without Passion or Partisanship’: Florentine Historical Writing in the Age of Cosimo I,” in *History and Nation*, ed. Julia Rudolph (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006), 45–69; Mario Pozzi, “Mito aramaico-etrusco e potere assoluto a Firenze al tempo di Cosimo I,” in *Le pouvoir monarchique et ses supports idéologiques aux XIV^e–XVII^e siècles*, ed. Jean Dufournet, Adelin Charles Fiorato, and Augustin Redondo (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1990), 65–76; and Schoonhoven, “A Literary Invention,” 459–71.

26 See Caroline S. Hillard, “Vasari and the Etruscan Manner,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 44 (2013): 1021–40; on language, see, for example, Lisa Saracco, “Un'apologia della *Hebraica veritas* nella Firenze di Cosimo I: Il *Dialogo in difesa della lingua toscana* di Santi Marmochino O.P.,” *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 42 (2006): 215–46; Michael Sherberg, “The Accademia Fiorentina and the Question of the Language: The Politics of Theory in Ducal Florence,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 56 (2003): 26–55, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1262257>; and Paolo Simoncelli, *La lingua di Adamo: Guillaume Postel tra accademici e fuoriusciti fiorentini* (Florence: Olschki, 1984).

27 See Weinberg, “Azariah de' Rossi and the Forgeries of Anniius of Viterbo,” 269.

28 Weinberg, 258.

29 Weinberg, 255–57.

fabrications “appealed to him because they could be used to emend or confirm Rabbinic tradition.”³⁰ Both Sforino and de’ Rossi intended their writings for a Jewish audience that was not necessarily familiar with the Latin text of Anniius’s *Antiquitates*. It is therefore not difficult to imagine why, for example, de’ Rossi presents his arguments and sources as original and reliable in order to prove his arguments against the rabbinic authority.³¹ However, this is not the case for Abarbanel’s *Dialoghi d’amore*. In this text, we can trace the first employment of Anniius’s forgeries by an Italian Jew for a Christian scholarly readership. Indeed, by writing his *Dialoghi* in the Italian vernacular,³² Judah addresses and challenges his Christian colleagues.³³ More specifically, I would argue that he employed the *Antiquitates* in order to engage with Christian scholars who could easily identify the *Dialoghi*’s references to Anniius’s forgeries, as we will see in the next section. However, scholarship has not paid much attention to the *Antiquitates* as one of Judah’s essential sources and has thus failed to bring to light the role that its falsifications played in forging his philosophical identity.³⁴ Judah’s reading of the *Antiquitates* is thus an invaluable source for understanding the *Dialoghi* and the complex relationship between his philosophical project and the Christian intellectual production of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy.

30 Weinberg, 268.

31 Weinberg, 269. For Azariah’s historical methods, see Salo W. Baron, “Emphases in Jewish History,” in *History and Jewish Historians: Essays and Addresses*, ed. Salo W. Baron (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 65–89; Baron, “Azariah de’ Rossi’s Historical Method,” in Baron, *History and Jewish Historians*, 205–39.

32 Here, I am referring to the theory that the *Dialoghi* was originally written in the Italian vernacular. See Barbara Garvin, “The Language of Leone Ebreo’s *Dialoghi d’amore*,” *Italia: Studi e ricerche sulla storia, la cultura e la letteratura degli ebrei in Italia* 13–15 (2001): 181–210; James Nelson Novoa, “Appunti sulla genesi redazionale dei *Dialoghi d’amore* di Leone Ebreo alla luce della critica testuale attuale e la tradizione manoscritta del suo terzo dialogo,” *Quaderni d’italianistica* 30, no. 1 (2009): 45–66, <https://doi.org/10.33137/q.i.v30i1.8426>.

33 This purpose clearly appears in both his *Dialoghi d’amore* and his Hebrew elegy *Telunah ‘al ha-Zeman* (*A Complaint against the Time*). For *Telunah ‘al ha-Zeman*, see Nahum Slousch, “Poésies hébraïques de Don Jehuda Abrabanel (Messer Leone Ebreo),” *Revista de estudos hebráicos* 1 (1928): 1–22.

34 François Secret was the first to notice that Judah had copied Anniius while introducing the Noah-Janus couplet in his *Dialoghi*: see Secret, “Egidio da Viterbo et quelques-uns de ses contemporains,” *Augustiniana* 16 (1966): 377. Angela Guidi refers to Secret’s observation: see Guidi, *Amour et sagesse. Les Dialogues d’amour de Juda Abravanel dans la tradition salomonienne* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 135. A brief observation also appears in Damian Bacich, “Negotiating Renaissance Harmony: The First Spanish Translation of Leone Ebreo’s *Dialoghi d’amore*,” *Comitatus* 36 (2005): 136. I will further explore Judah’s Noah-Janus couplet in the next section.

3 Judah Abarbanel, Reader of Annius's *Antiquitates*: A Christian Source for an Ancient Jewish Tradition

Published posthumously in 1535, the *Dialoghi d'amore*,³⁵ a dialogical treatise on love composed of three dialogues, circulated widely among Christian scholars during the Cinquecento. After the *editio princeps*, sixteen editions of it were published in Italy between 1535 and 1607, and it was also soon translated into French, Spanish, Latin, and Hebrew.³⁶ Although it was mostly welcomed by the French, Spanish, and Italian Christian literati rather than by Jewish intellectuals, it is certainly true that Judah's work was an editorial success of the early modern period.³⁷ The details of the first publication are, however, quite scant. Although there is no clear evidence and the original manuscript is missing, we may presume that Judah wrote his *Dialoghi* in the Italian vernacular at the very beginning of the sixteenth century. The little we know places the drafting of the third dialogue between 1501 and 1512, depending on which

35 In this article, all English translations from the Italian vernacular are my own. Unless otherwise specified, words or brief phrases enclosed in square brackets in the English translation have been added to clarify the English text. The critical edition of the Italian vernacular text used is Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, ed. Delfina Giovannozzi (Rome: Laterza, 2008). For an alternative English translation, I have referred to Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, trans. Damian Bacich and Rossella Pescatori (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

36 For a complete list of the Italian editions, see Carl Gebhardt, "Bibliographie," in Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore. Hebraeische Gedichte. Herausgegeben mit einer Darstellung des Lebens und des Werkes Leones, Bibliographie, Register zu den Dialoghi [...] von Carl Gebhardt*, ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1929), 111–22. For the circulation of the *Dialoghi d'amore* in France, see Ulrich Köppen, *Die Dialoghi d'amore des Leone Ebreo in ihren französischen Übersetzungen: Buchgeschichte, Übersetzungstheorie und Übersetzungspraxis im 16. Jahrhundert* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1979). For the Spanish circulation of the *Dialoghi*, see James Nelson Novoa, "An aljamiado version of Judah Abravanel's *Dialoghi d'amore*," *Materia giudaica* 8 (2003): 311–26; Nelson Novoa, *Los Diálogos de amor de León Hebreo en el marco sociocultural sefardí del siglo XVI* (Lisbon: Cátedra de Estudios Sefarditas Alberto Benveniste, 2006); Nelson Novoa, "From Incan Realm to Italian Renaissance: Garcilaso el Inca and his Translation of Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore*," in *Travel and Translation in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carmine G. Di Biase (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 187–201. For the circulation of the text among the Jewish literati, see Guidi, *Amour et sagesse*, 34–42.

37 For an overview, see Maria Vittoria Comacchi, "Basta credere fermamente quel che la ragione non reprovà: La *renovatio* ficiniana in un passo sulla creazione dei *Dialoghi d'amore* di Yehudah Abarbanel," *Rivista di storia della filosofia*, 75, no. 3 (2020): *Dissenso ed eterodossia nel pensiero ebraico*, ed. Maria Vittoria Comacchi and Luigi Emilio Pischedda, 381–407, <https://doi.org/10.3280/SF2020-003002>.

manuscript we rely on as the manuscripts provide different dates.³⁸ In addition to this textual evidence, the manuscript tradition confirms that the work was already circulating in Italy—specifically, in Rome—in the second decade of the sixteenth century.³⁹

Accordingly, Judah might have read the 1498 first edition of Annius's *Antiquitates*, as he seems to show familiarity with it in the third dialogue at the point when the male character of the *Dialoghi*, Filone, explains the ancient theory of the cosmic cycles to Sofia, his disciple and beloved.⁴⁰ In this passage, Judah aims to demonstrate how ancient astrologers and theologians agree on the cosmological cyclic theory. He argues that the ancient astrologers supported their ideas about cosmic cycles by declaring themselves to be the heirs of an ancient Jewish wisdom; that is, a divine Adamic tradition.⁴¹

38 For an updated history of all the manuscripts of the third dialogue and the issue regarding the date that occurs in the text, see Nelson Novoa, "Appunti sulla genesi redazionale dei *Dialoghi d'amore*," 45–66.

39 On this issue, see Carlo Dionisotti, "Appunti su Leone Ebreo," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 2 (1959): 409–28; Vera Law, "Two More Arrighi Manuscripts Discovered," *The Book Collector* 27, no. 3 (1978): 370–79; and James Nelson Novoa, "A publicação dos *Diálogos de amor* de Leão Hebreu no contexto romano da primeira metade do século XVI," *Cadernos de estudos sefarditas* 6 (2006): 55–74.

40 For the description of this theory in the *Dialoghi* and how it was developed by contemporary authors, such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Yohanan Alemanno, and Isaac Abarbanel, see Brian Ogren, *The Beginning of the World in Renaissance Jewish Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). Marsilio Ficino was also familiar with this kabbalistic theory: see Guido Bartolucci, "Il *De christiana religione* di Marsilio Ficino e le 'prime traduzioni' di Flavio Mitridate," *Rinascimento* 46 (2008): 345–55. For an analysis of the philosophical context in which Judah situates this theory, see Comacchi, "Basta credere fermamente quel che la ragione non reprovava," 381–407.

41 On the supposedly Adamic origin of any true wisdom as an attempt to "Judaize" Marsilio Ficino's *prisca theologia*, see Brian Ogren, "Leone Ebreo on *prisca sapientia*: Jewish Wisdom and the Textual Transmission of Knowledge," in *Umanesimo e cultura ebraica nel Rinascimento italiano. Convegno internazionale di studi (Firenze, 10 marzo 2016)*, ed. Stefano U. Baldassarri and Fabrizio Lelli (Florence: Pontecorboli, 2017), 181–94. For an interpretation of this line of transmission in the *Dialoghi*, its sources, and Judah's idea of *prisca theologia* more generally, see Maria Vittoria Comacchi, "Yehudah Abravanel e l'eredità di Marsilio Ficino. La 'teologale sapienza' e il divino Platone," *Filosofia italiana* 15, no. 1 (2020): *Filosofia ebraica in Italia (XV–XIX secolo)*, ed. Guido Bartolucci, Michela Torbidoni, and Libera Pisano, 53–72, <https://doi.org/10.4399/97888255346344>. For *prisca theologia* among Jewish scholars, see Moshe Idel, "Prisca theologia in Marsilio Ficino and in Some Jewish Treatments," in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Michael J.B. Allen, Valery Rees, and Martin Davies (Leiden: Brill, 2002): 137–58; Abraham Melamed, "The Myth of the Jewish Origins of Philosophy in the Renaissance: From Aristotle to Plato," *Jewish History* 26 (2012): 41–59, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10835-012-9156-4>.

Its antiquity thus certifies its legitimacy. Filone declares that this wisdom had been transmitted as an oral tradition from Adam to Enoch, Noah, Shem, Eber, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Levi, and thence to the kabbalists. Introducing this tradition, Judah emphasises Noah's central role in transmitting this wisdom as he taught both his son Shem and Abraham. As a matter of fact, he states that Abraham received this archaic wisdom from Shem and his descendent Heber, but that he also *saw* (*vidde*) Noah. The insistence on the antiquity of this oral tradition is of considerable consequence since Judah seems to separate it from the Mosaic account of the creation. The overt chronological framework from Adam to the kabbalists gives the primordial Jewish tradition a historical legitimacy that is in agreement with the Mosaic story, but independent of it. However, the chronological priority of the Adamic wisdom does not displace the Mosaic authority. On the contrary, as Filone says, Moses authenticated the Adamic tradition, which was received through a face-to-face divine revelation, writing it accurately and verifying it in the Torah:

[Sofia]: This coincidence [of theology] with astrology is a good demonstration [of the validity of this cosmic theory]. But tell me, did these astrologers receive this theory through their reason only, or through an authentic teaching?

[Filone]: I have already told you that [the astrologers] believe they are supported by reason when they say that the world is corruptible. But besides astrological evidence, it will be difficult [for us] to find any philosophical reasons due to limited time. However, both [astrologers and theologians] say that they received [this theory] through a divine teaching, not only from Moses, who gave us the Law, but from the first Adam. This teaching was an oral and unwritten tradition, called "Kabbalah" in Hebrew, which means "reception," and it was transmitted to the savant Enoch, and from Enoch to the famous Noah, who after the Flood was called Janus because he invented wine. Indeed, "Janus" means "wine" in Hebrew. And they represent him with two faces turned away from each other, because he lived before and after the Flood. He handed down this tradition, along with many other human and divine stories, to the wisest of his sons, Shem, and to his descendant, Eber. [Shem and Eber] were teachers of Abraham, whom his forefather and master Eber called "the Jew." Also, Abraham saw Noah, who died when Abraham was fifty-nine years old. Some say that this tradition from Abraham and his successors Isaac, Jacob, and Levi was transmitted to the Jewish savants called "kabbalists," who say that Moses, [who received] this tradition by means of divine revelation,

confirmed it not only orally, but also by writing the Holy Scripture, using proper and credible verifications in many passages.⁴²

Similarly, in his *Antiquitates*, Anniius argues that according to Berosus's *Defloratio chaldaica*, Adam wrote the first history of the world after receiving it from God by revelation, and that Adam then transmitted the history of creation to Enoch, Enoch transmitted it to Lamech, and eventually Lamech transmitted it to Noah, who taught it to the Chaldeans. Accordingly, the Chaldean historical tradition, which posits the common antediluvian origin of Italy, Europe, and, to a certain extent, the Mediterranean,⁴³ predates the Mosaic narrative of the Jewish people. It is thus historically independent of Moses. In Anniius's view, there is a striking similarity between Moses's books and the Chaldean accounts since Moses used the Chaldean documents as a historical source when writing the book of Genesis:

And Hieronymus rightly says that Moses followed [the Chaldeans in tracing the history from Adam to Abraham. And, as others believe, the Chaldeans acquired this historical account from the history of Adam. Adam was the first to write] about the world and its creation after receiving it by means of revelation and weaving the history of humankind up to Enoch, whom he left to continue the history. Then Enoch left Lamech, the father of the prophet Noah, to continue [writing it] and Lamech [left it to]

42 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 235–36. The Italian vernacular text reads: “SOFIA. Non è poca dimostrazione questa concordanza d'astrologia. Ma dimmi, questi astrologi hanno avuto questo per ragione solamente o per disciplina autentica? FILONE. Già t'ho detto che a porre il mondo corruttibile credeno essere accompagnati da ragione; ma ne la limitazione de' tempi, oltra l'astrologica evidenza difficile saria trovar ragione filosofica. Ma l'uno e l'altro dicono avere per divina disciplina, non solamente da Moises, datore de la legge divina, ma fin dal primo Adam: dal quale per tradizione a bocca, la quale non si scrivea, chiamata in lingua ebraica *caballà* (che vuol dire 'recezione'), venne al sapiente Enoc e da Enoc al famoso Noè; il quale di poi del diluvio per sua invenzione del vino fu chiamato Iano, perché Iano in ebraico vuol dire vino, e il dipingono con due faccie reverse, perché ebbe vita innanzi il diluvio e di poi. Costui lassò questa, con molte altre notizie divine e umane, al più sapiente de' figliuoli, Sem, e al suo pronepote Eber, li quali furono maestri di Abraam, chiamato *ebreo* da Eber, suo proavo e maestro; e ancora egli vidde Noè, il qual morì essendo Abraam di cinquantanove anni. Da Abraam per successione di Isac e di Iacob e di Levi venne la tradizione, secondo dicono, a li sapienti degli Ebrei chiamati *cabalisti*: li quali da Moise dicono per rivelazione divina esser confirmata non solamente a bocca, ma nelle Sacre Scritture in diversi luoghi significata con proprie e verisimili verificazioni” (emphasis in original). For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 238–39.

43 See Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina xvii*, 104b–5a.

his son Noah. After the Flood, Noah thus left the Chaldeans [to continue it]. Abraham and the others wrote the truth about the history of humankind [having received it] from the Chaldeans. As Josephus claims against the grammarian Apion and in the first book of his *Jewish Antiquities*, the Phoenician Maseas and the Egyptian Hieronymus cite Moses as a witness of the Chaldaic tradition, since ancient Chaldaic history is very similar to Jewish history. Thus, it is not surprising that Berosus and Moses agree, since they drank from the same source.⁴⁴

Judah's Adamic tradition jibes with Anniius's ancient Chaldaic history. However, Judah strives to stress its status as an ancient wisdom rather than a historical account, although, like Anniius in his *Antiquitates*, Judah implies a historical foundation in order to demonstrate the chronological antiquity of Jewish wisdom. Also, in Judah's work, the Adamic tradition does not turn into a Mosaic tradition because Moses followed the Chaldeans in narrating the history of the world and humankind, but rather because Moses confirmed it, producing irrefutable evidence.⁴⁵ The postulate, far from displacing Moses's authority, enables Judah to distinguish an oral revealed tradition from one that is not only revealed face-to-face, but also verified, and written. Without any intention of doubting Moses's authority, Judah therefore emphasises the strength of his prophetic and scriptural voice.

If we keep these differences between Judah and Anniius in mind, Judah's Adamic line and his explanation of the cosmic cycles seem to bear more than a passing resemblance to his father Isaac Abarbanel's (1437–1508/9) *Mif'alot*

44 Nanni, 106b–107a. The original text reads: "Et ideo non immerito Moyses dicitur a Hieronymo sequutus [Caldeos, ab Adam usque ad Habraam. Et, ut alii existimant, hii Caldei tenuerunt ex historia Adae, quia Adam scripsit pri]mus ex revelatione de mundi atque sui creatione, et texuit historiam gestorum usque ad Enoch cui prosequendam reliquit historiam. Enoch autem prosequendam reliquit Lamech prophetae patri Noae, et Lamech filio eidem Noae. Noa vero reliquit post dilivium Chaldaeis, a quibus Habraam et residui veritatem rerum gestarum scripserunt. Unde cum historia Chaldaica de antiquitatibus quam simillima est Hebraeae ac propterea Moyses pro teste adducitur a Masea phoenice et Hieronymo egyptio, ut asserit Iosephus contra Appionem grammaticum et in primo *De antiquitate iudaica*. Non est igitur mirum si Moyses et Berosus conveniunt, qui ex eodem fonte historiae combiberunt." The long passage enclosed in square brackets in the Latin text and the English translation is an interpolation from the *editio princeps* of Anniius's *Antiquitates* (see Nanni, *Commentaria fratris Ioannis Viterbiensis*, 03a.). The passage is missing in the 1512 and 1515 editions.

45 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 235–36. The Italian vernacular text reads: "Da Moisè dicono per rivelazione divina esser confermata non solamente a bocca, ma nelle Sacre Scritture in diversi luoghi significata con proprie e verisimili verificazioni." For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 239.

Elohim (Deeds of God) (ca. 1499) rather than to Annius's *Antiquitates*.⁴⁶ Isaac was a well-known biblical exegete and intellectual, and *Mif 'alot Elohim* outlines an Adamic line of wisdom, tracing the origin of Moses's assumptions about the world's creation back to Adam himself. Questioning whether the world was created, Isaac claims that Moses received this belief from Qehat, a disciple of Jacob, who heard it from Noah's son Shem, who learned it from Methuselah, who received it directly from Adam.⁴⁷ Although Judah knew his father's oeuvre, Moshe Idel has suggested the kabbalist Shem Tov ben Shem Tov (ca. 1390–1440) or medieval philosophers such as Judah ha-Levi (ca. 1075–1141) and Shem Tov ibn Falaquera (ca. 1225–1295) as common sources for both Isaac and Judah.⁴⁸ Yet might Judah at least have had Annius's *Antiquitates* in mind, rather than only medieval Jewish texts or his father's work? Annius offers a model for giving historical legitimacy not only to Noah, but also to the religious belief of the creation of the world out of nothing. Even more importantly, the Dominican friar seems to be the first, as Walter Stephens points out, "to emphasize the role of the antediluvian Patriarchs in transmitting the *prisca sapientia* from its divine source to the more recent of the ancients."⁴⁹ Although we should spot some differences between Annius and Judah regarding their perception of Moses's authority and their description of the tradition, whether oral or written, it is worth recognising that Judah is astute enough to invoke Annius's authority in his *Dialoghi* in order to legitimise the chronological superiority of Jewish wisdom.

This passage of the *Dialoghi* may nevertheless be alternatively read as referring to the *Antiquitates iudaicae (Jewish Antiquities)* by the first-century Roman Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (ca. 37–100) rather than to Annius's *Antiquitates*. Specifically, in the first book of his *Antiquitates*, Josephus introduces Noah's life and provides details of the Flood in order to apologetically confirm the historicity of the Noachian account and thus the Jewish lineage of all the nations. The fact that Judah's father Isaac used a Latin translation of Flavius Josephus and a medieval Hebrew version of his works known as the *Sefer Josippon (Book of Joseph)*⁵⁰ in his commentaries and writings may perhaps

46 On this tradition in Isaac's *Mif 'alot Elohim*, see Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy, 1280–1510: A Survey* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 164–73. On Isaac's theory of cosmic cycles, see Brian Ogren, "La questione dei cicli cosmici nella produzione pugliese di Yiṣḥaq Abravanel," *Itinerari di ricerca storica* 20/21 (2006): 141–61.

47 To read this passage of *Mif 'alot Elohim*, see Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy*, 171.

48 See Idel, *Kabbalah in Italy*, 164–73.

49 Stephens, "The Etruscans and the Ancient Theology," 318.

50 This book is a summarised chronicle of Josephus's *Antiquitates iudaicae* and Pseudo-Hegesippus's *De excidio hierosolymitano (On the Destruction of Jerusalem)*. For Isaac, see

point to a reference to Josephus's oeuvre in the *Dialoghi*. Despite some controversial issues in Josephus's work, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the *Sefer Josippon* retained its central role among Jewish readers as a compendium of information proving the superiority of Jewish erudition and history.⁵¹ More broadly, Josephus was one of the most published ancient historians in Latin Renaissance Europe, and he was employed in various capacities by the Christian literati, who found his works to be linguistically accessible, a significant historical source for biblical narratives, and a potential buttress against Josephus's co-religionists.⁵² For example, Anniius himself relies extensively on Josephus's works as a historiographical model, and he names the Jewish historian more than any other author.⁵³ For our purposes, suffice it to say that in the *Antiquitates*'s passage on the Flood and the epithets of Noah, Anniius

Michael Avioz, "The Place of Josephus in Abravanel's Writings," *Hebrew Studies* 60 (2019): 357–74, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hbr.2019.0001>. Yitzhak F. Baer has stated that Isaac was the first Jewish author to read Latin translations of Josephus's works: see Baer, "Don Isaac Abravanel and His Relationship to Problems of History and State" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 8 (1937): 241–59. However, Nadia Zeldes has recently shown that they were known to other Jewish scholars in Italy and Spain from before Isaac's time, such as Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol (ca. 1452–1528): see Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance: Christians, Jews, and the Hebrew Sefer Josippon* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), 93–118.

- 51 On this matter, see Saskia Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption des Sefer Yosippon* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013); Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance*, 11–36, 93–118. For the debate around the reference to Jesus as the Messiah in the *Sefer Josippon* and the *Testimonium Flavianum*, see, among others, Robert Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist According to Flavius Josephus' Recently Rediscovered "Capture of Jerusalem" and the Other Jewish and Christian Sources*, trans. Alexander Haggerty Krappe (London: Methuen, 1931), 93–112; Abraham A. Neuman, "A Note on John the Baptist and Jesus in *Josippon*," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 23, no. 2 (1950/51): 137–49; Alice Whealey, *Josephus on Jesus: The Testimonium Flavianum Controversy from Late Antiquity to Modern Times* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Antony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg "I Have Always Loved the Holy Tongue." *Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2011), 203–9.
- 52 For Josephus's Christian reception, see Daniel Stein Kokin, "The Josephan Renaissance: Flavius Josephus and His Writings in Italian Humanist Discourse," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 47, no. 2. (2016): 205–48, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.VIATOR.5.11232>. For the reception of the *Sefer Josippon* among Christians, see Guido Bartolucci, "Marsilio Ficino e le origini della cabala cristiana," in *Giovanni Pico e la cabalà*, ed. Fabrizio Lelli (Florence: Olschki, 2014), 510–53; Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance*, 37–92, 119–38. For the medieval reception, see Heinz Schreckenberg, *Die Flavius-Josephus-Tradition in Antike und Mittelalter* (Leiden: Brill, 1972); and Schreckenberg, *Rezeptionsgeschichtliche und textkritische Untersuchungen zu Flavius Josephus* (Leiden: Brill, 1977).
- 53 For an overview, see, among others, Grafton, "Invention of Traditions and Traditions of Invention in Renaissance Europe," 8–38; Stephens, "The Etruscans and the Ancient Theology," 309–22; Fubini, "L'ebraismo nei riflessi della cultura umanistica," 291–331.

clearly draws his statements from Josephus's account, as confirmed by the specific distinction he recognises between Noah and Deucalion. More generally, Walter Stephens has noted the fundamental role played by Josephus's opposition between Jews and Gentiles in Annius's work. Annius strengthens this opposition and also the idea that the antiquity of the Jewish nation guarantees its superiority over the Greek culture, although—as I have suggested—he does Christianise the Jewish tradition.⁵⁴

While it is certainly possible that Judah was familiar with both either the *Antiquitates iudaicae* or the *Sefer Josippon* and his father's oeuvre, they do not seem an exact fit in this context. In the aforementioned passage of the *Dialoghi*, the ancient narratives that Judah ascribed to Adam and the kabbalists are in perfect agreement with Moses's account of the world's creation. Despite Judah's claims that the Mosaic revelation and verification confirm the ancient Jewish Adamic tradition, this archaic wisdom was independent of it. This brings us back to Annius's *Antiquitates* as the main source here, although Judah and Annius hold divergent opinions regarding Moses's authority.

Besides, the specific reference to Noah as Janus in the *Dialoghi d'amore* very clearly shows that Judah translated the passage from Annius's *Antiquitates*. While describing the Adamic line of transmission, Filone conflates the biblical patriarch Noah with the pagan god Janus. In Filone's own words, the reason Noah was called Janus is that after the Flood, he discovered wine, the Hebrew word for which is *yayin*. Filone then corroborates this argument regarding the correspondence between Janus and Noah by stating that Janus was usually depicted as a two-faced god, indicating Noah's two lives, one before the Flood and one after it:

This teaching was an oral and unwritten tradition, called "Kabbalah" in Hebrew, which means "reception," and it was transmitted to the savant Enoch, and from Enoch to the famous Noah, who, after the Flood was called Janus because he invented wine. Indeed, "Janus" means "wine" in Hebrew. And they represent him with two faces turned away from each other, because he lived before and after the Flood.⁵⁵

54 See Stephens, "The Etruscans and the Ancient Theology," 309–22.

55 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 235. The Italian vernacular text reads: "Venne [...] al famoso Noè; il quale di poi del diluvio per sua invenzione del vino fu chiamato Iano, perché Iano in ebraico vuol dire vino, e il dipingono con due faccie riverse, perché ebbe vita innanzi il diluvio e di poi." For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 238.

There are some references to Janus in the *Sefer Josippon*, and several Jewish scholars, including Isaac, also elaborate further on the Janus myth. While acknowledging Janus as the first king of Italy, the *Sefer Josippon* nevertheless conflates him with the biblical figure of Zepho, son of Eliphaz.⁵⁶ In the *Dialoghi*, the distinctive etymology of the name Janus and the different historical account of Noah-Janus, who taught his successors many other divine and human *notizie* (“stories”), prove that here, Judah is emulating none other than Anniius’s etymology, which we can read as follows:

In the end, Berosus imparts the reasons for the three epithets, Noah, Cam, and Tythea. Regarding Noah, [Berosus] says that he was called Janus, an epithet derived from the word *yayin*, which means “wine” in Aramaic and Hebrew, because Janus produced wine and was fond of it because he was the first who invented and drank it, as Berosus says. [Likewise,] both Propertius and Moses make it known to us [respectively] in an aforementioned text and in chapter IX of his Genesis, where Moses also names Janus after *yayin* [which means] “wine.”⁵⁷

Judah’s interpretation of Noah as Janus thus confirms that he references the *Antiquitates* in his *Dialoghi*. Paradoxically, he repeats a Christian mytho-historical theory in order to reinforce a larger Jewish paradigm. His contemporaries were undoubtedly able to identify a reference to Anniius’s forgeries in the aforementioned passage of the *Dialoghi*. As shown in the second section of this article, the friar’s text circulated widely among Christian scholars from the end of the fifteenth century. What emerges from this quotation, therefore, is Judah’s intention to challenge his Christian contemporaries’ canonical view of a proto-Christian Jewish history and sapiential tradition by adopting a critical approach to the reading of a well-known Christian source. However, Judah’s ability to rework Anniius’s *Antiquitates* challenges conventional Christianising interpretations of the Jewish tradition, as well as the Jewish tradition itself, revealing the extent to which Judah echoed, reinterpreted, and adapted various

56 For the accounts of Zepho-Janus, see Zeldes, *Reading Jewish History in the Renaissance*, 93–118.

57 Nanni, *Antiquitatum variarum volumina xvii*, 115a. The original text reads: “Hoc ultimo loco Berosus de tribus cognominibus rationes tradit Noa, Cam et Tythea. De Noa dicit quod fuit illi tributum cognomen Ianus a Iain quod apud Arameos et Hebraeos sonat vinum; a quo Ianus id est vinifer et vinosus, quia primus vinum invenit et inebriatus est, ut dicit Berosus et supra insinuavit Propertius et item Moyses *Genesis* cap. IX, ubi etiam Iain vinum Iani nominat.”

ideas that fostered philosophical debates between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as I will discuss in the next section.

4 Questioning the Ancient Jewish Tradition in the *Dialoghi d'amore*

It is obvious that Judah employed Annius's *Antiquitates* to prove the superiority of the Jewish tradition. What is more, he digested it in order to bring about a philosophical renewal of this tradition. In other words, he was a willing defender of the Jewishness of the Jewish wisdom that was proto-Christianised by Christian authors like Annius, yet at the same time, he expanded the Jewish sapiential tradition by including a philosopher among the more recent of the Jewish ancients. By doing so, he not only challenged his Christian contemporaries, but also, somewhat unexpectedly, questioned any Jewish tradition that could not be verified by means of reason and intellect. A broader analysis of the theoretical framework in which Judah includes the quotation from Annius might show his critical stance towards the Jewish tradition more clearly.

Judah introduces the Adamic line when Filone tells Sofia about the ancient theory of cosmic cycles in order to demonstrate the agreement between Plato and Moses on the world's creation. It is precisely this context that assists us in situating Judah's elaboration of his source, while also helping us to understand how he revised the concept of the Jewish tradition. While recounting the kabbalistic theory of cosmic cycles, Judah introduces his readers to the idea of *scemita* (*šemiṭṭah*) and *iobel* (*yovel*). In this passage, he introduces the cyclical temporal process of the *šemiṭṭot*: every seven thousand years, the end of an epoch marks the dissolution and re-composition of the earthly or sublunar world. Then, according to Judah, in the fifty thousandth year, after seven *šemiṭṭot*, the entire universe, including the heavens, collapses and everything material degenerates once more into prime matter or Chaos before the renewed world begins again. This is the cycle of *yovel*:

[Theologians] say that [Moses's Holy Scripture] means seven revolutions of the inferior world in forty-nine thousand years, and that [God] communicates the divine ideas in the universal Chaos and recreates the whole universe. [...] They say that "the earth" means "Chaos," which Jews, Chaldeans, and other Gentiles in fact used to call "earth." And this means that Chaos must sprout generative things for six thousand years, and that [it] will rest in the seven thousandth year, when all things are mixed up together and lose any individual property. [...] Moses calls this seventh year *šemiṭṭah*, which means "dissolution." This means that the properties

of all things dissolve in the seven thousandth year, and all things return to the first Chaos. This *šemittah*, therefore, is like Saturday among the weekdays. [...] When seven *šemittot*, which correspond to forty-nine thousand years, have passed, the fiftieth year of *yovel*, which means “jubilee” in Latin and a return [to the original Chaos] once more, will necessarily come. [...] And [theologians] say that this jubilee means the fifty thousandth year in which the whole universe, both the heavenly one and the inferior one, will be renewed.⁵⁸

A careful reading of this passage shows significant details that confirm that Judah is alluding to the kabbalistic theory of cosmic cycles in order to justify the problematic issue of the Platonic prime matter: “Because Chaos is the eternal mother, we say that her sprouting [...] is eternal. This means that the inferior world is perpetually renewed every seven thousand years, whereas the heavens [are renewed] every fifty thousand years, when everything is renewed.”⁵⁹ Obviously, the Platonic theory implicitly negates the conventional religious belief that God created the entire universe out of nothing. Suffice it to say here that Judah makes Plato a disciple of ancient theologians who believed in the corruptibility of the inferior world every seven thousand years. By doing so, he seeks to put Plato’s beliefs—even those in contrast with traditional theology—in line with Adamic wisdom, and thus with Moses, whose

58 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 236–37. The Italian vernacular text reads: “Dicono che significa le sette rivoluzioni del mondo inferiore in quarantanove milia anni, e la nuova comunicazione delle idee divine ne l’universo caos e nella recreazione di tutto l’universo. [...] Dicono significare la terra il caos, il quale gli Ebrei sogliono chiamare terra, e ancora li Caldei e altri gentili; e significa che 'l caos debbe essere in germinazione de le cose generabili sei milia anni e il settimo riposare con tutte le cose confuse comunemente senza proprietà alcuna [...]. [...] onde chiama questo settimo anno *scemita*, che vuol dire *relassazione*, che significa la relassazione de le proprietà de le cose nel settimo migliaro d’anni e la sua redizione nel caos primo, e questa *scemita* è come il sabbato ne’ giorni de la settimana. [...] quando saranno passate sette *scemita*, che sono quarantanove milia anni, si debba fare il quinquagesimo anno *iobel*, che in latino vuol dire iubileo, e redizione ancora [...]. [...] di sorte che in quell’anno le cose passate erano estinte, e principiava mondo nuovo per cinquanta anni, come il passato; il qual iubileo dicono che significa il quinquagesimo migliaro anno, nel quale tutto il mondo si rinnova, così il celeste come l’inferiore” (emphasis in original). For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 239–40.

59 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 233. The Italian vernacular text reads: “Essendo il caos eterna madre, la germinazion sua [...] poniamo eterna, cioè infinite volte successivamente l’inferiore di sette in sette milia anni, e il celeste con tutto che si rinnovi di cinquanta in cinquanta milia anni.” For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 236–37.

revelation confirms the Adamic tradition: "The ancient theologians before Plato, of whom he was a disciple, already said that the inferior world collapses and is renewed every seven thousand years."⁶⁰ In the ensuing lines, Judah turns more specifically to the problematic explanation of God's production of the eternal Chaos by juxtaposing Mosaic and Platonic narratives and conflating Plato's philosophy with Moses's revelation:⁶¹ "I like seeing you making Plato Mosaic and placing him among the kabbalists."⁶²

By framing Plato in the field of the faithful (*fideli*) and mooring his philosophy, specifically his theory of the world's creation, within the ancient Jewish tradition, Judah maintains that he is a follower or imitator of the Jewish elders, and thus of Moses. This could seem a rather negative designation if we do not read emulation as a value within the philosophico-theological and philological antiquarianism of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Plato's discipleship is indeed proof of his superiority over the corrupted degeneration of the present:

On the contrary, Plato, since he learned from the elders in Egypt, could hear more [than Aristotle], even if [his discipleship] did not allow him to grasp the hidden principle of the supreme wisdom or the first beauty. Thus, he made the supreme wisdom the second principle of the universe, dependent on the supreme God, the first principle of all things.⁶³

In particular, Plato's affiliation with the antediluvian Jewish nation represents a means of counterattack against false theories and philosophies, such as the Peripatetics' beliefs regarding the eternity of the universe. After clarifying the coincidence between Plato and Moses on the issue of the primordial Chaos, Sofia asks Filone whether Plato's philosophical arguments can better resolve Aristotelians' incorrect statements on this matter. Her question is designed to shift the attention from revelation to philosophical discourse. By maintaining

60 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 232. The Italian vernacular text reads: "Già li teologi più antichi di Platone, de' quali lui fu discepolo, dicono che 'l mondo inferiore si corrompe e rinnova di sette in sette milia anni." For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 236.

61 See Comacchi, "Basta credere fermamente quel che la ragione non reprova," 381–407.

62 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 238. The Italian vernacular text reads: "Mi piace vederti fare Platone mosaico e del numero de' cabalisti." For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 241.

63 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 330. The Italian vernacular text reads: "Ma Platone, avendo da li vecchi in Egitto imparato, poté più oltre sentire, se ben non valse a vedere l'ascoso principio de la somma sapienzia o prima bellezza, e fece quella secondo principio de l'universo, dependente dal sommo Dio, primo principio di tutte le cose." For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 325.

the authority of tradition, to which he anchors the origins of Plato's philosophy, and the verified Mosaic revelation, which confirms the ancient Jewish wisdom and Plato alike, Judah revises the Adamic-Mosaic tradition itself. Accordingly, by excavating the lowest layers of Greek philosophy down to its deepest roots, he proceeds to build a philosophical wisdom, or rather a sapiential philosophy. This strategy, which alludes to Marsilio Ficino's *docta religio* ("erudite religion") or *pia philosophia* ("pious philosophy"),⁶⁴ entails positing Plato—once provided with legitimising Jewish origins—not only as the most recent of the truthful ancient theologians, but also and above all as the culmination of the ancient Jewish wisdom. The reason for this is that Plato's philosophy is nothing but a philosophised version of the antediluvian wisdom. It is indeed a theological wisdom, as Plato was the last of the ancient theologians, and for this reason, his philosophy corresponds completely to the Mosaic Law: "I remain a follower of Moses [following] the theological wisdom, because I embrace this second path [i.e., the Platonic path] as it is truly the Mosaic theology."⁶⁵ In his discussion of the world's creation, Judah thereby enhances the appeal and credibility of both Jewish wisdom and Plato's philosophy in response to the contemporaneous Neoplatonic debate and against the false Peripatetic theory regarding the eternity of the world. Following Plato means being a true follower of Moses, because the Platonic way is based on reason and intellect and does not depend upon the mere authority of the ancients. One need only look at the beginning of the conversation between Filone and Sofia on the prime matter to see how Judah turns a received sapiential authority into a philosophical wisdom that can be fully grasped and verified:

[Sofia]: Has the ancient adage that nothing can be made out of nothing been supported for any other reason than its having been approved and acknowledged by the ancients?

[Filone]: If there had been no other reason for supporting it, it would not have been acknowledged and approved by so many excellent ancients.

64 On this matter, see Cesare Vasoli, "Ficino e la 'pia philosophia,'" in *L'Italia letteraria e l'Europa. Atti del convegno internazionale (Aosta, 20–23 ottobre 1997)*, vol. 2, *Dal Rinascimento all'Illuminismo*, ed. Nino Borsellino and Bruno Germano (Rome: Salerno, 2003): 129–49; Vasoli, "Ficino, la religione e i 'profeti' (1474–1482)," in *Laurentia Laurus. Per Mario Martelli*, ed. Francesco Bausi and Vincenzo Fera (Messina: Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Umanistici, 2004), 287–312.

65 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 329. The Italian vernacular text reads: "Come ch'io sia mosaico ne la teologale sapienzia, m'abbraccio con questa seconda via, però che è veramente teologia mosaica." For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 325.

[Sofia]: Tell me the reason, and let us abandon the authority of the ancients.

[Filone]: I will tell you [...] and you will see the reason why Plato was compelled to say not only that the world was made new out of nothing, but also that Chaos and the matter of the world were produced out of eternity by the supreme creator.⁶⁶

In sum, in his reading of Annius's *Antiquitates*, Judah seeks to vindicate the superiority of the Jewish sapiential tradition, which he can declare to be excellent thanks to its historical antiquity. However, Greek philosophy, which is conceived as reprehensively modern in authors like Annius, Isaac, or Flavius Josephus, is not always opposed to the Jewish revealed wisdom in the *Dialoghi*. On the contrary, Plato's newness, which is rooted in the Adamic-Mosaic tradition, unquestionably strengthens the ancient wisdom by means of reason and intellect. Before Judah, Marsilio Ficino incorporated the coincidence between philosophy and sacred religion into his ambitious programme of vigorous religious and philosophical *renovatio* ("reform").⁶⁷ Judah thus joins this debate and demonstrates a willingness to propose an alternative interpretation of the agreement between Moses and Plato from a Jewish perspective. Despite the differences, it is reasonable to attribute Judah's paradigm to Ficino's model of *pia philosophia*:

66 Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 228. The Italian vernacular text reads: "SOFIA. Ha questo detto antico, che di niente nulla si fa, altra forza di ragione ch'essere approvato e concesso dagli antichi? FILONE. Se altra forza di ragion non avesse, non sarebbe così concesso e approvato da tanti eccellenti antichi. SOFIA. Di' quella, e lassiamo l'autorità de' vecchi. FILONE. Io tel dirò [...] e vedrai una ragione, qual costrinse Platone a porre non solamente il mondo di nuovo fatto, ma ancora il caos, e materia del mondo, *ab eterno* prodotto dal sommo creatore." For an alternative English translation, see Leone Ebreo, *Dialogues of Love*, 232. For the production of prime matter out of eternity as an ontological state and not from eternity as a temporal condition, see Ogren, *The Beginning of the World in Renaissance Jewish Thought*, 218. For the *Argumentum in Timaeum*, the Ficinian source from which Judah draws material for his explanation of prime matter, see Comacchi, "Basta credere fermamente quel che la ragione non reprova," 381–407.

67 For Ficino's programme of *renovatio*, see Cesare Vasoli, "Il mito dei *prisci theologi* come ideologia della *renovatio*," in Vasoli, *Quasi sit Deus. Studi su Marsilio Ficino* (Lecce: Conte Editore, 1999), 11–50; Vasoli, "Dalla pace religiosa alla *prisca theologia*," 3–25; Vasoli, "Marsilio Ficino e la sua *renovatio*," in *Marsilio Ficino. Fonti, testi, fortuna. Atti del convegno internazionale (Firenze, 1–3 ottobre 1999)*, ed. Sebastiano Gentile and Stéphane Toussaint (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2006), 1–24; and Toussaint, "Alexandrie à Florence," 971–90.

Divine providence has decreed that many who are wrong-headed and unwilling to yield to the authority of divine law alone will at least accept those arguments of the Platonists which fully reinforce the claims of religion; and that irreligious men who divorce the study of philosophy from sacred religion will come to realize that they are making the same sort of mistake as someone who divorces love of wisdom from respect for that wisdom, or who separates true understanding from the will to do what is right.⁶⁸

5 Conclusion

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, as a result of the political emancipation of German Jewry and the subsequent fear of assimilation into the dominant Christian culture, the German Jewish movement known as the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* declared the need for a new academic discipline, Jewish philosophy.⁶⁹ These German Jewish scholars conceived Jewish philosophy as the result of a critical investigation into the Jewish intellectual tradition. In the *Wissenschaft's* manifesto (1818), its author, Leopold Zunz, stressed the importance of achieving a historical awareness of the Jewish intellectual

68 Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, trans. Michael J.B. Allen, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 111. The original text reads: “Hoc providentia divina decretum, ut et perversa multorum ingenia, quae soli divinae legis auctoritati haud facile cedunt, platonice saltem rationibus religioni admodum suffragantibus acquiescant et quicumque philosophiae studium impie nimium a sancta religione seiungunt, agnoscant aliquando se non aliter aberrare quam si quis vel amorem sapientiae a sapientiae ipsius honore vel intellegendiam veram a recta voluntate disiunxerit” (Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, 110).

69 The creation of Jewish philosophy as an academic subject has engaged scholars, at least in the last two centuries, in discussions that are still ongoing regarding the nature and even the very historical existence of a Jewish philosophy. See, for example, Raphael Jospe, “Jewish Particularity from Ha-Levi to Kaplan: Implications for Defining Jewish Philosophy,” in *Paradigms in Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Raphael Jospe (London: Associated University Press, 1997), 115–27; Daniel H. Frank, “What Is Jewish Philosophy?”, in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1997), 1–8; Josef Stern, “What Is Jewish Philosophy? A View from the Middle Ages,” in *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies 2017*, ed. Bill Rebigier (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 185–204; Dirk Westerkamp, “*Quaestio sceptica disputata de philosophia judaeorum*: Is There a Jewish Philosophy?”, in *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies 2018*, ed. Bill Rebigier (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 3–14. For a bibliography on this issue, see Maria Vittoria Comacchi and Luigi Emilio Pischetta, “Prefazione,” *Rivista di storia della filosofia*, 75, no. 3 (2020): *Dissenso ed eterodossia nel pensiero ebraico*, ed. Maria Vittoria Comacchi and Luigi Emilio Pischetta, 367–79, <https://doi.org/10.3280/SF2020-003001>.

tradition.⁷⁰ As Giuseppe Veltri suggests, the premise of Zunz's declaration is "to identify Jewish philosophers in a historical sense—within the axes of time and place—and to situate their scientific knowledge amidst other contemporary achievements."⁷¹ In this article, I have proposed situating a specific Jewish intellectual work in its historical perspective; that is, within its proper contemporary intellectual context.

Yet Abarbanel never admits to quoting Annius's *Antiquitates*, nor does he mention any past or present Christian author by name.⁷² Concerning Judah's choice not to openly acknowledge his Christian sources, Shlomo Pines has suggested that it "may have been due to a personal decision or to a Judaeo-Spanish convention."⁷³ However, Judah does not mention his father or any other Jewish source from his time in his *Dialoghi*. The only exceptions seem to be Maimonides and Ibn Gabirol, who are in fact medieval Jewish sources. Furthermore, they are referred to using their Latin Christian pseudonyms, such as "Rabi Moise" and "Albenzubron."⁷⁴ A more credible explanation for this generalised absence of contemporary sources is Judah's overt and strong desire to appear superior to every philosopher of his time, which leads him to consider them unworthy of mention—least of all the Christian ones. This intent is clear in his *Dialoghi d'amore*, when, for example, he bitterly criticises allegorical interpretations of Plato's *Symposium* that differ from his own.⁷⁵ Also, Judah's exclusion of explicit references to both Jewish and Christian contemporary authors can be attributed to his idea that the only true wisdom is a hoary wisdom, the *antica sapienzia* ("ancient wisdom") or *teologale sapienzia* ("theological wisdom").⁷⁶ He attributes legitimacy and

70 For Leopold Zunz and a complete bibliography, see Giuseppe Veltri and Libera Pisano, *Lebraismo come scienza: Cultura e politica in Leopold Zunz* (Turin: Paideia, 2019).

71 Veltri, *Alienated Wisdom*, 111.

72 On this issue, 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. Bernard D. Cooperman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 390.

73 Pines, "Medieval Doctrines in Renaissance Garb," 390.

74 See Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 153, 233, 266, 327.

75 Further evidence that Judah is alluding to contemporary sources here is his Italian translation of Diotima's teachings from Ficino's Latin *Convivium*: see Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore*, 290–91. In this passage, Judah also refers to Francesco Cattani da Diacceto's reading of the *Convivium* in his *De pulchro* (ca. 1499). I will investigate Judah's acquaintance with Francesco Cattani da Diacceto further in a forthcoming article.

76 On these two reasons behind Judah's "silence," see Maria Vittoria Comacchi, "Yehudah Abarbanel's Astromythology: In the Footsteps of Marsilio Ficino's *prisca theologia*," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 26, no. 2 (2020): *Marsilio Ficino's Cosmology: Sources and Reception*, eds. H. Darrel Rutkin and Denis J.-J. Robichaud, 437–52, <https://doi.org/10.19272/202004102006>.

significance to ancient astrological knowledge about the cosmic cycles as this theory matches a true *antica sapienza*—namely, the Adamic tradition—which Moses confirms by means of revelation and verification and Plato confirms through reason. If this assumption is correct, the *Dialoghi d'amore* thus shows a subtle and precarious balance between revealed, sacred tradition and philosophical enquiry. Paradoxically, this puzzlingly philosophical and philological *redditus ad fontes* (“return to sources”) ensures the superiority of the past over the present, as well as a departure from the acceptance of authority inherited only through tradition. This synthesis between revealed tradition and philosophy emerges as a common thread in all Neoplatonic intellectual productions written between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In conclusion, Judah's use of Annius's *Antiquitates* echoes his relationship with the Christian authors and intellectual environment of his own time. His Jewish re-appropriation of a proto-Christian Jewish ancestral paradigm and his re-elaboration of the correspondence between religion and philosophy from a Jewish perspective was embedded somewhere between deep-rooted philological and philosophical Renaissance antiquarianism and an ambitious religious and theological programme of reform; that is, *renovatio*.⁷⁷ As I have shown in this article, it is precisely in this context that Judah's *Dialoghi* should be read and understood. The combination of a recondite Jewish past and the belief in a philosophical Neoplatonic renovation could be said to be based on the premises of an intense and sometimes stormy debate promoted by Christian and Jewish scholars alike. Further research on Judah's use of Christian sources will certainly help to broaden our understanding of the *Dialoghi* and its context and to frame the intricate “neighbourhood of the mind” shared by Jews and Christians throughout the Renaissance.

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Bordering Two Worlds

Hillel Zeitlin's Spiritual Diary

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Abstract

This article explores the history and ideas of Hillel Zeitlin's (1871–1942) mystical diary. The first part of the diary appeared in print in Warsaw in 1919, but Zeitlin continued to write the diary until the European Holocaust, and the manuscript is presumed lost. This paper aims to reconstruct the content of the lost part of the diary on the basis of the manuscript correspondence between Zeitlin and other authors. It also discusses Zeitlin's unsuccessful attempts to have his diary published. By exploring this episode in Zeitlin's intellectual biography, this article examines the often-neglected mystical dimension of his oeuvre and the effect of diaristic writing on his late works.

Keywords

Hillel Zeitlin – mystical diary – modern Jewish thought – publishing – David Frischmann – Fishel Lachower – Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik

1 Introduction¹

The Warsaw writer, journalist, and philosopher Hillel Zeitlin (1871–1942) was a highly enigmatic figure. His writings are scattered across dozens of journals, he

1 A different Hebrew version of this article was published as Jonatan Meir, "The Book of Visions: On the Mystical Diary of Hillel Zeitlin and the Attempts to Print Hidden Treatises" [Hebrew], *Alei Sefer* 21 (2010): 149–71. On Zeitlin, see Simha Bunam Auerbach, *Toldot Nešamah Aḥat* (Jerusalem, 1953); Moshe Waldoks, "Hillel Zeitlin: The Early Years (1894–1919)"

published in both Hebrew and Yiddish, and only a very small portion of what he wrote has been gathered and republished. To make matters worse, the collections of his writings published following his death appeared in bowdlerised editions, his persona having been twisted and distorted by various ideologues who sought to foreground particular aspects of his complex thought. Until recent years, scholarship on Zeitlin focused primarily on his journalism and his political activities, themselves largely concerned with questions of nascent Jewish nationalism, Zionism, and the Jewish politics of early twentieth-century Eastern Europe. Yet recent studies have pointed to Zeitlin's contribution in another sphere; namely, his unique mystical-messianic vision. This vision, far from being simple neo-Romanticism, was articulated in numerous messianic publications issued from the 1920s on. These writings must be read in the context of a far more esoteric text, a highly personal mystical diary that Zeitlin began to keep during the First World War and continued to write until the end of his life. Only a small part of the diary was published in his lifetime, and its wider existence is known only from letters held in various archives. This spiritual diary, particularly its unpublished portions, lies at the heart of this article.

In what follows, we will examine the partially extant journal that Zeitlin kept from 1915 until his last days in the Warsaw Ghetto. While sections that were penned during the Great War came out in 1919, the rest of the diary was left unpublished and was ultimately lost to posterity. This article presents the various stages of the diary's creation, its partial publication, and the renewed efforts to bring it to press in the years before the Holocaust. Drawing on archived letters, *inter alia*, which remain in manuscript form, the unveiling of this episode will shed further light on Zeitlin's life and thought. First and foremost, it promises to elucidate his transformation from holding a neo-Romantic view of Jewish mystical literature to fully living in its spirit.²

(PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1984); Shraga Bar-Sella, *Between the Storm and the Quiet: The Life and Works of Hillel Zeitlin* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 1999); Arthur Green, "Three Warsaw Mystics," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 13 (1996): 1–58 (English section); Asael Abelman, "Hillel Zeitlin and the Making of Jewish Culture in East Europe, 1871–1919" [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2007). See also Hillel Zeitlin, *Hasidic Spirituality for a New Era: The Religious Writings of Hillel Zeitlin*, ed. and trans. Arthur Green (New York: Paulist Press, 2012). All English translations from the Hebrew are my own, unless otherwise specified.

2 For an analysis of this transformation, see Jonatan Meir, "Ḥasidut še-le-ʿAtid Lavo': Ne'ō-Romanṭiqah, Ḥasidut, we-Kisufey Mašiah be-Kitvey Hillel Zeitlin," in Hillel Zeitlin, *Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav: World Weariness and Longing for the Messiah, Two Essays by Hillel Zeitlin*, ed. Jonatan Meir (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2006), 9–39. For earlier expressions of his metamorphosis, see Asael Abelman, "In the Thicket of Belief and Denial: The Spiritual Path of Hillel Zeitlin at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century" [Hebrew], *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 16 (2007): 129–50. See also Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Darko

2 In the Secret Place of the Soul

The origins of Zeitlin's diary lie in the events of the First World War, which had an enormous impact on his way of thinking. In 1928, he reflected on the transformation that he had undergone:

The picture of my inner life (and that is most of my life) would not be complete or accurate if I did not mention, at least briefly, the growth in my life of faith since the day the war broke out. In it and all that has happened since I see the "messiah's footsteps," meant not metaphorically, and not simply referring to our national rebirth, but truly the footsteps of Messiah son of David. In the years 1914 and 1915, I was enveloped in almost the same state of ecstasy in which I had found myself when I first encountered Ḥabad [Hasidism]. I nearly achieved the state of "beholding visions" [*hozeh hezyonot*]. [...] The fruit of this wonderful ecstasy has comprised my entire spiritual life during these years.³

A harbinger of this transformation surfaces even earlier, in Zeitlin's essay "*Be-Ḥevyon ha-Nešamah*" ("In the Secret Place of the Soul," 1913). Published in the literary collection *Netivot*, which was edited by Fishel Lachower,⁴ this article was Zeitlin's response to William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). Here, Zeitlin sought, following James, to set guidelines for describing the Jewish religious experience.⁵

This was the first response to James to appear in the world of Hebrew literature.⁶ In contradistinction to James, who focused on accounts taken from Christian (predominantly Protestant) sources, Zeitlin sought to establish a Jamesian science of religions from a Jewish perspective. In place of the personal accounts preferred by James, Zeitlin turned to biblical, kabbalistic,

šel Hillel Zeitlin el ha-Misṭiqah ha-Yehudit," *Kivunim* 3 (1979): 81–91; Shraga Bar-Sella, "Hillel Zeitlin's Prophetic-Messianic Approach to Judaism" [Hebrew], *Daat* 26 (1991): 109–24.

3 Hillel Zeitlin, "Qišur Toldotay," *Ketuvim* 2, no. 28/29 (1928): 1–2; translation adapted from Arthur Green, "Hillel Zeitlin: A Biographical Introduction," in Zeitlin, *Hasidic Spirituality*, 5.

4 Hillel Zeitlin, "Be-Ḥevyon ha-Nešamah: ha-Peraqim ha-Rišonim mi-Tokh Sefer," in *Netivot*, ed. Fishel Lachower (Warsaw, 1913), 205–35. There is no express acknowledgement that Lachower was the editor of this anthology. In any event, he also contributed material to it under several pseudonyms; see Shmuel Lachower, *Fishel Lachower: Bibliyografiyah (1904–1947)* (Tel Aviv, 1948), 3, 12. The essay was reissued with a new introduction in Hillel Zeitlin, *In the Secret Place of the Soul: Three Essays* [Hebrew], ed. Jonatan Meir and Samuel Glauber-Zimra (Jerusalem: Blima Books, 2020).

5 On Zeitlin's essay, see Waldoks, *Hillel Zeitlin*, 205–42; Bar-Sella, *Between the Storm and the Quiet*, 133–50.

6 Zeitlin, it appears, read James's work in the Russian translation published in Moscow in 1910.

and Hasidic literature, repurposing these texts as phenomenological descriptions of the Jewish religious experience. Zeitlin explained his preference for these textual sources over James's "personal documents," writing that the latter only expressed human feelings and not the "true mystical astonishment" that he sought to uncover.⁷ The categories that he presented in this work, "wonder," "astonishment," and "revelation," were later adopted by Abraham Joshua Heschel in his influential work *God in Search of Man*.⁸ "*Be-Hevyon ha-Nešamah*" was presented as the first chapter of a larger study, and in its conclusion, Zeitlin expressed his intentions to author further sections on "higher forms of revelation," such as "the holy spirit," "voices," and "prophecy." However, this continuation never appeared.

From an undated letter to Lachower, we learn that Zeitlin later wanted to follow up this work with a sequel drawn from his personal experience:

I would be truly indebted to you if were able to sway [David] Frischmann and [Abraham Joseph] Stybel to publish my visions. After weighing the matter over, I have decided to present them as a second part of "*Be-Hevyon ha-Nešamah*." I will complete the first section with numerous testimonials and demonstrations from the experiences of others; the second part (*Sefer ha-Hezyonot* [*The Book of Visions*]) will be from my own experiences. Of course, their style must be down to earth and very simple; nevertheless, it is incumbent upon me to adapt and refine them. Even simplicity needs enhancement.⁹

Thanks to Lachower's efforts, the second part was eventually published with Stybel Press. It was not, however, titled "The Book of Visions" (a name that subsequently resurfaced as one of the titles of the unpublished sections of Zeitlin's mystical journal), but rather "*Al Gevul Šeney 'Olamot*" ("Bordering Two

7 In a letter to Shmuel Hugo Bergmann from 11 July 1965, Zeitlin's son Aaron wrote that "if I had the time I would write about the remarkable similarity between Rudolf Otto's concept of the numinous and the concept of astonishment (astonishment also in the sense of great fear) in the above-mentioned essay [*Be-Hevyon ha-Nešamah*] by my father. And it should be known that my father preceded Otto by five years (and later not only Otto)": Aaron Zeitlin, Letter to Shmuel Hugo Bergmann [Hebrew], 11 July 1965, National Library of Israel, Manuscripts Department, Bergmann Archive, 4^o1502, file 2389.

8 That said, Heschel fails to mention Zeitlin's name in this book. See Green, "Three Warsaw Mystics," 33. For more on the relationship between Heschel and Zeitlin, see Edward K. Kaplan and Samuel H. Dresner, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 62–64, 305–6.

9 Hillel Zeitlin, Letter to Fishel Lachower [Hebrew], undated, Machon Genazim, Fishel Lachower Archive (16), document 11038/12.

Worlds”). The above-cited letter indicates that the first part of the diary, which came out in 1919, was intended as a supplement to “*Be-Ḥeyyon ha-Nešamah.*” However, this link between the two works, which had inspired Zeitlin to take on the diaristic project to begin with, quickly waned, as the journal assumed a new course. At this early stage, we see the first buds of Zeitlin’s experiential approach, which would mature following the Great War, especially in his writing on Kabbalah and Hasidism and his prophetic-messianic works published throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The published diary, then, constituted a turning point in Zeitlin’s thought, which further coalesced in the years ahead, including—as evidenced by fragments of information that turn up in his correspondence with various figures—in the unpublished sections of his diary, which he continued to write.

3 “Bordering Two Worlds”: The Published Diary

As suggested earlier, Zeitlin released part of his diary in 1919 under the title “*‘Al Gevul Šeney ‘Olamot.*”¹⁰ The diary sections appeared in the journal *Ha-Tequfah*, which at that time was headed by its editor-in-chief David Frischmann and published by Abraham Joseph Stybel (there will be more on Stybel below). Lachower, too, was involved; he edited the essay section in which Zeitlin’s journal appeared. Zeitlin was among the regular contributors to *Ha-Tequfah*, so his voice was hardly foreign to its readership. While dates appear in the diary (from March 1917 onwards), it is evident that Zeitlin himself removed certain passages from the published version.

This incarnation of the diary has already been the subject of several surveys, thereby obviating the need for a lengthy discussion.¹¹ However, several issues warrant our attention. The entries are written in a personal vein, *sans* ideological or literary order. Instead, they stress the author’s experiences. On occasion, passages relate directly to events from the Great War, whose influence on the apocalyptic strain of Zeitlin’s thought is evident throughout the work.¹² He unfurls the essence of his lectures-cum-sermons on messianic topics, ideas

10 Hillel Zeitlin, “*‘Al Gevul Šeney ‘Olamot (mi-Tokh Sefer Rešimot šel Ḥolem),*” *Ha-Tequfah* 4 (1919): 501–45, reprinted with changes and omissions in Hillel Zeitlin, *Bordering Two Worlds* [Hebrew], ed. Aaron Zeitlin (Tel Aviv, 1960), 169–215. All the references herein are to the first edition. The essay was recently republished in Zeitlin, *In the Secret Place of the Soul*, 79–147.

11 Auerbach, *Toldot Nešamah Aḥat*, 113–16; Bar-Sella, *Between the Storm*, 190–96; Abelman, “Hillel Zeitlin,” 236–62.

12 Zeitlin, “*‘Al Gevul Šeney ‘Olamot,*” 503–4.

which, over the years, would evolve into a comprehensive overarching gospel, the crux of which is a *ḥazarah be-tešuvah* (“return to the fold of Judaism”) in the spirit of Jewish esoteric literature.¹³ Some of the content, however, has nothing to do with the war. For instance, Zeitlin fleshes out a series of *azharot* (“admonitions”) that he culled from Hasidic works,¹⁴ while describing the mixed results of his own efforts to perform these *azharot*.¹⁵ It also bears noting the major role that dreams play therein (a topic that Zeitlin’s son Aaron would take to extremes in his inquiry into parapsychological phenomena).¹⁶ As the years passed, Zeitlin amplified the journal’s eclectic mix, but even this early version included elements that were bizarre and alien to many of his contemporaries.¹⁷ Attributing clairvoyant power to his dreams, he carefully recorded his premonitions concerning the fate of the Jewish people, as well more mundane incidents, such as an attempted home robbery that was thwarted thanks to a warning he received in a dream the previous night.

4 Reception of the Published Diary

As evidenced by the substantial coverage in *Ha-Tequfah*, mysticism was indeed in vogue within the Jewish community during this period. That said, Zeitlin’s diary stood out from other articles on this topic, as it did not offer research,

13 Zeitlin, 502–3.

14 Zeitlin, 501. His words are derived from *Sefer ha-Tanya*’ and the insights of R. Naḥman of Bratslav, R. Menahem Naḥum Twersky of Chernobyl, R. Ya’akov Yitzhak Horowitz (the Seer of Lublin), and others.

15 Zeitlin, “Al Gevul Šeney ‘Olamot,” 502, 504. For a discussion on these practices, see Bar-Sella, *Between the Storm*, 190–91, 198, nn. 49–51. Zeitlin’s affinity for this literature also comes across in his later book on Naḥman of Bratslav. However, the strongest manifestation of this influence is the practices that he devised for the short-lived messianic groups he established from the 1920s onward. See Hillel Zeitlin, *Sifran šel Yehidim: ‘Omeq Raz, Zokh Maḥšavah ve-Kišaron Hanhagah u-Ma’ašeh le-Nešanut Bodedot ha-Mešapot le-Yišu’at ‘Olamim be-Šanim Eleh šel ‘Iqveta’ de-Mešīḥa* (Warsaw, 1928), 57–63; Zeitlin, *Vos ikh hob yets tsu zogen dem yudishen folk* (Warsaw, 1930), 96–97. See also Zeitlin, *Oro šel Mašīaḥ be-Torat ha-Breslavi* (Warsaw, 1936). More recently, these practices have been resuscitated in a post-modern spirit: see Or N. Rose and Ebn D. Leader, *God in All Moments: Mystical & Practical Spiritual Wisdom from Hasidic Masters* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004), 137–40.

16 Aaron Zeitlin, “Ḥalomot Neqamah ve-ha-Hitraḥšut ha-Historit,” *Molad* 17, no. 132 (1959): 350–62; Zeitlin, *Ha-Mešī’ut ha-Aḥeret: ha-Perapsikhologyah ve-ha-Tofa’ot ha-Perapsikhiyot* (Tel Aviv, 1977). The latter work (370–76) discusses one of the dreams published in “Al Gevul Šeney ‘Olamot.”

17 The journal is analysed with an emphasis on Zeitlin’s esoteric influences in Samuel Glauber-Zimra, “From Time to Time I Dream Wondrous Dreams’: Esotericism and Prophecy in the Writings of Hillel Zeitlin,” *Correspondences* 9 (2021): 5–48.

criticism, literary adaptations, or neo-Romantic views, but rather living expression.¹⁸

One of the first reviews of Zeitlin's journal was a parody by A. Ben Yosef in the newspaper *Ha-Şefirah*, which opens:

Since it has come to my attention that the entries by Rabbi Hillel Zeitlin that were printed in volume 4 of *Ha-Tequfah* stirred great noise in the upper and lower worlds, I have decided to follow in its footsteps and record in my notebook whatever I see in a dream and when awake, so that the passing and coming generations will know that a great person like me creates great things and works wonders even in his dreams.¹⁹

Ben Yosef proceeded to ridicule Zeitlin's experiences in a similar vein. The diary was also the target of a succinct yet cynical review penned by Ya'akov Koplewitz in the journal *Ha-Şiloah*:²⁰

But most "interesting" of its kind is the article-diary "Bordering Two Worlds" by Hillel Zeitlin: a wonderful concoction, which has no parallel in literature, of true religiosity and manic hallucination, a pure humane aspiration for renewal and salvation of the soul and oblivious hypocrisy, a light touch of the senses, the senses of the man of letters, in the world of mystery and superstitions, the naiveté of a child's tempestuous, rash soul, and the tastelessness of a person to whom the culture of composition is utterly foreign.²¹

This invective, which was rooted in Koplewitz's negative attitude towards Zeitlin and Jewish esoteric knowledge more generally, was not the most severe reproach the diary received. For instance, Dov Kimhi's short piece in *Ha-Po'el ha-Şa'ir* described the journal as amounting to "odd prayers, an odd tone, dreams of nonsense, and infirmity."²² Even the novelist Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner,

18 Before publishing Zeitlin's diary in 1919, *ha-Tequfah* ran several pieces on similar topics. Shortly afterwards, Zeitlin's most important articles on Kabbalah appeared in the same journal: see Zeitlin, "Qadmut ha-Misttorin be-Yiśra'el," *ha-Tequfah* 5 (1920): 280–322; Zeitlin, "Mafteah le-Sefer ha-Zohar," *Ha-Tequfah* 6 (1920): 314–34; 7 (1920): 353–68; 9 (1921): 265–330.

19 A. Ben Yosef, "Mi-Pinqaso šel 'Ittonay (4): Ḥalomotay," *Ha-Şefirah* 59, no. 34 (1920): 2.

20 Ya'akov Koplewitz, "Sifrey 'Ha-Tequfah' (Rešimot Biqqoret)," *Ha-Şiloah* 37 (1920): 410–20; the criticism of Zeitlin's diary appears on 420. Koplewitz later adopted the name "Yešurun Qešet." See Getsel Kressel, *Cyclopedia of Modern Hebrew Literature* [Hebrew], vol. 2 (Tel Aviv, 1967), 805–6.

21 Koplewitz, "Sifrey 'Ha-Tequfah," 420.

22 Dov Kimhi, "Rešimot Biqqoret," *Ha-Po'el ha-Şa'ir* 13, no. 25 (1920): 12.

who was Zeitlin's closest friend when the two lived in Gomel (in present-day Belarus), hurried off a note to Fishel Lachower asserting that the publication of the diary was nothing less than "a scandal."²³

5 Pushing Ahead

What was published in 1919 was only a small fragment of Zeitlin's journal. Undeterred by these sharp barbs, Zeitlin continued to write and advance his new ideas. "*Al ha-Kamus we-ha-Ne'elam*" ("On the Hidden and the Concealed"), an article that came out in 1921, includes a discussion on "hidden feelings" and dreams. In an accompanying footnote, the reader is informed that this text constitutes two chapters from a work titled *Al ha-Misttorin (On the Esoteric)*. By dint of their "theoretical value in their own right," he decided to publish them in *Ha-Tequfah* as "a correct answer to the critics of the book of my visions, whose opening was printed in *Ha-Tequfah*."²⁴ Zeitlin's discussion here is divided into two sections on "hidden senses" and "dreams," the latter written in part to contest Sigmund Freud's recent publications on the subject. "*Al ha-Kamus we-ha-Ne'elam*" presents a novel theory of prophecy that is partially derived from Ḥabad Hasidic metaphysics interwoven with the notion of "intuition" developed by the American metaphysical writer Ralph Waldo Trine, a leading figure of the New Thought movement.²⁵ Zeitlin substantiated his claims by citing accounts of German mesmerists and parapsychologists.²⁶

This was an opening to a new concept of prophecy that sustained Zeitlin's own messianic visions in the 1920s and 1930s. It comes as no surprise, then, that in 1928, "*Al ha-Kamus we-ha-Ne'elam*" was directly incorporated into one of Zeitlin's messianic tracts, whose strange title reads in full *Sifran šel Yehidim: 'Omeq Raz, Zokh Maḥšavah we-Kišaron Hanhagah u-Ma'aseh le-Nešamot*

23 Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner, *Iggrot Y. H. Brenner*, ed. M. Poznansky, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv, 1941) 2:320, letter 747. For more on Brenner's critique, see Zeitlin, *Mešūt ha-Aheret*, 370–72. The complex relationship between Brenner and Zeitlin at different phases of their lives is explored in Jonatan Meir, "Longing of Souls for the Shekhina: Relations between Rabbi Kook, Zeitlin, and Brenner" [Hebrew], in *The Path of the Spirit: The Eliezer Schweid Jubilee Volume*, ed. Yehoyada Amir (Jerusalem: Mandel Institute for Jewish Studies, 2005), 771–818.

24 Hillel Zeitlin, "Al ha-Kamus we-ha-Ne'elam," *Ha-Tequfah* 11 (1921): 472.

25 In 1918, Zeitlin published original Yiddish translations of several selections from Trine's magnum opus *In Tune with the Infinite*. See Ralph Waldo Trine, "Der Nayer Onhoib," trans. Hillel Zeitlin, *Hilel Tseytlen's Bletlekh* 1 (1918): 5–8; Trine, "Di Harmonye mit dem Unendlikhen," trans. Hillel Zeitlin, *Hilel Tseytlen's Bletlekh* 2 (1918): 28–30.

26 This work is analysed at length in Glauber-Zimra, "From Time to Time I Dream Wondrous Dreams," 24–30.

Bodedot ha-Mešapot le-Yišu'at 'Olamim be-Šanim Eleh šel 'Iqveta' de-Mešiḥa' (The Book of the Select: Profound Secret, Clear Thinking, and Guidance and Deed for the Lone Souls Longing for World Salvation in These Years of the "Messiah's Footsteps").²⁷ Moreover, at the outset of another messianic book from that same year, *Davar la-'Ammim (A Word to the Nations)*, Zeitlin proclaimed that "I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, nor am I deluded into thinking that the message underlying my *Davar la-'Ammim*, presented here to the reader, was sent to me from on high," yet continued: "Were Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel to rise today from their graves [...] the outer revealed, understood content of their message, I believe, would be the same as my *Davar la-'Ammim*."²⁸

Another way in which Zeitlin offered a retort to his critics was his persistence in writing his journal. Its detailed account of his personal experiences aside, the published diary does not have any particular mystical characteristics. However, it is worth remembering that the journal was penned at the outset of Zeitlin's transformation and that the lion's share of his mystical and apocalyptic thought was crafted in the following years. Given this broader context, this personal experiential diary should also be viewed as a mystical text, for Zeitlin's life was suffused with mysticism from this point onward. This is manifest in the numerous works that he put out from the end of the First World War until his passing in 1942. As hinted by the fragmented information found in the small handful of Zeitlin's private letters, the rest of the diary, which is no longer extant, placed a much greater emphasis on messianic issues. Our knowledge of the subsequent entries is intertwined with records of Zeitlin's struggles to publish works in Hebrew during the 1920s and 1930s. In the following sections, we will present his attempts to publish his writings and the remainder of his journal, an effort that preserved a glimpse of the diary's esoteric contents that he so wished to reveal to the world.

6 *The Book of Visions and the Stybel Press*

In a letter to Joseph Klausner dated 28 June 1921, Zeitlin brought up his diary: "The book is strange and alien to our intelligentsia, yet it is truly so full of interest and full of truth that its beginning appeared in *Ha-Tequfah* under the name 'Bordering Two Worlds.'" Moreover, he expressed his desire to publish

27 Hillel Zeitlin, *Sifran šel Yehidim*, 16–27.

28 Hillel Zeitlin, *Davar la-'Ammim: Ḥazon 'al Goyim we-'al Mamlakhot, 'Iqarey Torat Bney-Noah we-Širot-Tefillot 'al Šelom ha-'Olam we-'al Šivat ha-Šekhinah li-Meqomah* (Warsaw, 1928), 1–2.

the rest.²⁹ Indeed, around two years later, Zeitlin endeavoured to have the full diary published by the Stybel Press under the title *Sefer ha-Hezyonot* (*The Book of Visions*).³⁰ The choice of this particular name, which had previously been used by Hayyim Vital, is indicative of how significant the full version was to its author.

Zeitlin's turn to the Stybel Press was only natural, for this company had already put out the first instalment in its capacity as the publisher of *Ha-Tequfah*. Moreover, as an adolescent, Abraham Joseph Stybel, the proprietor of this printing house, had venerated Zeitlin. In his memoirs, Stybel recalled Zeitlin's impact on him. As early as 1904, he told Menachem Ussishkin: "I admired and venerated Hillel Zeitlin. He struck a chord in my heart; and with bated breath, I awaited every word that left his pen."³¹

Besides the journal, Zeitlin subsequently pitched his "complete works" to the Stybel Press, thereby following the lead of Yosef Hayyim Brenner and Micha Josef Berdyczewski. For its part, the company announced that it would release Zeitlin's collected writings between 1922 and 1925.³² In addition, there are references to this plan in various works published by the Stybel Press. At one point, it even informed the public that the first volume, which it planned to call *Pardes* (*Orchard*), was in the pipeline.³³

This project fell through on account of the heavy expenditures that Stybel incurred while bringing to press *The Complete Works of M.J. Berdyczewski* (Leipzig, 1921–1924) and *The Complete Works of Y.C. Brenner* (Tel Aviv, 1924–1928), each of which comprised ten volumes.³⁴ In consequence, the publishing house was unable to put out so much as a single volume of Zeitlin's writings.

Other ventures that Zeitlin initiated at around this time met a similar fate. For example, a book series including a translation of the Zohar and monographs

29 Hillel Zeitlin, Letter to Joseph Klausner [Hebrew], National Library of Israel, Manuscripts Department, Klausner Archive (1086), file 436.

30 D.A. Friedman, "Luah ha-Sifrut we-ha-Sofrim," *Ein ha-Qore* 1 (1923): 182–83. According to this source, Zeitlin was preparing his works for republication at the Stybel Press. Moreover, Friedman noted that among the drafts were two new books: *Sefer ha-Hezyonot* and *Davar la-Dor* (*A Word to the Generation*).

31 Dania Amichay-Michlin, *Ahavat iś: Avraham Yosef Stybel* (Jerusalem, 2000), 29–30.

32 This can be ascertained from Zeitlin's letter to Simon Rawidowicz of 7 December 1922, where he discusses the preparations for this collection: see Hillel Zeitlin, "Letters," *Mešudah* 1 (1943): 38. For more on these efforts, see Zeitlin's letters to Jacob Joseph Haus [Hebrew], Machon Genazim, Zeitlin Archive (237), document 20893/1 (undated); document 20872/1 (27 Heshvan 5697 [1936]).

33 "Yedi'ot 'al Devar Sefarim Hadašim be-Hoša'at Stybel," *Ha-Tequfah* 21 (1924): back matter.

34 Amichay-Michlin, *Ahavat iś*, 153, 185.

on Isaac Luria and Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, which was slated for publication by the Berlin-based 'Ayanot press, never came to fruition either.³⁵

7 Zeitlin's Messianic Works

While Zeitlin apparently refrained from pitching his diary to publishing houses from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s, in all likelihood he continued to make entries in it. During these years, he devoted himself to writing articles and books on Jewish esoteric wisdom (foremost among them a Hebrew translation of the Zohar), disseminating his messianic ideas in sundry Hebrew and Yiddish tracts, and establishing messianic associations in Eastern Europe and the Land of Israel. The objective behind these groups was to prepare the Jewish people for the arrival of the Messiah by means of prayer, superior moral conduct, and the study of Kabbalah. Correspondingly, he embarked on an unusual effort to revitalise Hasidism through a quasi-movement that he dubbed *Ḥasidut še-le-ʿatid lavo* ("The Hasidism of the Future"),³⁶ while continuing to publish articles in the Yiddish daily press. In particular, he contributed several pieces a week to *Der moment*.³⁷

Zeitlin encountered immense difficulties finding a publisher for his works. More often than not, he footed the bill for the pamphlets and booklets that he printed during the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. Owing to limited means, he resorted to cheap paper and basic designs. With respect to his collected works, he was compelled to approach the large publishers that were active in the Land of Israel; namely, Schocken Books and Mosad Bialik.

Upon renewing his attempts to publish his diary, which by this point had grown exponentially, Zeitlin turned to old friends who had since moved to Palestine, where they were immersed in the building of a new literary centre for world Jewry. In the meantime, however, the transformation in Zeitlin's worldview had altered the attitude of these circles toward his work. Their

35 For more on these plans, see Jonatan Meir, "Hillel Zeitlin's Zohar: The History of a Translation and Commentary Project" [Hebrew], *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 10 (2004): 119–57.

36 Meir, "Ḥasidut še-le-ʿAtid Lavo," 19–36. See also Arthur Green and Ariel Evan Mayse, "The Great Call of the Hour': Hillel Zeitlin's Yiddish Writings on Yavneh," *In geveb* (March 2016), <https://ingeveb.org/articles/the-great-call-of-the-hour-hillel-zeitlins-yiddish-writings-on-yavneh>.

37 A few of these publications were included in a bibliographical list assembled by Eliezer Raphael Malachi: see Malachi, "Hillel Zeitlin (Bibliyografyah)," *Ha-Tequfah* 32/33 (1948): 848–76 and Malachi, "Milu'im la-Bibliyografyah šel Hillel Zeitlin," *Ha-Tequfah* 34/35 (1950): 843–48.

objections were not limited to the fact that he was now writing almost exclusively in Yiddish or to his gaping differences with the Zionist enterprise;³⁸ they also refused to take his embrace of religion seriously and mocked his apocalyptic visions. Though well aware of this enmity, Zeitlin feverishly sought to ensure the publication of his work, including his journal, in the Land of Israel.

8 Zeitlin and the Literary Centre in Palestine

Zeitlin's attitude towards writers who were active in Palestine emerges from a letter that he sent to Fishel Lachower on 19 February 1936. The two were extremely close when they resided in Warsaw. Lachower had had a hand in the publication of "*Be-Hevryon ha-Nešamah*" in 1913 and "*Al Gevul Šeney 'Olamot*" in 1919, as well as the unsuccessful attempt to publish Zeitlin's collected works through the Stybel Press.³⁹ In this letter, Zeitlin addressed Lachower directly:

Dear Mr Lachower, my friend! Since you are tending to every jot and tittle of Bialik, reams of *halakhot*, at an hour that passes in silence with respect to the works of a person like me, I have absolutely nothing against you.⁴⁰ However, if you write about other long sermons and have not found it necessary to give a place in your book about writers for your article about me published in your "*Rešafim*,"⁴¹ and, all the more so, if you make no effort to understand that you need (after the dozens of books that I have

38 Zeitlin's complex outlook on Zionism in different periods in his life is discussed in Bar-Sella, *Between the Storm*, 103–20, 200–226; Ehud Luz, *Wrestle at Jabbok River: Power, Morality and Jewish Identity* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998), 229–31; Moshe Hallamish, "The Concept of the Land of Israel in Hillel Zeitlin's World" [Hebrew], in *A Hundred Years of Religious Zionism, Volume 1: Figures and Thought*, ed. Avi Sagi and Dov Schwartz (Ramat-Gan, 2003), 203–12; Shraga Bar-Sella, "On the Brink of Disaster: Hillel Zeitlin's Struggle for Jewish Survival in Poland," *Polin* 11 (1998): 77–93.

39 In fact, they resided in the same building in Warsaw, on 60 Śliska Street: see Shlomo Shreberk, *Zikhronot ha-Moši' la-Or Šlomoh Šreberk* (Tel Aviv, 1955), 151.

40 Zeitlin is referring to Lachower's comprehensive multi-volume work on Bialik, parts of which had already come out: Fishel Lachower, *Hayyim Nahman Bialik: Hayyaw we-Yeširato*, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv, 1937). In parallel, Lachower began releasing volumes of Bialik's letters (5 vols. *in toto*).

41 This is alluding to Lachower's earlier work: Lachower, "Massot Sifrutiyot: 1. Hillel Zeitlin," *Rešafim* 1 (1909): 21–32. Some ten years later, he wrote another essay about Zeitlin: Lachower, "Hillel Zeitlin: Devarim Aḥadim le-Ḥag Yovelo," *Ha-Tequfah* 12 (1921): 482–83. However, these articles were left out of the editor's contemporaneous book on Jewish writers: Lachower, *Rišonim ve-Aḥronim: Massot we-Ma'amarim*, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv, 1934–1935).

printed from the day that your aforementioned article was written until now) to add a great deal to what has been said, for this, your God in your heart will forgive you. For my part, I am unable to forgive such treatment on the part of a person like you whom I knew to be honest [...]. I am a sincere person with all the naiveté and simplicity that the soul possesses; this being the case, I will reveal to you in a very straightforward manner that you and your friends have to a large extent been ruined in *Ereš Yiśra'el. Niśmaltem* [you have veered to the political left], *nisttaddar-tem* (you have enslaved yourselves to the *histtaddrut*⁴²), and *ništaba'atem* [you have become hypocrites] (the hypocrisy from the left is much worse than the hypocrisy from the right) in *Ereš Yiśra'el*.⁴³

Thereafter, Zeitlin referred to five of his latest books: *Davar la-'Ammim* (*A Word to the Nations*, 1925),⁴⁴ *Sifran šel Yehidim* (*The Book of the Unique*, 1928), *Demamah we-Qol* (*Silence and Voice*, 1936),⁴⁵ and two other unnamed works in Yiddish on similar topics.⁴⁶ He then asked Lachower to write “a longer article in a journal and a popular article in a newspaper in Palestine” on these new publications.⁴⁷ In Zeitlin's estimation, the Hebrew literary scene was ignoring his messianic and prophetic works. Moreover, its writers preferred to see him as a loyal disciple of Micha Josef Berdyczewski and nothing more.⁴⁸ This attitude

42 The Histtaddrut was a pre-state organisation that dominated the economy and politics of the Jewish community in Palestine.

43 Hillel Zeitlin, “Letter to Fishel Lachower, 19 February 1936” [Hebrew], *Genazim* 3 (1969): 185.

44 In this call to non-Jews, Zeitlin explains their role in the messianic age. It is no surprise that of all Zeitlin's works, this was the only book to merit a Polish translation during these same years. I am indebted to Dr Pawel Maciejko for bringing this rendering, which he found in the University of Warsaw Library, to my attention.

45 Hillel Zeitlin, *Demamah we-Qol: Hegyonot, Tokhaḥot, Gillyuyey-Nešamah we-Kissufey Mašiah* (Warsaw, 1936).

46 In all likelihood, Zeitlin is referring to his three messianic books in Yiddish: *Di reydt fun yeshayahu ben amots: vos er hot amol gezagt un vos volt er haynt zogn* (Warsaw, 1929); *Vos ikh hob yets tsu zogen dem yudishen folk* (Warsaw, 1930); and *Vos darf yisroel tun in yetstiger tsayt fun khevley-meshiekh* (Warsaw, 1934).

47 Zeitlin, “Letter to Fishel Lachower, 19 February 1936,” 185.

48 This image was conjured up by Joseph Klausner in 1907: Klausner, *Ha-Zeramim ha-Ḥadašim šel ha-Sifrut ha-Ṭvrit ha-Še'irah* (New York, 1907), 47. Ben Avigdor took issue with this designation in his *Ha-Sifrut ha-Ṭvrit ha-Še'irah* (Vilnius, 1910), 12. On the bond between Zeitlin and Berdyczewski, see Bar-Sella, *Between the Storm*, 92, 105–7, 126–27; Avner Holtzman, *Literature and Life: Essays on M.J. Berdyczewski* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 2003), 235–56.

was promulgated in Lachower's own book *Toldot ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Ḥadašah* (*Annals of the New Hebrew Literature*).⁴⁹ Toiling to rectify this misimpression, Zeitlin shipped these new books, which had come out in Warsaw, to potential readers in the *Yishuv* (the Jewish community in Palestine). As we shall see, he would repeatedly voice this claim in ensuing correspondence up until the Holocaust.⁵⁰

On 10 June 1936, Zeitlin sent a list of all his "Hasidic" articles to his confidant Jacob Joseph Haus, with the objective of finding a publisher for them in Palestine.⁵¹ Although Haus was far removed from Zeitlin's worldview, dozens of extant letters demonstrate that he went to great lengths to help Zeitlin to disseminate his writings. A short while later, Zeitlin asked Haus to pitch a collection of his studies on Kabbalah and Hasidism, which had previously appeared in different outlets, to one of Stybel's representatives in Palestine, or, for that matter, to any other publisher.⁵² In addition, he wanted his friend to inquire as to whether the books that had been sent, including the prophetic *Davar la-'Ammim*, had reached their destination. Zeitlin also requested that he go to Lachower and Dov Stock (Sadan)—who were among the recipients of the works—and see "whether one of these people is gracious enough to write something[. If so], please be so kind as to send me the print, for the writers in *E[reṣ] Y[isra'el]* are great laggards and they could not care less about their friends' dignity."⁵³ As part of this effort to spread his prophetic-messianic works in Palestine, Zeitlin sent copies to many other figures—Abraham Isaac Kook, Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik, R. Isaiah Shapira ("the Pioneer *Rebbe*"), R. Binyamin, Joseph Klausner, and Eliezer Steinman, among others—all of whom were urged to write a review.

49 Fishel Lachower, *Toldot ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Ḥadašah*, book 3, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv, 1931–1932).

50 See, for example, Zeitlin's letter to Fishel Lachower and Jacob Fichman [Hebrew], ca. 1934, Machon Genazim, Lachower Archive (16), document 6446/1, and his letter to Joseph Klausner [Hebrew], 19 February 1936, National Library of Israel, Manuscripts Department, Klausner Archive (1086), file 436; see also his letter to Z.Z. Weinberg [Hebrew], *Adam be-Ohalo*, IV (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1956), 125–34.

51 Hillel Zeitlin, Letter to Jacob Joseph Haus [Hebrew], 10 June 1936, Machon Genazim, Zeitlin Archive (237), document 208691/1.

52 This book was supposed to include the following articles and tracts: "Qadmut ha-Mistorin be-Yisra'el," "Maftteah le-Sefer ha-Zohar," and "Ḥasidut" (printed in Hebrew), "Khsides" (printed in Yiddish), "Ha-Ḥasidut ha-Qoṣqit," "Mah Ḥiddeš ha-Be-Št," "Pirkey Ḥabad," "Sefarim Šlemim 'al Rabbi Naḥman, 'al kabbalat ha-ARI, 'al ḥasiduto šel Rabbi Mendele mi-Riminov, 'al ha-Rabbi ha-Lubaviš," and more. According to Zeitlin, this book would encompass forty printer's sheets. To conclude, he said that "it would certainly spread at a respectable clip if they print it with due elegance and publish it in a worthy manner."

53 Hillel Zeitlin, Letter to Jacob Joseph Haus [Hebrew], 1936, Machon Genazim, Zeitlin Archive (237), document 20893.

On 12 November 1936, Zeitlin reminded Haus of his past exchanges with Stybel:

And incidentally: I spoke with Mr Stybel on the matter of publishing some of my new works, and he promised to print and publish, etc., etc. At long last, I have indeed come to the realisation that this was all hot air. Lo and behold, the days and years are passing and I am growing older, and no one is paying attention to what a man has laboured and sweated over throughout his lifetime and [the fact that he] has endeavoured to rescue and save the remnant of the Jewish people from material and spiritual oblivion and has written books that have the wherewithal to give sublime and uplifting spiritual content to thousands of errant souls; and there are no well-wishers and takers, nor is there anyone to turn to.⁵⁴

At this point, Zeitlin upbraids the *Yishuv's* literary circles:

And those lovely creatures wielding power in *Ereṣ Yiśra'el*, in the end, they have not written a thing about my *Demamah we-Qol* [...], even though I also sent the book to *Ha-Davar* [the daily organ of the Zionist Labour movement] [...], Mr Lachower [...], Dr Joseph Klausner, and [...] Rabbi Shapira [the Pioneer *Rebbe*] in Jerusalem. [...] And the main thing: whether [or not] they wrote [about it], do I have any need whatsoever for approvals and consents [along the lines] of “You wrote well?” The crux [of the matter] is that they are not paying attention to everything that is said in the book, and they do not wish to truly and sincerely return to G-d and to His people Israel, but instead [are complicit] in lies, lies, and lies.⁵⁵

When these same writers finally got around to reviewing *Demamah we-Qol*, the vast majority of them skewered the work. In 1937, Lachower and Yaakov Cohen published the second annual edition of the journal *Knesset*. The former contributed a 22-page article titled “In the Hebrew Book” surveying the Hebrew literature that had come out the previous year, including *Demamah we-Qol*. This particular booklet is highly relevant to the topic at hand, for it was one of Zeitlin's principal messianic works. After addressing Benzion Rappaport's *Hogim we-Hegyonut (Intellectuals and Common Sense)*, Lachower scrutinised Zeitlin's work:

54 Hillel Zeitlin, Letter to Jacob Joseph Haus [Hebrew], 12 November 1936, Machon Genazim, Zeitlin Archive (237), document 20872/1.

55 Zeitlin to Haus, 12 November 1936.

A book of common sense of another kind is Hillel Zeitlin's book *Demamah we-Qol*, which also came out this year in Poland, in Warsaw, and whose author notes its content on the cover, or defines it, with these attributes: "Common Sense, Admonishments, Revelations of the Soul, and Yearnings for the Messiah." In essence, this too does not define its entire content, which appears to be strange, even very strange. Lines of heartfelt outpouring and human ethics are comingled here with haughtiness and immorality [...] and at times ecstasy with an immediate plunge to the depths of the "self," which fills everything, to the point where "there is no place free thereof." He describes a couple of the book's episodes in a frivolous manner, and within this frivolity is intermingled alien thoughts about power, a sort of power of prophecy that is given to someone who sits for years on end at the gates of the press—and not the finest one either—and goes with the flow, [and] he is muddied on more than one occasion.⁵⁶ [...] On the face of things, Zeitlin is entirely of the *beney heykhala'* [members of the Sanctuary; namely, the intellectual elite]. Perhaps, he takes pause to pull us, mere mortals governed by a simple mind, after him and even takes us into the place from which one may peek at the sanctuary's gate; upon standing by the sanctuary's gate, however, we see Zeitlin "descending" before us, eye to eye. Forgive me, my great friend Hillel Zeitlin, who calls upon the entire world *lašuv be-tešuvah* [to repent], if I hereby call upon him *lašuv be-tešuvah šelemah* [to completely return to the fold].⁵⁷

Like most of Zeitlin's colleagues in Palestine, Lachower misread his friend's transformation,⁵⁸ despite the fact that he too had recently started to delve into Jewish mysticism. In fact, Lachower subsequently began working on a

56 This argument recurs in many of the contemporaneous reviews. Lachower made a similar case in 1921, but interpreted it differently: "The greatest leap that Zeitlin ever made in his life is his leap to the mass media, his turn to the people [*sic*] [...] when the moment, possibly a moment of weakness, came to the man of letters. At the time, he descended from the mountain to the people to speak to them. When he went down, the Tablets of Testimony were already in his hand." See Lachower, *Širah we-Maḥšavah: Massot we-Ma'amarim* (Tel Aviv, 1953), 162–63. Cf. Eliezer Steinman, *Be-Ma'aggal ha-Dorot* (Tel Aviv, 1943), 185–86, and Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner, "Al Hillel Zeitlin: Min ha-'Izzavon," *Mi-Bifnim* 28, no. 4 (1967): 334–43.

57 Fishel Lachower, "Be-Sefer ha-'Ivri," *Kenesset* 2 (1937): 536–37.

58 For more on the attitude of writers in Palestine to Zeitlin's visions, see Meir, "Ḥasidut še-le-'Atid Lavo," 36–39. This outlook was substantially revised in the wake of the Holocaust. See, among others, Eliezer Steinman's words of regret, "Benenu le-ven Hillel

project that was originally conceived by Zeitlin: an annotated Hebrew translation of the Zohar.⁵⁹ As per the testimony of Jacob Fichman, who published a few select works by Zeitlin between 1910 and 1912⁶⁰ and who collaborated with Lachower on different ventures, it was Zeitlin who piqued Lachower's interest in Kabbalah.⁶¹

Comparatively upbeat reviews of Zeitlin's works were penned by religious Zionist thinkers, especially pioneers, who had already adopted some of his views. For instance, Zeitlin's messianic books caused waves in publications such as *Ha-Hed*, whose editor was the aforementioned R. Binyamin.⁶² Soon after the release of *Sifran šel Yeḥidim* (1928), Zeitlin was buoyed by another figure espousing a competing vision for the *Yishuv*. None other than Bialik wrote a letter to Zeitlin personally commending him for this work:

I received your book—*Sifran šel Yeḥidim*—and I read it, in its entirety, from beginning to end, that very day. I see that you have been touched by the hand of God. Not every person merits [such attention from on high]. Go forth with this power of yours and redeem your soul, and perhaps the souls of others too. May the salvation come from wherever it will, only let it come.⁶³

Zeitlin," *Me'at me-Harbeh: Ma'assef Sofrey Ereš Yiśra'el*, ed. G. Shofman (Tel Aviv, 1947), 216–22; Steinman, *Be-Ma'aggal ha-Dorot*, 185–86.

- 59 This project, *Mišnat ha-Zohar*, was published by Mosad Bialik. It was conceived by Lachower and Horodezky, who were subsequently joined by Isaiah Tishby. Lachower managed to work on the translation of the sub-chapters in the first volume (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1949) and prepared the table of contents for the second. For an in-depth look at this enterprise and its connection to Zeitlin's work, see Meir, "Hillel Zeitlin's Zohar." See also Arthur Green, "Hillel Zeitlin and Neo-Hasidic Readings of the Zohar," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 22 (2010): 59–78.
- 60 Hillel Zeitlin, *Ketavim Nivḥarim*, 3 vols. (Warsaw, 1910–1912). The first volume opens with an insightful essay on Zeitlin by Jacob Fichman.
- 61 Jacob Fichman, "F. Lachower (Qawim le-Hayyav u-Demuto)," in Fishel Lachower, *Toldot ha-Sifrut ha-Tvrit ha-Ḥadašah*, vol. 4 (Tel Aviv, 1948), 4: viii.
- 62 For example, D. Friedman, "R. Hillel Zeitlin we-Sifro *Demamah we-Qol*," *Ha-Hed* 11, no. 8 (5696 [1936]): 29–30; Avraham Ḥen, "Le-Hillel Zeitlin 'al *Davar la-'Ammim šelo*," *Ha-Šefirah* 68, no. 81 (1928): 3; R. Binyamin, "Sefarim Ḥadašim," *Ha-Hed* 4, no. 4 (1929): 15. The religious Zionist camp also put out *Sefer Zeitlin*, an anthology focusing on Zeitlin's personality and worldview. Among the contributors to this book were Simcha Bunim Auerbach, Ševi Yehuda Kook, Yishayahu Wolfsberg, Itzhak Gush-Zahav, Binyamin Lifkin, Shalom Posinsky, R. Binyamin, and Zvi Harkavy; see Yishayahu Wolfsberg and Zvi Harkavy, eds., *Sefer Zeitlin* (Jerusalem, 1945).
- 63 Bialik, *Iggerot Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik*, ed. Fishel Lachower, vol. 4 (Tel Aviv, 1938), 191–92.

Upon referring Zeitlin to the “prophecies” of Ḥayyim Yitzhak Bunin, the poet added that “Warsaw has had the honour of producing two seers, which the Land of Israel has not merited. Here, there are very few who prophesise. Perhaps you can explain to me the reason for this.”⁶⁴

Zeitlin’s response to this letter has not survived, but he continued to assert that the Hebrew writers of Palestine had turned their backs on his prophetic-messianic vision. Even those who had read one or more of these works, he claimed, had refrained from making a serious effort to grasp their content or had misinterpreted it as a call for repentance along the lines of *Agudath Yisrael* or Mizraḥi (the *Yishuv*’s leading ultra-Orthodox and religious-Zionist movements respectively). These arguments are evinced in the above-mentioned letter to Fishel Lachower from 1936. In Zeitlin’s estimation, his turn to Jewish mysticism and Hasidim had rubbed the intellectuals in Palestine up the wrong way. This wide-scale dismissal particularly disturbed him because he was on close terms with these same writers until the 1920s—some of whom had even brought his earlier works to press. With his appeal for repentance and a re-embrace of Kabbalah having been rebuffed by the progressive intellectual circles in Palestine, Zeitlin sought in vain to publish his collected works, including the continuation of his mystical diary.

9 Fishel Lachower and Mosad Bialik

In the late 1930s, Zeitlin initially pitched his diary to Mosad Bialik, a recently established publishing house that aspired to spearhead the “new Hebrew culture.”⁶⁵ To this end, he contacted Fishel Lachower, who was among the institute’s founders. Notwithstanding his fusillade against Zeitlin the previous year (1934–1935), it was Lachower who had first published early instalments of the diary in *Ha-Tequfah* back in 1919. Therefore, Zeitlin believed that there was a possibility that Mosad Bialik would be amenable to his overtures. Nevertheless, as we have already seen, Lachower spurned Zeitlin’s new approach. In a long letter from 16 May 1938, Zeitlin dangled a pair of offers before his old friend. The first option was to assemble all his works on Hasidism and Kabbalah

64 As an aside, this letter was published in a volume of Bialik’s personal correspondence that was edited by none other than Fishel Lachower. In fact, this volume came out in 1938—the same year that the latter wrote a negative review of Zeitlin’s messianic book: see Bialik, *Iggerot Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik*, 191–92.

65 For a discussion of the Bialik Institute (established 1935) and its mandate during the years under review, see Fishel Lachower, “Mosad Bialik,” *Moznaim* 3 (1935): 210–15; *Mosad Bialik u-Po’alo ha-Sifrut ba-Šanim 5695–5703* (Jerusalem, 1943).

under the suggested title of *Aggadah, Kabbalah, Ḥasidut*.⁶⁶ Reconciling with Lachower's above-mentioned review and allaying the publishing house's fears as to the collection's suitability for a wide audience, Zeitlin guaranteed that it would stay clear of polemics.

The second offer that Zeitlin tendered to Lachower was the aforementioned diary. To this end, he described how he had continued to make entries all through the years. Given its importance to the topic at hand, we will cite from this section of the letter at length:

Perhaps the said institute will see fit to publish my diary, the beginning of which came out in the fourth [volume of] *Ha-Tequfah* under the name "Bordering Two Worlds." This diary chronicles my inner life from the year 1916 until the present in connection with the adventures that the Jewish people have been through from that time to this day and age. If you have in your hands the said volume of *Ha-Tequfah*, please read it and you will see that the format of my journal is *sui generis* not only in Hebrew literature, but in general literature as well. Given that every diary primarily negotiates with the external life—and even if it deals with the inner life, that same external life is, for the most part, connected with and latched onto the physical life—my journal instead deals entirely with the life of the soul, its palpitations, its travails, its hopes, its despair, its faith, its revelries, its doubts, the rock bottom of its hell, and its upper holy firmaments. That same innermost life is tied to the hopes-travails, faith-destiny of that great and holy nation that is called *Yiśra'el*.⁶⁷

Thereafter, Zeitlin delved into the content and essence of his journal:

On the one hand, this diary of mine is a sort of new Zohar; on the other, an innermost confession much more profound and much more affable than

66 This part was supposed to contain the following works: "Shekhinah"; "Yofi šel Ma'lah"; "Pirkey Ḥasidut" ("the first part of my 'Hasidism' book, which was put out by you, and now there is barely any trace of it"); *Rabbi Naḥman mi-Bratslav* (1910), including its Yiddish sections that were published in *Der moment*; "Qadmūt ha-Misttorin be-Yiśra'el"; "Maftteah le-Sefer ha-Zohar"; "Ha-ART"; "Mah Ḥideš R. Yisrael Bešt"; "Šiḥah Dimyonit 'im R. Y. Bešt"; "Rabbi Uri me-Strelisq"; "Ḥasidut še-la-'Atid Lavo"; "Rebbe Mendel of Riminov"; "Go'el Ḥabad"; "Ha-Ḥasidut ha-Qoşqa'it"; "Ha-Aḥim ha-Nodedim" (i.e., Rebbe Elimeleh and Rebbe Zusha); and "Šiḥot Mišpaḥah 'al Ḥabad." Zeitlin planned to translate his Yiddish works into Hebrew if Mosad Bialik accepted them for publication.

67 Hillel Zeitlin, "Letter to Fishel Lachower, 16 May 1938" [Hebrew], *Genazim* 3 (1969): 186. The excerpt is corrected according to the manuscript version of the letter, Machon Genazim, Lachower Archive (169), document 16996.

the *Confessions* of Augustine. Within all this, many interesting events, many Torah-related, scientific, and esoteric comments, encounters, lines about writers and books, lines on Jewish national and general political deeds, etc., etc. “If you have a shortcoming, bring it up before anyone else can” [*b. B. Qam.* 92b]. It also contains quite a few dream stories (as there already are in “my entries” printed in the fourth [volume of] *Ha-Tequfah*, as well as visions and apparitions). Of course, there are many “Maskilim” who will grind their teeth upon reading “foolish words” like this, just as the “maskil” Lirik [i.e., Aaron S. Riklis] ground his teeth over them in the newspaper *Haynt* after you and Frischmann printed the said entries. Be that as it may, how long will we continue to be such indentured servants to the accepted lies of false sciences and refuse to admit the terrible truth, which Shakespeare placed in the mouth of his Hamlet: “There are many things, Horatio my friend, that were not foreseen by your parents and teachers,” etc., etc.⁶⁸

Zeitlin proceeded to discuss the content and character of his unpublished diary:

In any event, the dream stories themselves and the stories of visions and apparitions contain extremely interesting psychological material, which every man of science will be able to interpret according to his own way and method. My book also contains a great deal of psychological material [which I convey] via [accounts of] the lives of shattered messiahs that I have met over the course of my life, especially during the last years of the First World War and in these years, years of tragedy and great hope for the entire Jewish people. These shattered messiahs have contacted me from all the lands [of the Diaspora], be it in writing or in person. A large share of the events of their lives has faded from my memory, but many of them are recorded in my book. These people are nearly all lunatics or half-lunatics, but at the same moment they are also remarkable people. At the very least, they are original and interesting people insofar as the flight of their imaginations is concerned. And even you “Maskilim,” please do not tremble and fear too much, for I see the negative side of all these phenomena and I reveal [them] to all without [any attempt] at evasion or concealment. Everything that there really is to say against these phenomena I bring up myself in my diary, occasionally in a harsher style than the style of the “sciences.” However, in light of the pure truth [of] my

68 Zeitlin, “Letter to Fishel Lachower, 16 May 1938,” 186.

way, which I prove, the accepted “scientific” explanation does not suffice to truly explain the transcendental psychotic phenomena.⁶⁹

What is more, he discusses the size of the manuscript and hints at its content vis-à-vis other works:

This book contains roughly forty or forty-five printer’s sheets (and perhaps even fifty). Mosad Bialik would truly be doing the right thing if it were to dare to put out a book like this. Even if the Maskilim of our generation do not endorse it, the next generations will certainly pay tribute to the said institute that benefited the masses with a book of this sort; for do we not presently acknowledge the person who first published the books of the Zohar or the book *Maggid Meyšarim* by R. Joseph Karo and the like? I have no desire to stand alongside these luminaries. All I am doing is talking in terms of the level of our generations, [which are] burdened with troubles, sorrows, disasters, tragedies, sabre-rattling, and the brandishing of spears, etc., etc., etc.⁷⁰

Zeitlin, who well knew that the chances that Mosad Bialik would publish his diary were slim, had no compunctions against resorting to personal pressure:

And this [project] is dependent entirely on you, my friend from long ago, even if you have grown quite distant from me these past years (for the air in *Ereš Yišra’el mašme’il* [indoctrinates to the left] and I am steadily venturing rightwards). If you really want, you can help me a great deal on this matter. At the very least, Mosad Bialik can publish my aggadic, esoteric, and Hasidic works for which there is a consensus that they are “kosher.”⁷¹

Lachower, who took his time responding to this lengthy letter, most likely found its tone somewhat discordant. Five weeks after mailing the letter, Zeitlin confided in Haus:

Months ago I also wrote a long letter to Mr F. Lachower. [...] I asked him to tell me if he could do me a favour in the matter of publishing some of my works with Mosad Bialik [...]. Lo and behold, I have not received an answer. Nowadays the air of *Ereš Yišra’el* is *mašme’ilah* [indoctrinates to

69 Zeitlin, “Letter to Fishel Lachower, 16 May 1938,” 186–87.

70 Zeitlin, “Letter to Fishel Lachower, 16 May 1938,” 187.

71 Zeitlin, “Letter to Fishel Lachower, 16 May 1938,” 187.

the left] and addles the mind [...]. With this in mind, [please] drop by Lachower's and ask him again and keep me abreast.

Thereafter, Zeitlin broached the matter of the Palestinian publishing houses' aversion to any religiously oriented work, especially a book on Jewish mysticism:

I once wrote to you [Haus] regarding the publication of a book on Kabbalah. You turned to [Yehoshua Hone] Ravnitzky and he answered that there is no need for books on Kabbalah. That said, you were slightly mistaken on this count, for it is not merely Kabbalah, but all books that contain studies on religion and words of poetry.⁷²

Mosad Bialik ultimately refused to accommodate Zeitlin, who felt that Lachower's stated reasons for the publishing house's rejection were less than sincere (see below).⁷³ Be that as it may, Zeitlin continued to explore other options, while publicly nursing his grievances toward Lachower and his ilk.

10 Shmuel Hugo Bergmann, Martin Buber, and Schocken Books

Even before hearing back from Mosad Bialik, Zeitlin attempted to contact Salman Z. Schocken in the hope of persuading the retail magnate-cum-publisher to admit him into Schocken Books' cadre of authors.⁷⁴ In the 1930s, Shmuel

72 Hillel Zeitlin, Letter to Jacob Joseph Haus [Hebrew], 2 Tammuz 5698 [1938], Machon Genazim, Zeitlin Archive (237), document 20885/1. On Zeitlin's proposed book on Kabbalah, which surveyed the annals of Jewish mysticism at length from its inception through to the first half of the twentieth century, see Hillel Zeitlin, Letter to Jacob Fichman and Fishel Lachower [Hebrew], ca. 1934, Machon Genazim, Lachower Archive (16), document 6446/1. See also Zvi Yehudah Kook, "Zekher le-Miqddaš Hillel," in Wolfsberg and Harkavy, *Sefer Zeitlin*, 78. According to Zeitlin, this book encompasses "all the pearls of creation that there were in 'Kabbalah' from the first Essenes to the very last of the Hasidim and Jerusalem's Kabbalists in this generation." The book was shelved and was never brought to print.

73 For more on why Lachower refused to publish this work, see Hillel Zeitlin, Letter to Jacob Joseph Haus [Hebrew], 30 October 1938, Machon Genazim, Zeitlin Archive (237), document 20889/1.

74 For an in-depth look at Schocken Books, see Volker Dahm, *Das jüdische Buch im Dritten Reich* (Munich: Beck, 1992); Stephen M. Poppel, "Salman Schocken and the Schocken Verlag," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 17 (1972): 93–113; Anthony David, "German-Jewish Identity and the Schocken Bücherei," in *Arche Noah: Die Idee der "Kultur" im deutsch-jüdischen Diskurs*, ed. Bernhard Greiner and Christoph Schmidt (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2002), 289–303. David's article is based on a doctoral thesis about Salman Z.

Hugo Bergmann (a Prague-born Jerusalem-based scholar) visited Warsaw, where he met with Zeitlin, among others. Over the course of their meeting, Zeitlin brought up the topic of finding a Hebrew publisher for some of his works, including the diary. Bergmann was well-versed in kabbalistic literature, in which he took a great interest. During his early years in Prague, he was even close with several figures, such as Ernst Müller, who were occupied with the Zohar.⁷⁵ It appears that Bergmann, who empathised with Zeitlin, agreed to reach out to Schocken and his associates. In consequence, Zeitlin asked Bergmann to pass a letter on to Martin Buber, who was already living in Palestine. The turn to Buber was not without logic. To begin with, he was on good terms with Schocken Books. As the first scholar to approach Hasidism from a Romantic perspective, he was also familiar with Zeitlin's work. Moreover, Buber had entreated Gershom Scholem to publish a German translation of Zeitlin's "*Shekhinah*" in *Der Jude*. Although this essay was turned down (the manuscript remains in Scholem's archive to this day),⁷⁶ Buber did publish another article by Zeitlin in this journal on the uniqueness of Hasidism and its pivotal role in the religious awakening at the start of the twentieth century,⁷⁷ and he even contributed an article to one of Zeitlin's messianic Yiddish-language journals.⁷⁸ Given this backdrop, it is surprising that Buber, in whom Zeitlin had placed great hopes, rebuffed the latter's requests for assistance, displaying no interest in his writings.⁷⁹

Schocken, which was subsequently adapted into the following biography: David, *The Patron: A Life of Salman Schocken* (New York: Henry Holt, 2003). See also Judah Rosenthal, "Schocken Publishing House" [Hebrew], *Jewish Book Annual* 3 (1944/45): 45–51.

- 75 See Hugo Bergman, "Vorwort," in Ernst Müller, *Der Sohar und Seine Lehre: Einführung in die Kabbalah* (Zürich: Origo, 1957), 7–14.
- 76 This rendering is also mentioned in the following sources: the correspondence between Walter Benjamin and Scholem; Scholem's diary; and a letter that he subsequently wrote to Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer: Scholem, *Tagebücher nebst Aufsätzen und Entwürfen bis 1923. 1. Halbband: 1913–1917*, ed. Herbert Kopp-Oberstebrink, Karlfried Gründer, and Friedrich Niewöhner (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdische Verlag, 1995), 410, 420; Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, vol. 1, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), 129; Scholem, "Iggeret el Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer," *Yedi'ot Genazim* 104/105 (1983): 345–46.
- 77 Hillel Zeitlin, "Aufgaben der Polnischen Juden," *Der Jude* (1916/17): 89–93. See also Meir, "Ḥasidut še-le-'Atid Lavo'," 12–15.
- 78 Martin Buber, "'Yikhud' un 'teshuve,'" *Der alef* 1 (1933): 32–35.
- 79 This incident surfaces in Zeitlin's correspondence with Agnon, which is discussed in the next section. At around this time, Zeitlin wrote a piece for the Yiddish press commending Buber and holding out hope that the latter would revive the spiritual life in Palestine. What is more, he compared Buber's contribution to German Jewry to that of Samson Raphael Hirsch. See Zeitlin, "Martin buber: tsu zayn ankumen keyn Poyln," *Der moment* 50 (1939): 5.

11 Zeitlin, S.Y. Agnon, and Schocken Books

Zeitlin was not discouraged by this rejection, instead seeking the assistance of Shmuel Yosef Agnon. The Hebrew novelist was well connected to both the East European Jewish literary scene and German-Jewish figures such as Schocken and Gershom Scholem. For these same reasons, Şevi Yehuda Kook also reached out to Agnon in the hopes of getting Schocken to publish the works by his father, Abraham Isaac Kook.⁸⁰ Schocken, however, was not partial to such authors, and he took no interest in the writings of Kook, Zeitlin, or, for that matter, Abraham Joshua Heschel.

In a letter to Haus dated 16 September 1938, Zeitlin vented his frustrations about the cold shoulder that his output was receiving from the literary circles in Palestine. While they expressed no interest in reading his published works in Yiddish, they likewise refused to publish his work in Hebrew:

I would have been willing [to give] you as many of my books as you desire, but who knows if you will be able to distribute them in your city, as an edict to annihilate Yiddish has been issued in the Land of Israel; and you, even you, hate your mother tongue and have been pulled by all the high rhetoric of Hebrew fanatics (incidentally, it is a contrived fanaticism, as what have all these [people] really done for the sake of disseminating an assortment of my Hebrew books?).⁸¹

Zeitlin was also pessimistic regarding the sway of his messianic books that had come out in Hebrew a few years earlier: “They have already been disseminated in *Ereş Yiśra’el*,” but “do not have a place there anymore.”⁸² In all likelihood, Lachower’s critique the previous year had convinced Zeitlin that the *Yishuv* was ill-disposed to his visions. In the margins of that same letter, he asked Haus for Agnon’s address. Upon receiving the information, he immediately sent a postcard to the future Nobel laureate:

To the most pleasant of the Jewish people’s writers [...] I ask of you—one of the meagre few that understands my pain and my longings, yearnings, and aspirations to ascend—to lobby on my behalf before Mr Schocken.

80 See Neria Gutel, “Ben ha-Rav Ş.Y. Kook le-Ş.Z. Schocken: we-Ş.Y. Agnon ba-Tawwekh,” *Century Jubilee of Ha-Mizrahi* [...] 1902–2002, ed. Yitshak Elfassi and Geula Bat Yehuda (Jerusalem, 2002), 412–19.

81 Hillel Zeitlin, Letter to Jacob Joseph Haus [Hebrew], 16 September 1938, Machon Genazim, Hillel Zeitlin Archive (237), document 20882/1.

82 Hillel Zeitlin, Letter to Jacob Joseph Haus [Hebrew], 16 September 1938.

Perhaps he will deign to publish a portion of my work that I call *Aggadah, Kabbalah, Ḥasidut*.⁸³

This proposition is reminiscent of the one that he made to Lachover back in 1936, in which he once again brought up his journal, divulging a few precious details regarding its content and essence:

I have another book, which Schocken really has to publish; namely, my journal (from the autumn of 1915 until today), which contains a description of one seeking a path to the anointed king [i.e., the Messiah]: a very interesting book for the Kabbalist, the researcher, the psychologist, the poet, and to every reader seeking the Lord and seeking justice. If Schocken is so thrilled about a manuscript by some Sabbatean who lived hundreds of years ago,⁸⁴ why wouldn't he also be thrilled with the creation of a modern man who is in touch with and has constant dealings with remote upper worlds!? What's more, he knows how to analyse and critique all the transcendental phenomena and at one and the same time lives in a quintessentially secular world and takes part in all the general and Jewish social movements. The beginning of this book was printed in the fourth volume of *Ha-Tequfah* (under the name "Bordering Two Worlds"), and the rest of it is in my possession to this day. This book is also replete with very profound kabbalistic matters and great studies on all the disciplines of the Torah.⁸⁵

On the edge of the postcard, Zeitlin added the following comment: "When Prof. Bergmann was here in Warsaw, I handed him a letter to Martin Buber on this matter, and the latter rejected me all the same. For this reason, I am turning

83 Hillel Zeitlin to S.Y. Agnon, first letter [Hebrew], 1938, National Library of Israel, Manuscripts Department, Agnon Archive, 2276:5. He planned to include the following works in this collection: "Shekhinah," "Yofi šel Ma'lah," "Pirkey Ḥasidut," *Rabbi Naḥman mi-Bratslav*, "Qadmut ha-Misttorin be-Yiśra'el," "Maftteaḥ le-Sefer ha-Zohar," "Ha-ARI" ("a long series of articles on his life and his Kabbalah"), "Mah Ḥideš R. Yisrael Bešt," "Šiḥah Dimyonit 'im R. Y. Bešt," "Ḥasidut še-le-'Atid Lavo'," "Rebi Uri me-Strelisq," "Rebe Mendel me-Riminov," "Go'el Ḥabad," "ha-Ḥasidut ha-Qoṣqa'it," "Šiḥot Mišppaḥah 'al Ḥabad," and more. According to Zeitlin, "this part will contain about forty printer's sheets, and it will not be possible to put it out in one fell swoop, but rather in parts, parts."

84 Zeitlin is alluding to the following book: Gershon Scholem, *Ḥalomotaw šel ha-Šabta'i R. Morddekhay Aškenazi* (Jerusalem, 1938). For the relationship between Zeitlin and Scholem, see Meir, "Ḥasidut še-le-'Atid Lavo'," 12–15.

85 Zeitlin to Agnon, First letter.

to you as a person who is much closer to my worldview.”⁸⁶ Agnon responded to Zeitlin right away. While his letter is not extant, it is mentioned in another of Zeitlin’s letters. In any event, we know that Agnon promised to talk with Schocken as soon as he returned from abroad.

In another postcard dated 2 Tammuz 5698 [1938], Zeitlin thanked Agnon for getting back to him so quickly and reminded him of his promise to lend a hand. He also listed the books that he wished to publish with Schocken. Last but not least, Zeitlin distinguished between his most recent works and the rest of his generation’s output:

My books possess various revelations of the *Shekhinah*, whose profundity and value only people like you will understand. However, they also possess a power that is attractive even to men who do not understand a thing about all this. My works such as “*Shekhinah*” and “*Yofi šel Ma’elah*,” etc., etc.:⁸⁷ these works of piety are indeed good and beautiful even from a purely aesthetic standpoint. That said, extremely bad days are upon us with respect to original Jewish thought, especially for visions with a modicum of mysticism, which cannot be shrunk and placed in the Sodomite bed of “Mizraḥism” [national-Zionist political thought] or “Aguddahism” [ultra-Orthodox political thought], and so on and so forth. All the more so is it impossible to view them as literature or mere poetry. In the end, what will a man like me do, who indeed lives not with the present generation, but rather with past generations and generations [that] will come when the Lord restores the fortunes of Israel?⁸⁸

Despite Agnon’s sincere wish to assist in the publication of these writings, this plan was also not carried out. In a letter dated 7 September 1938, Zeitlin informed Haus of the rejection from Mosad Bialik and told him that they could expect more of the same from Schocken Books. At the time, a few of Zeitlin’s works appeared in *Ha-Hed*. With this in mind, he sent his “best regards to the dear writer R. Binyamin [the journal’s editor], who, of course, is much closer to my spirit, by a lot, a lot.” He then inquired as to whether Haus had talked to “Mr Schocken [...] on the matter of publishing my book” and if so, what his answer had been. “In all likelihood,” he surmised, “there is no positive response,”

86 Zeitlin to Agnon, First letter.

87 Zeitlin is referring to these works: Zeitlin, “*Shekhinah* (Histaklut),” *Sifrut* 1, no. 1 (1909): 67–84; Zeitlin, “*Yofi šel Ma’elah* (Šerufey-Širah min ha-Aggadah we-ha-Kabbalah),” *Sifrut* 1, no. 2 (1909/10): 33–82.

88 Hillel Zeitlin to S.Y. Agnon, Second letter [Hebrew], National Library of Israel, Manuscripts Department, Agnon Archive, 2276:5.

for otherwise Zeitlin would have “certainly” heard back from Agnon, who had last told Zeitlin that he had not yet spoken with Schocken.⁸⁹

On 30 October 1938, Zeitlin sent word to Haus that Agnon and R. Binyamin had gotten back to him. He then poured out his heart:

It is a pity and I am very bitter about the fate of my works. At an hour in which they are printing and disseminating all sorts of nonsense, sheer absurdities, impurity, and wickedness, there is no one to pay heed to the state of affairs and to disseminate works of utmost importance.⁹⁰

At this point, he also apprised his friend of Mosad Bialik’s decision:

I also received letters from Mr Lachower with sundry pretences and excuses, but the explanations that I have best understood and grasped are, incidentally, his words: “The indigent of your own town come before [those from other places].” In fact, if all this—[namely,] the matter of writing and disseminating books—is only a matter of panhandling and begging, then justice is certainly with those heading up Mosad Bialik and their ilk. However, I consider my own books and my own creations to be a great calling and a crown of both thorns and roses alike. What’s more, I have never been a “beggar,” and I hope [and pray] to the Holy One Blessed be He that I will never become one, and that a word to the wise will be sufficient.⁹¹

About a month later, on the first night of Chanukah, Zeitlin reached out to Agnon for the third time:

To the illustrious national storyteller S.Y. Agnon! I received the letter that you wrote on the matter of Schocken publishing my book from my relative Jacob Joseph Haus. The answer is negative. You certainly did everything in your power, but Mr Schocken is either unable or does not wish to put out my book. For this reason, I will ask you to inform me of Mr Schocken’s specific address—that is, not the address of the publishing house, but his private address—and I will try and speak to him on my own. Perhaps [...] it is incumbent upon me to turn to him with this vigorous request, for if

89 Hillel Zeitlin, Letter to Jacob Joseph Haus [Hebrew], 7 September 1938, Machon Genazim, Zeitlin Archive (237), document 20888/1.

90 Zeitlin to Haus, 30 October 1938.

91 Zeitlin to Haus, 30 October 1938.

he will not put out such works, who will? I turned to Mosad Bialik and [they] turned down my request with different excuses, foremost among them: "The poor of your own town come before." [...] How am I supposed to respond to such a claim? [...] I am harvesting the field, and the days are few and the debts are great, etc., etc. My spiritual capital is heavily invested in my writing and there is no one demanding or asking [for the fruit of my labours]. What's more, the best among us are also only seeking out the dead and pay no attention to the living and [to] the person who is living, producing, and threading pearls for our generations.⁹²

For the second time in this letter, Zeitlin asked Agnon for Schocken's address in the hope that a direct solicitation would convince the publisher that he was not "a run-of-the-mill compiler or a run-of-the-mill writer, but a person who really has something to say to the generation or even the generations."⁹³ There is no evidence that Zeitlin personally contacted Schocken. In the meantime, however, he started to ponder another option that was not dependent on the graces of the Hebrew publishing houses and their heads.

12 "The Society for the Publication of Hillel Zeitlin's Works"

Zeitlin's final attempt to bring his collected works to press, including his diary, also revolved around Jacob Joseph Haus. From the autumn of 1938 onwards, Zeitlin beseeched his Tel Aviv-based relative to establish a society dedicated to publishing his writings. To this end, Haus was urged to collect signatures from acquaintances in the Land of Israel. The first communication regarding this association turns up in a letter from Zeitlin to Haus dated 5 December 1938:

I beseeched all sorts of book publishers and there is no one to put out my books, which are dispersed and scattered amongst newspapers, journals, and anthologies or stored in my home in manuscript [form]. I turned to Mr Lachower and you are aware of his response (incidentally: there was more to his answer than that, for he actually wrote me a long letter with various excuses, but I grasped the basic gist of his words ...). I turned to Mr Agnon concerning Schocken Books, and nothing came of it. I turned

92 Hillel Zeitlin to S.Y. Agnon, third letter [Hebrew], the first of Chanukah 5699 [18 December 1938], National Library of Israel, Manuscripts Department, Agnon Archive, 2776:5.

93 Hillel Zeitlin to S.Y. Agnon, Third letter.

to the right, I turned to the left—there is no one who will listen and hear the tumult in my soul.⁹⁴

Against this backdrop, Zeitlin proposed to establish a small, publicly held company that would endeavour to put out a three-volume collection of his works. He stressed that he had no desire to profit from this venture, but merely wished to disseminate his thought. With sorrow, Zeitlin admitted that his influence over the gatekeepers of the Hebrew literary world was not what it once was:

In years past, I would have been able to convene a small assembly of old acquaintances: R. Binyamin, Mr Lachower, Mr Steinman, Mr Fichman, and more and more, for the purpose of carrying out some public relations for this endeavour. However, it is evident and known not only to He who saith and the world came to be, but even to me—a man of flesh and blood, an indigent person, a maggot, and worm—that they will not lift a finger to bring this idea to fruition; and even if they were to begin, they would do more harm than good, be it due to hatred and jealousy or laziness and ineptitude. For this reason, the initiative should be started by plain readers whose hearts pulsated upon reading “*Hirhuray*” (“My Passing Thoughts”), “*Mikhttevey Eḥad ha-Şe’irim*” (“The Letters of One of the Youths”), and my “*Kawwanot we-Yiḥudim*” (“Intentions and Unifications”), and the like.⁹⁵

In addition, he suggested that Haus talk to Menahem Poznansky, whom he had once met in Tel Aviv. Zeitlin’s lengthy exchange with the latter regarding the publication of Brenner’s correspondence led him to believe that the Hebrew novelist and translator would assist him:

On account of his strong and loyal dedication to all that is connected with Brenner, my heart says that a man like this, who is capable of devoting so much to the memory of someone who is no longer among us, can also feel, and genuinely so, the tragedy of a person who has yearned and thundered and grown angry and fumed and became worn down and

94 Hillel Zeitlin, Letter to Jacob Joseph Haus [Hebrew], 5 December 1938, Machon Genazim, Zeitlin Archive (237), 20890/1.

95 Zeitlin to Haus, 5 December 1938. These articles are among Zeitlin’s early works: “*Hirhurim*,” *Ha-Dor* 1, nos. 10, 16, 21 (5661 [1901]); “*Mi-Kitvey Eḥad ha-Şe’irim*,” *Ha-Dor* 1, nos. 32, 33, 36, 37, 48 (5661/62 [1901]); “*Kawwanot we-Yiḥudim*: Me’en Şirim be-Prozah,” *Luah Ahi’asaf* 10 (1903): 129–44.

cried throughout the days of his life and strove and created something all for the spirit and [the spirit] alone.⁹⁶

Be that as it may, Brenner and Zeitlin were hardly of equal stature in Palestine. Poznansky, who was antagonistic to mystical philosophy, was unwilling to support this cause. We do not know whether Haus managed to recruit anyone for the so-called Society for the Publication of Hillel Zeitlin's Works; however, given the fact that a collection of his works failed to materialise in his lifetime, it is evident that this effort came up short as well.

13 Conclusion: Laying Plans to Rest

Zeitlin, it seems, integrated parts of his diary into his later works. For instance, the above-mentioned article "*Al ha-Kamus we-ha-Ne'elam*" originated in the journal. Additionally, numerous passages in his messianic-prophetic books from the 1920s and 1930s can easily pass for diaristic writing, and many of the sub-headings of his apocalyptic works (elements that were omitted from the posthumous editions) seem to be highly personal. The sub-title of his book *Demamah we-Qol*, for instance, is "Common Sense, Admonishments, Revelations of the Soul, and Yearnings for the Messiah." Some of these works also contain personal prayers and/or descriptions of Zeitlin's own experiences. That said, this hypothesis cannot be substantiated, as the complete diary has been lost to posterity. It stands to reason that Zeitlin stashed the manuscript, together with others, beneath his home in the Warsaw Ghetto and that not a single document in this cache survived the war.⁹⁷ According to Hillel Zeitlin's son, the poet Aaron Zeitlin, however, the journal was entrusted to Stybel—and even typeset for publication—shortly before the outbreak of the war, before being lost in the wartime chaos.⁹⁸

When Aaron Zeitlin, set out to compile, edit, and publish his late father's oeuvre, all that stood at his disposal were the published works. Accordingly, he reprinted the beginning of the diary as it appeared in *Ha-Tequfah*. This material

96 Zeitlin to Haus, 5 December 1938. This same repository holds many letters from the correspondence between Poznansky and Zeitlin. However, none of these documents refers to the matter of publishing the collected works under review. In the extant letters, the two intellectuals shared memories of Brenner and requested items that they wished to include in Brenner's collected correspondence.

97 Meir, "Hillel Zeitlin's Zohar," 151–52.

98 Aaron Zeitlin, "Ḥalomo šel Aba," *Ha-Šofeh* (1945): 3.

was included in a volume that was fittingly titled *‘Al Gevul Šeney ‘Olamot*.⁹⁹ For several reasons, however, Aaron edited portions of the journal with the objective of expunging its mystical and visionary elements.¹⁰⁰ In consequence, readers who were unfamiliar with the first published version or with the twists and turns of his father’s saga—not least his failed attempts to publish the work in its entirety—are left with the impression that it is a typical personal diary of a man of letters. As it now stands, the only indications of these numinous attributes are the hints that are divulged in a few of the letters that have survived from the inter-war period.

All told, Zeitlin’s later enterprise has yet to merit a full reckoning. The allusions to the diary in his correspondence illuminate the turnaround in his life and divulge the messianic atmosphere in which he was ensconced. It was this very environment that imbued him with the fortitude to continue writing until the last days of his life in the Warsaw Ghetto. Like his personal metamorphosis, these later works still await an exhaustive analysis; namely, a reading that ceases to view Hillel Zeitlin only as a disciple of Micha Josef Berdyczewski and takes stock of his messianic-prophetic thought.

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⁹⁹ See note 10 above.

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion of Aaron Zeitlin’s approach to editing his father’s works and the objectives thereof, see M. Bosak, *Moznaim* 11 (1960/61): 292; Mendel Piekarz, *Studies in Braslav Hasidism* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1995), 56–57; Meir, “Ḥasidut še-le-‘Atid Lavo,” 42. Aaron Zeitlin’s proofs of his father’s works, which were posthumously put out by the Yavneh Press, are housed in the National Library of Israel, Manuscripts Department, Aaron Zeitlin Archive, 4^o1490, file xvii. It appears that he photocopied his father’s published articles, whereupon he erased words and added text over the originals. Wherever he deemed fit, Zeitlin the younger also omitted entire sections by gluing white paper over the text.

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Scepticism in Samuel Ibn Tibbon's *Commentary on Ecclesiastes (Peruś Qohelet)*

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Abstract

The main issue dealt with in the Book of Ecclesiastes is man's possibility of attaining immortality. Many passages in the book convey pessimism regarding man's final end, denying him eternal reward in the hereafter. In his exegesis of Ecclesiastes, Samuel ibn Tibbon claims that these heretical passages represent the opinions of the philosophers that Solomon cites in order to expose the fact that they do not have a demonstrative proof for the denial of immortality. While doing so, and while exposing that philosophy cannot prove the impossibility of perdurance, Solomon, according to Ibn Tibbon, concludes that it is not possible to confirm or infirm scientifically anything concerning the hereafter. Neither man's finitude nor his perdurance can be posited with certainty. The thesis I will attempt to support in this paper is that this inconclusive inference translated itself to Ibn Tibbon's sceptical approach, with doubt and uncertainty accompanying him throughout his exegesis of Qohelet.

Keywords

scepticism – immortality – conjunction – matter – induction

1 Introduction¹

Was Samuel ibn Tibbon a sceptic? In what sense was he a sceptic and what was he sceptical about? These are the questions I will attempt to address in this paper.

The term “scepticism” will be used here in a narrow sense.² Ibn Tibbon does not challenge the concept of truth and certainty or the correspondence between epistemology and ontology, nor does he use doubt as a methodological tool or see the suspension of judgement (*epoché*) as an ideal.³ The scepticism that will be discussed in this paper will be limited to a specific question. It will examine a crucial issue—crucial, that is from a philosophical and theological standpoint—namely, the question of man’s final end.

A full answer to the question of scepticism in Ibn Tibbon’s oeuvre requires a survey of both his writings, his *Commentary on Ecclesiastes (Peruš Qohelet)* and *Ma’amar Yiqqawu ha-Mayim*.⁴ In the present context, I will investigate the question within the limits of Ibn Tibbon’s exegesis of Qohelet. The thesis

1 Part of this research was conducted during my time as a fellow at the project “Samuel Ibn Tibbon’s Explanation of Foreign Terms and the Foundations of Philosophy in Hebrew” (622/22), funded by the Israel Science Foundation (ISF).

2 For an introduction to scepticism in the Middle Ages, see Richard Popkin, “Skepticism,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (n.d.), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/skepticism>; Avrum Stroll and A.P. Martinich, “Epistemology, Knowledge and Certainty,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (n.d.), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/epistemology>; Charles Bolyard, “Medieval Skepticism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skepticism-medieval>, and see bibliography there. For a survey of the research and bibliography on the subject, see Giuseppe Veltri, “Scepticism in Jewish Philosophy and Thought: A *status quaestionis*,” in *Judaistik im Wandel. Ein halbes Jahrhundert Forschung und Lehre über das Judentum in Deutschland*, ed. Andreas Lehnhardt (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 211–22. See also Henrik Lagerlund, “A History of Skepticism in the Middle Ages,” in *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 1–28. For scepticism or anti-scepticism in the thought of individual figures see Tanelli Kukkonen, “Algazālī’s Skepticism Revisited,” in Lagerlund, *Rethinking the History of Skepticism*, 29–59, and various articles in Racheli Haliva, ed., *Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Thought* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018).

3 Giuseppe Veltri defines scepticism as putting into question the sources of knowledge: see Veltri, “Principles of Jewish Skeptical Thought: The Case of Judah Moscato and Simone Luzzatto,” in *Rabbi Judah Moscato and the Jewish Intellectual World of Mantua in the 16th–17th Century*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 15–36, esp. 17.

4 Scepticism in *Ma’amar Yiqqawu ha-Mayim* (henceforth MYH) takes a different form and is mainly (though not exclusively) connected to the issue of the limitation of human knowledge. I intend to address this question in a future paper. See also Rebecca Kneller-Rowe, “Samuel ibn Tibbon’s *Ma’amar Yiqqawu ha-Mayim*, a Philosophical and Exegetical Treatise” (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 2011). All citations and paragraph numbers will follow the numbering in this edition.

that I will attempt to support in the following pages is that as Ibn Tibbon was commenting on Solomon's examination of the question of retribution, both terrestrial and eternal, doubt and uncertainty accompanied him throughout his work. From beginning to end, Ibn Tibbon's exegetical endeavour in *Peruš Qohelet* reflects an intellectual struggle and, perhaps, a personal quest, attempting to grapple with the question of the possibility of conjunction with the *agent intellect* in the hope of attaining immortality of the soul.

The primary question addressed in the Book of Qohelet is whether a human being can transcend his material condition and attain perdurance. Is there a prescription that will guarantee him eternal felicity? Or, in philosophical terms, it is the question of the possibility of conjunction and the immortality of the soul.

Qohelet, as is known, is a difficult, sceptical text⁵ *par excellence*.⁶ Talmudic sages and exegetes in later periods alike noted contradictions in the book of Ecclesiastes, and accusations of heresy were voiced against Qohelet in various rabbinic sources.⁷

5 "Doubt," "hesitation," "undecidedness," and "uncertainty" are used in this paper as synonyms for scepticism, in the same limited sense indicated above.

6 See Giuseppe Veltri, "Do/Did the Jews Believe in God? The Sceptical Ambivalence of Jewish Philosophy of Religion," in *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ra'anan S. Bustan, Klaus Herrman, Reimund Leicht, Annette Yoshiko Reed, and Giuseppe Veltri, with Alex Ramos (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 2:717–32.

7 See *b. Šabb.* 30b. For contradictions in how Ibn Tibbon reads Qohelet, see, for example, his representation of the woman as intellect *in actu* (in Ibn Tibbon, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes: The Book on the Soul of Man*, trans. James T. Robinson [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007], §80 against the more frequent representation of the woman as matter and as the cause of man's downfall (§§43, 46, 51, 74, 206, 353, 431, 609–16, 624, 626, 630–31), or the contradictory statements on the active intellect's role in bestowing the terrestrial forms (§§291, 299, 395, 401–2, 472, and 520). In his exegesis of Ecclesiastes, Saadia Gaon mentions this talmudic passage and adds the comment that many great commentators were embarrassed or confused by it: cf. Saadia Gaon, *Sefer ha-Perišut*, in *Five Megillot with Ancient Commentaries* [Hebrew], ed. Rabbi Joseph Kafih (Ramle: Makhon Mošeh le-Ḥeker Mišnat ha-Rambam, 2010), 164. Jacob Anatoli also refers to this talmudic passage and adds to the rabbis' justification for including Qohelet within the biblical corpus the specification that its opening verses tell the wise about retribution for the study of Torah and science, while the final verses make known the reward according to one's actions. The middle chapters, according to Anatoli, contain a dialectic examination of human actions to see whether "vanity of vanities" applies to them all. See the introduction to Anatoli, *Malmad ha-Talmidim* [Hebrew] (Lyck, 1866; reprinted Israel, 1968, and Brooklyn: Goldenberg Brothers, 1994), and also Yehuda Halper, *Socratic Questions in an Age without Plato: Permitting and Forbidding Open Inquiry in 12th–15th Century Europe and North Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 173–78. Isaac ibn Latif mentions this talmudic statement in the introduction to his commentary on Qohelet in *Miqra'ot Gedolot, Orim Gedolim on the Five Megillot, Compiling Treasures of Old, Rare Commentaries*, ed. Yisrael Ya'akov Vidovski (Jerusalem: Machon Even Israel, 2004), 103, as does Obadiah

Doubt and disillusion resound throughout the book, from the opening words, “all is vanity of vanities”⁸ (*havel havalim*), through to sayings such as “that which is crooked cannot be made straight” (Qoh 1:15), “for the sons of man [...] and the beasts, they have all one accident, the death of the one is like the death of the other” (Qoh 3:19), “who knows the spirit of the sons of man, whether it rises above” (Qoh 3:21). These verses and others motivated the sages to seek to ban the book of Qohelet or to exclude it from the biblical canon. In its defence, the rabbis quoted the first and last verses of the book, which prescribe piety and righteousness⁹ and imply that while all under the sun is vanity, that which is above is not. Qohelet’s last words are taken by the rabbis and most interpreters to represent Solomon’s true message; namely, that all assets and endeavours *under the sun*—meaning, in this lower world—are vanity and valueless. The only avenue to salvation is *above the sun*; namely, through the fear of God and the observance of His commandments, “for this is the whole of man” (Qoh 12:13).

Ibn Tibbon goes along with this justification, but he adds an original elaboration to it. In his attempt to absolve Solomon from the accusations of heresy, he suggests that the doubts and heretical propositions in this book represent the stance of the philosophers that Solomon is quoting in order “to make known [...] that they do not have a decisive demonstration” in support of

Sforno in the introduction to his commentary on Qohelet (*Miqra'ot Gedolot*, 1). Gersonides incorporated the contradictory statements in Qohelet noted in *b. Šabb.* into the general investigative methodology used in his *Wars of the Lord*. According to him, King Solomon used the same dialectic methodology, the first step of which required the listing of all the arguments that pertain to the subject under discussion. Step two consists of an analytical examination of each argument in view of discerning the fallacious reasoning from the correct reasoning for the purpose of ultimately attaining the final stage: the true conclusion. The name of the Book Qohelet, from the Hebrew root קהל, “gathering,” refers, according to him, to the assemblage of contradictory statements. It is within this framework that he explains that *havel havalim* (“vanity of vanities”) relates to the many false arguments that will be put forward in the forthcoming discussions. See Gersonides, *Gersonides on the Megillot* [Hebrew], ed. Yaakov Leib Levy (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2004), 15–18. For Gersonides’s dialectic methodology, see Sara Klein-Braslavy, “La méthode diaporématique de Gersonide dans les Guerres du Seigneur,” in *Les méthodes de travail de Gersonide et le maniement du savoir chez les scolastiques*, ed. Colette Sirat, Sara Klein-Braslavy, and Olga Weijers (Paris: Vrin, 2003), 105–34.

8 All English quotations from the text of Qohelet (Qoh) and from Ibn Tibbon’s *Peruš Qohelet* (henceforth PQ), unless stated otherwise, are from Samuel ibn Tibbon, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes: The Book of the Soul of Man*, ed. and trans. James T. Robinson (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007). Robinson’s introduction to his edition will be referenced as Robinson, PQ. Quotations from Ibn Tibbon’s commentary will follow the numbering of the paragraphs in Robinson’s edition and will be marked as PQ §xx.

9 See note 7 above.

their position.¹⁰ Solomon's purpose in doing so is to expose the weakness of their views so that no one will abandon the faith of his forbearers believing the philosophers' denial of immortality to be a demonstratively sustained truth.¹¹ Ibn Tibbon's interpretation of Solomon's intent is repeated in §517:

He did this [...] to reveal to what extent the force of the speculation of those who speculate about and investigate philosophically the immortality of man's soul is valid, so that not one person who speculates will think the philosophical sages have a decisive demonstration denying immortality. That way, no one will hastily reject the traditions received from his parents.¹²

The (seemingly) heretical passages in Qohelet, Ibn Tibbon says, are part of Solomon's *ruse*: to expose the inadequacy of the philosophers' claims denying immortality in order to preserve the traditional¹³ view of providence and the possibility of conjunction.

Ibn Tibbon takes the argument one step further by comparing Solomon's presentation of the philosophers' opinions to Maimonides's *démarche* in citing the various arguments against creation,¹⁴ as he says:

The True Sage [Maimonides] used the same method [...] regarding the question of the world's eternity [...]. Not only did he show that there is no decisive demonstration in favor of it; he also showed that there is a refutation of all the proofs used by the philosophers who support it.¹⁵

James T. Robinson describes this strategy as dialectic theology. This form of argumentation does not present a positive argument for the eternity of the soul, but rather attempts to undermine the philosophers' claims, pointing to the fact that the demise of the soul with the body, as they allege, is not necessary and that immortality is not impossible. This strategy, Robinson says, was adopted, according to Ibn Tibbon, by Moses, David, Solomon, and Maimonides

10 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §27.

11 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §27. Jacob Anatoli endorses Ibn Tibbon's claim that the seemingly heretical statements represent the philosophers' positions: cf. Anatoli, *Mamad ha-Talmidim*, introduction.

12 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §517.

13 The "traditional" view of providence, in the context of this paper, refers to the philosophical concept that there is an ultimate reward for those who labour *above the sun*, who attain intellectual perfection, and that man can attain conjunction with the Lord (or with the active intellect) through knowledge of the immaterial beings.

14 Maimonides, *Guide* 1:71 and 2:16.

15 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §27.

in their attempts to defend religious doctrines by refuting philosophical arguments against them.¹⁶

In my reading, Ibn Tibbon's interpretation of Solomon's *démarche* entails a problem.¹⁷ While revealing that the philosophers have no scientific proof for the denial of immortality, and proving that reward in the hereafter is *not impossible* from a philosophical standpoint, the possibility of conjunction and the eternity of the soul remain unconfirmed. Solomon's conclusion, according to Ibn Tibbon, is that there is no scientific proof to validate or invalidate the possibility of perdurance.

If the refutation of the philosophers' denial of perdurance rests on the basis that there is no proof for either its denial or its impossibility, there is also no positive argument that establishes it with certainty. One can perhaps continue the parallel with Maimonides's *démarche*. As Maimonides admitted to an impasse on the question of creation versus eternity (*Guide of the Perplexed* 1:71), equally so, there seems to be no scientifically valid resolution for either the negation or the affirmation of eternal life for he who labours *above the sun*.

The thesis that I will put forward in this paper is that this open-ended issue, this indecisiveness, will translate itself either to hesitation and wavering between the possibility of conjunction and the denial thereof or to allowing doubt to prevail throughout the commentary on Ecclesiastes. Due to the impossibility of arriving at a scientific confirmation of immortality, Ibn Tibbon will be alternating between support for the idea of an eternal reward for the select few and scepticism or denial of that possibility.

At times, it is not clear whether this is Solomon's *ruse*, attempting to downgrade the philosophers' position and sustain immortality, as Ibn Tibbon claims, or whether Ibn Tibbon ascribes this *démarche* to Solomon in an attempt to clarify his own doubts and perplexities. Is he following a personal agenda while reading his thoughts into Solomon's words?

Various considerations have led me to support this assumption; alongside a consistent effort to sustain the traditional stance that life in the hereafter is the final reward for he who attains knowledge of the immaterial existents, contradictions, inconsistencies, open-ended interpretations, and multiple

16 Robinson, PQ, 122–24. See also Ibn Tibbon, PQ §144 and Robinson's Hebrew version of Ibn Tibbon's exegesis of Qohelet: Ibn Tibbon, *Peruš Qohelet, Sefer Nefesh ha-Adam*, ed. James T. Robinson (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, Rav David Moshe and Amalia Rozen Foundation, 2005), 81 n. 111. According to Aristotle (*Cael.* 1.10.279b6–12) and Maimonides (*Guide* 2:15), exposing the contradicting opinions at the start of a debate helps to confirm and enhance the reader's confidence in the thesis it advances.

17 See below, section 3, for further question marks regarding Ibn Tibbon's *démarche*.

declarations convey, in my understanding, an ambivalence and hesitation that accompanied Ibn Tibbon to the very end of his exegesis of Qohelet.

In the following sections, I will point to various passages and discussions that I believe to reflect Ibn Tibbon's struggle with the central issue examined in this book; namely, the final end of man and the degree of certitude of it. In the second part, I will focus on the methods of investigation he used—or, as he says, that Solomon used—in his attempt to understand whether the philosophers' arguments bring about a solution to this question.

2 Hesitation and Scepticism: Ibn Tibbon's Testimony

From the very beginning of this work, Ibn Tibbon presents the reader with the terminus of his investigation. He enumerates the three logical options concerning the question of the immortality of the soul, namely:

1. "It can be proved, by philosophical investigation and the force of syllogistic reasoning, that the soul of man *qua man* is one of the things that exists *under the sun*," and therefore does not "possess perfection or eternal existence," or,
2. "It can be proved, by philosophical investigation, that the soul of man is not one of the things existing *under the sun*, and thus can possibly rise above," or,
3. "Whether the question must remain in doubt, since neither [opinion] can be proved; for there is no demonstration in support of either."¹⁸

No proof, he tells us, can confirm or infirm the first two options beyond doubt. We are therefore left with the third option, which leaves the question of the possibility of perdurance unanswered or scientifically unconfirmed. This, Ibn Tibbon claims, is the conclusion arrived at by the author of Qohelet: "It seems that this is what Solomon's investigation in this book led to: that neither [opinion]—that it is destroyed or immortal—can be proved by philosophical investigation."¹⁹

From the start of his journey, Ibn Tibbon discloses the final conclusion of his search: that no demonstrative proof can be brought in support of any of the theses regarding the fate of the soul. In the following chapters, he will pursue this search, attempting to explore every path that might lead him to a solution to his query regarding the question of conjunction, telling us that although

¹⁸ Ibn Tibbon, PQ §25. See also PQ §495.

¹⁹ Ibn Tibbon, PQ §25.

according to philosophical investigation, it seems best to believe that it is subject to destruction [...]. It is also possible to exonerate [Solomon] by saying that *Who knows* is an expression for “few” rather than “doubt.”²⁰

Throughout his exegesis of Qohelet, Ibn Tibbon will be contending with these two possibilities, leaving the reader with question marks rather than with a *denouement*.

Ibn Tibbon, as we shall see, interprets some verses as a confirmation of the traditional stance while construing others as denying or doubting that possibility, and mostly views the verses as carrying a dual message, suggesting both alternatives. Indecisiveness is reflected in his exegetical methodology; multiple, even contradicting interpretations of one and the same verse are abundant in his *Peruš Qohelet*, projecting an open-ended hermeneutical approach that seems to correspond to or reflect his general state of mind *vis à vis* the subject matter of this book.²¹ A study of the hermeneutics in this oeuvre is a *desideratum*. It exceeds the scope of this paper.

In his exegesis of one of the last verses of the Book of Ecclesiastes, Ibn Tibbon reaffirms the conclusion that the long investigation has not resolved Solomon's dilemma. Hesitation lingers till the end of the book. This passage also provides a striking example of Ibn Tibbon's exegesis, where he suggests a certain interpretation and its opposite for one and the same text, as well as a demonstration of how he reads scepticism and doubt into Solomon's words.

In Qoh 12:7, we read: “And the spirit returns to God [*elohim*] who gave it.”²² While a simple reading of this verse might have provided a straightforward answer to the above-cited question, “Who knows the spirit of the sons of man whether it rises above” (Qoh 3:21), confirming the perdurance of the soul, Ibn

20 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§25–26. Solomon's hesitation as to which of the options is correct and the possibility of conjunction altogether is also manifest in PQ §§24, 72–73, 75, 208, 212, 474–78, 495, 517, 550–55, 584, 606–8, 616–17, 653, 663, 745–48, and 760.

21 In various places, Ibn Tibbon explains away contradictions by the difficulty of deciphering the meaning of the text, as, for example, in PQ §499: “You should not be surprised that I set forth several meanings and interpretations [...]. I know of nothing comparable in all of Scripture and I have not yet found the ‘hole’ in its ‘settings;’” or as he bluntly puts it in PQ §542: “This verse has many interpretations, on account of the difficult literary figures it uses.” In PQ §620, Ibn Tibbon openly admits: “With such deep allusions, it is no surprise that someone who contemplates them is led to sacrifice on two altars” (meaning, led to posit or accept opposing positions). See also PQ §§645 and 657.

22 In *Guide* 1:40, Maimonides quotes this verse in support of the definition of the soul as the part that can rise to conjunction. Ibn Tibbon's insistence that the “spirit of man” in Qoh 12:7 does not refer to the part of man's soul that can rise to the supernal realm is all the more striking when compared to his insistence that the “spirit of man” in Qoh 3:21 refers precisely to the part of the soul that could potentially conjoin with the active intellect and become eternal.

Tibbon suggests a different reading. According to his reading, the “spirit” mentioned here refers to the “breath of life” (*ruah hayyim*) as in Gen 7:15 (*Guide* 1:40), not to the part of man that might rise above, and *elohim* here refers to nature, where the spirit, or the vital soul, returns (along with the body) after death.²³

Ibn Tibbon, as we can see, goes to great lengths to avoid interpreting the verse as a simple confirmation of the traditional view that the spirit of the just rises above, as he says: “He [Solomon] does not say *and the spirit rises* [...] and conjoins with God.” Had he (Solomon) “said that” (i.e., that the verse refers to the spirit that rises to God), Ibn Tibbon continues,

he would be retracting the view presented earlier, when he said *who knows the spirit of the [sons of] man whether it rises above*. He would be saying here [...] with no indication of doubt, what he had said earlier with doubt or with limitation of the few. Instead he says here only that it *returns unto God who gave it*.²⁴

Solomon’s hesitancy, we are told, did not dissipate until the very end, as he admits: “If he [Solomon] had doubted earlier the soul’s rising above, he has not extracted himself from that doubt.”²⁵ The conclusion that Ibn Tibbon foretold at the beginning of his oeuvre is reaffirmed again at the end of the road.

As we shall see, to this sceptical conclusion that concords with the philosophers’ stance, Ibn Tibbon added an optional reading that indicates a traditional understanding. The alternative interpretation of this very same verse suggests that a select few²⁶ may attain perfection and merit the ultimate felicity, as

23 Ibn Tibbon’s interpretation of “spirit” and *elohim* is based on Maimonides’s definition of these terms as equivocal, where “spirit” could denote the element of air, the wind, the animal spirit, or the thing that remains of man after death (*Guide* 1:40). In this context, Ibn Tibbon opts for the third option, the animal soul, which is physical and disintegrates with the body’s decay. As for interpreting *elohim* as “nature,” this is based on *Guide* 1:2, where Maimonides says: “Every Hebrew knew that the term *elohim* is equivocal, designing the deity, the angels and the rulers governing the cities” (Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963], 1:23). In *Guide* 2:6, Maimonides provides the additional clue, defining *elohim* (= angels) as intermediaries in the sense of “messengers,” thus “even the elements are in their turn, called angels” (Pines, 2:262) as well as “individual, natural and psychic forces” (Pines, 2:264).

24 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §745.

25 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §745.

26 So few, Ibn Tibbon says, that even Moses and the patriarchs could have reached greater heights had they not busied themselves with the needs of material life. The only ones who might perhaps have reached ultimate perfection, he concedes, were Noah and Enoch (Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§370, 373). According to Ibn Tibbon, Solomon includes himself among those who could not achieve conjunction (PQ §253) (although this contradicts the reason for dating Song of Songs to his old age, since it describes his personal experience of

he says: “Just as he had indicated earlier, that [rising above] is rare, here too he makes clear only that some spirits do *return* and conjoin with the God who gave them,”²⁷ “but,” he says in the next paragraph,

if this returning of the spirit to God was a universal statement referring to eternal existence, he would not say: *all is vanity*. [...] But since the rising of the soul is subject to doubt or is rare he was justified in saying: *all is vanity*. For there is no man who knows whether his soul will rise above [...] while *vanity* is known to affect them all, eternal existence is not known to affect even one.²⁸

Ibn Tibbon found additional grounds for his scepticism in the debate about the chronology of Solomon’s writings. Against those who asserted that the Song of Songs was the fruit of his youth, Ibn Tibbon argues that the contents of the book—namely, the description and first-hand testimony of conjunction—required the utmost perfection and maturity. It could therefore only have been written, in his view, in Solomon’s old age. In contrast to this, when he was writing Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiastes being probably the first, it seems that Solomon’s thoughts were not yet fully crystallised, for there, he exposes the doubt and perplexity of the philosophers on the question of the immortality of the soul.²⁹ At the outset of his investigation, Ibn Tibbon surmises, Solomon was wavering on this issue.

The following paragraph indirectly corroborates this assumption by saying that “in Proverbs, in contrast [to Qohelet], it seems that he [Solomon] did not have any doubt regarding immortality [of the soul].”³⁰ The affirmation of Solomon’s confidence in immortality in the book of Proverbs in contrast to the treatment of this question in his earliest work confirms, by implication, Solomon’s scepticism and irresoluteness in the Book of Qohelet.

conjunction [Ibn Tibbon, PQ §71]). Based on *b. B. Bat.* 17a, Ibn Tibbon mentions those to whom God disclosed the day and place of their death as examples of people who died in a state of prophecy and conjunction, in what the sages term *mitat nešiqah*, “a kiss of God,” and says that Moses, Aaron, and Miriam attained this state (§§214–15). The Talmud includes three more people—the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—among the six whose souls transcended physical death. However, the term *mitat nešiqah* is not mentioned in connection with them.

27 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §746. Robinson’s translation, slightly altered by me for the sake of clarity. For more examples of a dual interpretation where a sceptical interpretation is followed by a traditional reading, which confirms the return of the spirit to the highest realms for the rare few (or excludes it from the multitudes), see PQ §§139, 209, 476–78, 634, and 746.

28 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §747.

29 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §72.

30 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §73.

The passage reads further:

He believed there [in Proverbs], without doubt, that it is immortal. Either he arrived at the true demonstration with which he could verify immortality, or a demonstration by which he could refute their arguments for destructibility, and then rely on the tradition he received from the prophets and patriarchs.³¹

In these additional sentences, Ibn Tibbon admits that even in Proverbs, some wavering remained, and although immortality is affirmed there with certitude, it is not clear that it is based on a scientifically conclusive demonstration or on tradition.

In a later passage, Ibn Tibbon cites the order of the *Writings* (*Ketuvim*) mentioned in the Talmud (*b. B. Bat.* 14b), according to which Proverbs precedes Ecclesiastes.³² This, he says, would concord with the view that does not ascribe scepticism to Qohelet, but admits that the rare few, to the exclusion of the multitudes, can attain eternity. Here again there is an allusion to the possibility that Qohelet speaks scepticism. Even as far as the Song of Songs is concerned, he continues, although it is clearly a song to the immortality of the soul, there were some who contested that view, claiming that it is not possible for what is adjoint to matter to unite with the immaterial.³³ To my mind, the repeated referral to doubt concerning Solomon's writings is an additional expression of Ibn Tibbon's wavering between the alternative messages of the book of Ecclesiastes.

Regarding the verse in Qoh 8:17 that repeats man's incapacity to attain knowledge of God's ways, Ibn Tibbon asks a rhetorical question, wondering why God created man in His image and endowed him with a supernal intellect if all is vanity:

He [Solomon] says that a *man*, even a *wise man*, cannot find out the cause of the fact that the righteous and the wicked are equal. Since they both return to *vanity*, he cannot find out the final aim of man's creation: neither with respect to the realm of good and evil, nor with respect to his being created in the *image of God*, that is possessing the form of the supernal Intellect.³⁴

This poignant remark seems, in my eyes, to convey a profound dismay regarding the failure to arrive at a scientific confirmation of the possibility of perdurance.

31 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §73.

32 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §75.

33 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §76.

34 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §653.

To this declaration of doubt one can add the last words of Ibn Tibbon's commentary on Qohelet: "Thus one ought to *fear Him* for the fear of punishment, and [...] *keep His commandments* with hope of reward."³⁵ It is significant, in my mind, that fear and hope are Ibn Tibbon's last words on this text.

3 Comments and Discussions that Reflect Ibn Tibbon's Scepticism

Beyond the admissions and personal testimony of doubt, various comments and interpretations raise question marks as to Ibn Tibbon's purpose in invoking them. One such question mark concerns his justification of Solomon's citing of the philosophers' arguments. As mentioned above, Ibn Tibbon defends Solomon's presentation of the philosophers' heretical statements by saying that his aim was to expose the inconclusiveness of their arguments in order to protect readers from mistaking them for decisive demonstrations. Thus, "if [...] someone sees in this book anything that seems to contradict the belief that the soul of man *rises above*, he ought to know that it does not represent what Solomon himself believes. Rather, they are *words* made by the philosophical sages."³⁶

Reading through the book, one wonders to whom Ibn Tibbon is referring and whether Solomon does expose and invalidate arguments against perdurance in the book of Qohelet as Ibn Tibbon claims. In §72, Ibn Tibbon suggests that Solomon may be addressing the cohort of philosophers through the ages who considered the birth and demise of the soul with the body to be an apodeictic truth and continues that perhaps this was the prevalent belief in Solomon's time.³⁷ In §558, he names the Sabians as the possible proponents of the materialistic beliefs concerning the soul. Since, he says, the Torah made no explicit reference to immortality, those beliefs, together with the philosophers' demonstrations, had great impact. The need to protect the people from their influence prompted Solomon to point to the weakness of their arguments.³⁸

35 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §761.

36 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §29.

37 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §72.

38 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §558. Ibn Tibbon, who grouped all opponents of perdurance into one category, may also be referring to pre-Socratic philosophies that viewed the soul and the body as an organic whole, with varying degrees of physicality. There were also pre-Sadducee sects that likewise denied immortality. Testimony of the belief that the soul dies with the body can be found in Plato's *Apology of Socrates* (40c), and in other pre-Socratic schools of thought. It is possible that Ibn Tibbon knew of Avicenna's controversy with Ibn Butlân, one of the Nestorian philosophers of Bagdad, who criticised the possibility of an after-life for individuals. Ibn Tibbon may also have known Ibn Bajja's text according to which Alfarabi attributed this uncomform view to the ancients, while in his opinion they represented the beliefs of the *Ih̄wān al-Šafā'* (see Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human

However, in §76, he clearly says that except for Alfarabi, all of Aristotle's commentators admitted conjunction in some form or another,³⁹ and in fact, the only philosophical challenge to conjunction and immortality that is cited and addressed in this book is Alfarabi's.⁴⁰ Who, then, are the philosophers and what arguments will Solomon be arguing against? Besides the relatively brief and succinct debate with Alfarabi's commentary, we do not find any other philosophical arguments on the subject.

In view of the discrepancy between the declared intention ascribed to Solomon and the meagre implementation of it, one may wonder whether Ibn Tibbon brought up Alfarabi's challenge of immortality within the framework of undermining all philosophical arguments against perdurance or whether he brought it up in order to point to dissent and lack of unanimity on the subject among the philosophers.

In his attempt to defend Solomon for citing the philosophers' "heretical" position against perdurance, Ibn Tibbon adduces an argument that seems somewhat manipulative. As we saw above, he compares Solomon's presentation of the philosophers' opinions to Maimonides's *démarche* in citing the various arguments against creation,⁴¹ thereby interwinding the Maimonidean (supposed) esotericism with his own esoteric reading.

After repeating that Solomon's purpose in presenting the philosophers' arguments was "to make known [...] that they do not have a decisive demonstration,"⁴² Ibn Tibbon compares his strategy to that of Maimonides, the purpose of it being to show that "there is no decisive demonstration in favor of it" and "that there is a refutation of all the proofs used by the philosophers who support it."⁴³ There are various passages in PQ and MYH that make us wonder whether Ibn Tibbon actually believed that Maimonides cited the philosophers' denial of creation in order to undermine their position.

Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja and Maimonides," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 1, ed. Isadore Twersky [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979], 1: 83–85, and Pines, "La philosophie orientale d'Avicenne et sa polémique contre les Bagdadiens," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 19 [1952]: 5–37, esp. 6–26).

39 As Ibn Tibbon says in PQ §211 that "as for the philosophers who believe in the soul's immortality, and they include most Aristotelians" (with slight alterations). See also Ibn Tibbon, PQ §139.

40 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §76. As we shall see below (section 4.1), he does not cite any of the refutations against Alfarabi's claim mentioned by Alexander, Themistius, or Averroes.

41 For this comparison, see also introduction above and the theoretical discussion in the following section.

42 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §27.

43 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §27.

Chapter 20 of Ibn Tibbon's MYH reads Psalms 104 as a verse-by-verse interpretation of Genesis 1, describing a semi-eternal natural process of creation according to which the sub-lunar world periodically recreates itself through physical-geological processes while the elements and the supernal world exist since eternity. He criticised Maimonides's position according to which heaven and earth were created on day one.⁴⁴ Yet, as he mentions Maimonides's creationist theory, he adds that this understanding corresponds to his interpretation according to *pešutey devarav*,⁴⁵ meaning according to the literal understanding of Maimonides's words. Ibn Tibbon had already used this same formula concerning Maimonides's theory of creation in his commentary on Qohelet:

If this interpretation—despite its truth—does not seem good to you, since you prefer not to accept that there was not a simultaneous temporal creation for the celestial and the sublunar world, this seems to be the simple meaning (*pešutey qešat devarav*) of the Master's statements.⁴⁶

The insistence that this is the *literal* reading of Maimonides clearly suggests that Ibn Tibbon did not consider Maimonides's *true* position to correspond to the overt statements defending creationism. Maimonides's quotation of opposing opinions might therefore not have been motivated, “like Solomon,” by a wish to better eliminate opposing arguments. It is difficult to say what motivated Ibn Tibbon to draw this comparison. Did he consider Maimonides's citation and refutation of the opposing positions to be intended to convince the unlearned of creation? Did he ascribe to the view suggested by some commentators that where Maimonides cites opposing opinions, it actually represents his esoteric position?⁴⁷ It is plausible that this comparison was a means to (reveal and) hide his profound scepticism.

44 See Maimonides, *Guide* 2: 30.

45 Ibn Tibbon, MYH §950.

46 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §307 (with slight alterations).

47 For Maimonides's esotericism, see, for example, Joseph ibn Kaspi on *Guide* 1:37 (Ibn Kaspi, *Amudey Kesef u-Maskiyyot Kesef*, ed. S. Werbluner (Frankfurt, 1848), reprinted in *Šelošah Qadmony Mefaršey ha-Moreh* (Jerusalem: Orzel, 1961), 50; Isaac ben Moshe Levi Profiat Duran (Efodi) on *Guide* 1:54, in *Moreh Nevukhim 'in Šelošah Perušim*, reprint ed. (Jerusalem: S. Monzon, Qiryat No'ar, 1960), 80a. For modern scholars, see Pines, “The Limitations of Human Knowledge,” 92–93; Warren Zev Harvey, “Maimonides' Critical Epistemology and *Guide* 2:24,” *Aleph* 8 (2008): 214–19; Herbert A. Davidson, “Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation,” in Twersky (ed.), *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, 16–40, esp. 22; Gad Freudenthal, “‘Instrumentalism’ and ‘Realism’ as Categories in the History of Astronomy: Duhem vs. Popper, Maimonides vs. Gersonides,” *Centaurus* 45 (2003): 247 n. 11; Joel L. Kraemer, “How (Not) to Read the *Guide of the Perplexed*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 32 (2006): 367; Carlos Fraenkel, “Maimonides, Averroes and Samuel ibn Tibbon on a *Skandalon* of Medieval Science,” *Aleph* 8 (2008): 210; Fraenkel,

The fact that Ibn Tibbon mentions the esoteric layer of the *Guide* following a fairly lengthy passage criticising Maimonides's theory of creation⁴⁸ lends additional weight to the supposition that his comparison of Solomon's *démarche* to Maimonides's strategy may be an esoteric device to conceal his doubt or his disbelief in the eternity of the soul.⁴⁹

Another indication of Ibn Tibbon's scepticism is provided in his discussion of why the sages did not ban Qohelet. The sages' main defence of Solomon's Qohelet rests on the three words at the end of the verse: "What profit has the man in all his labor wherein he labors under the sun?" (Qoh 1:3). As we saw above, these words implied, in their view, that while profit is denied for all who labour in the sublunar world, there is profit for he who labours in matters related to the world above. These words as well as the concluding sentences of the book were proof, in the sages' eyes, of Solomon's pietist belief in immortality.

Additionally, Ibn Tibbon casts doubt on the validity of this argument. Regarding everything *under the sun* as vanity and therefore perishable conforms, indeed, with the claims of the philosophers⁵⁰ as well as with traditional beliefs. Both the traditional and the sceptical approach (which doubts the possibility of immortality) concede the futility of life on earth. The crucial issue—the fate of that which is *above the sun*—remains open, and the pivotal question debated in the Book of Qohelet—whether there is a demonstrative confirmation that the human soul can transcend temporality—remains unanswered.

While the philosophers did not prove the impossibility of perdurance, there is also no proof of its reality. Without spelling it out, Ibn Tibbon points to a flaw in the sages' reasoning. The inversion of the statement that there is no profit for man's labour *under the sun*, he says, does not yield scientific proof of its opposite.⁵¹ The assertion that everything under the sun is vanity does not

From Maimonides to Samuel ibn Tibbon: The Transformation of the Dalālat al-Hā'irīn to the Moreh ha-Nevukhim [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2008), 191–94.

48 Ibn Tibbon, MYH §978.

49 Another indication that Ibn Tibbon assumed that Maimonides endorsed the eternity hypothesis can be deduced from a note he added to his translation of *Guide* 2:1 (third speculation). In that note, he seems to suggest, as do Efodi, Kaspi, and Crescas, that all of Maimonides's proofs of God's existence, uniqueness, and immateriality, including the teleological Kalam proof from creation, rest on the eternity hypothesis, which explains why Maimonides did not include creation among the foundations of religion in his halakhic works. See Fraenkel, *From Maimonides to Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 165–72, and Harvey, "Maimonides' Critical Epistemology," 228–30.

50 As he repeats, for example, in Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§660 and 698.

51 This claim echoes Maimonides's statement in *Guide* 1:59 that "negation does not give knowledge in any respect of the true reality of a thing with regard to which the particular matter in question has been negated" (Pines, 1:139).

necessarily lead to the conclusion drawn by the rabbis that there is a reward in the hereafter for labour in matters that are *above the sun*. The *vanity of vanities* inherent to terrestrial life need not imply or deny that eternity is granted for that which is not connected to matter. And if one would want to deduce a dialectic proof from the inverted argument, Ibn Tibbon says:

In no way did Qohelet deny *profit* for anyone reaching this perfection, that is for him whose soul conjoins with the separate intellect. In fact, Solomon said nothing at all—affirmative or negative—about he who labors “above the sun;” this subject he avoided entirely. Nor should you understand from this Sage’s dictum that he affirmed, in any manner, *profit* for the *man* in so far as he *labors* above the sun.⁵²

He continues with a concrete example: “Having doubt as to whether someone possesses two thousand gold coins is different than affirming he has one thousand. All he does is doubt his possession of two thousand gold coins without affirming a thing.”⁵³

While denying the possibility of affirming or negating immortality, Ibn Tibbon openly challenges the philosophers’ position as well as the sages’ defence of Solomon. What he is saying in the name of the (presumed) author of Ecclesiastes is that no scientifically valid positive or negative inference can be adduced from the inversion of the statement at the opening of Qohelet. Neither the philosophers’ rejection of conjunction nor the rabbis’ faith in Solomon’s belief in reward for labour *above the sun*, on the basis of its negation for those who toil in vanities, can be ascertained. The denial of profit for labour under the sun does not allow for a valid inference, either positive or negative, in the hereafter.⁵⁴

4 The Theoretical Discussion

Alongside multiple statements that affirm the traditional position on reward and punishment⁵⁵ and passages that reflect doubt and indecision, Ibn Tibbon

52 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §143.

53 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §143.

54 For Anatoli’s conclusion that reward in the hereafter can be inferred from the inversion of Solomon’s statement, see below, note 79.

55 As, for example, in PQ §552, where Ibn Tibbon admits that Solomon lauds bodily perfection only because it is more attainable and a precondition for the higher level, whereas the perfection of the soul is very difficult to achieve and is therefore most rare. On man’s ability to save himself through intellection, see also Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§464, 499, 500–503,

pursued his investigation into the possibility of attaining ultimate felicity in various ways. In the following section, I will attempt to trace Solomon's quest, as Ibn Tibbon sees it, along two trajectories.

In search of a demonstrative proof, he addresses Alfarabi's argument that negates the possibility of conjunction as (supposedly) stated in his lost *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, trying to assess its validity and possibly refute its thesis. The main part of the book, however, is devoted to a dialectical-empirical examination of all aspects of human life in order to establish whether all is vanity, and therefore perishable, or whether there is anything that can transcend *havel havalim* and attain eternal life.

4.1 *In Search of a Demonstrative Proof: The Debate with Alfarabi's Statements in his Lost Treatise on the Nicomachean Ethics*

Alfarabi's dissenting voice on the issue of immortality is recorded in several sources.⁵⁶ Ibn Bajja, Ibn Ṭufayl, Averroes, and Immanuel the Roman all reported his "provocative stance" in his commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics*, where he claimed that there is no possibility of conjunction with the active intellect, which is tantamount to a denial of the afterlife, that happiness is only to be achieved in this life, that there is no happiness except political happiness, and that all assertions concerning existence that is beyond what can be perceived by the senses is an *old wives' tale*.⁵⁷

671, and 675–76. For the possibility of the afterlife for the rare few, see PQ §§41, 44, 47, 51, 139, 209, 364, 373, 414, 435, 440, 455, 476, 478, 495, 517, 607, 634, 671, and 746–47.

56 For Ibn Bajja's position on Alfarabi's statements, see Pines's introduction to his translation of the *Guide*, 1:lxix–lxxxii; Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge," 82–88. It was also reported and criticised by Ibn Ṭufayl in his *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, trans. Yair Shiffman (Tel Aviv: The Haim Rubín Tel Aviv University Press, 2009), 44–45, as well as by Averroes, mainly in the *Three Treatises on Conjunction*, trans. Samuel ibn Tibbon (Hebrew: *Šelošah Ma'amarim le-Ḥakham Ibn Rušd*), German translation by J. Hercz as Averroes, *Drei Abhandlungen über die Conjunction des separaten Intellects mit dem Menschen von Averroes (Vater und Sohn)* (Berlin, 1869), 10–11, 13, and also by Immanuel the Roman, who added Alfarabi to the inhabitants of hell in chapter 28 of his "On Hell and Heaven" in *Maḥbarot 'Emanuel Ha-Romi 2* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1947), 515. For Alfarabi's position in his commentary on the *Ethics*, see also Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 328–35; Davidson, "Maimonides on Metaphysical Knowledge," *Maimonidean Studies* 3 (1992/93): 55–67; Davidson, *Maimonides the Rationalist* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011), 173–82; Robinson, PQ 12–13 and 95–98. For the differences between Alfarabi's arguments as cited by Averroes in the *Three Treatises* and those cited by Ibn Tibbon, see Robinson, PQ 12–13.

57 Many have noted contradictions in Alfarabi's writings on the questions under discussion. Ibn Bajja suggested that they were false accusations that had been mounted against him (see Pines, "Translator's Introduction," lxxix–lxxxii). However, fragments discovered by Chaim Meir Neria present evidence that the doctrines of the impossibility of union with

Ibn Tibbon consecrates relatively little space to a confrontation with the philosophical arguments. He deals with them in two places. He first mentions this issue in connection with doubts raised by some as to the alleged purpose of the Song of Songs, which seems to refer to the immortality of the soul. Alongside those who believe that it has been demonstrated that man can attain perfect knowledge of the active intellect and conjoin with it to immortality, there are those who claim that human nature, that is linked to matter, cannot conjoin with the incorporeal.⁵⁸

In support of the earlier position, Ibn Tibbon cites Alexander and Themistius, who, he says, supplied proofs of the possibility of conjunction and immortality. They were “great sages and the first commentators of [Aristotle’s] books,” who claimed that their position derived from “the force of Aristotle’s statements in *On the Soul*, and that this was his [Aristotle’s] opinion.”⁵⁹ No one disputed this position, continues Ibn Tibbon, except Alfarabi⁶⁰ in his lost commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, “who said that conjunction of the human soul with the agent intellect is like insipid vanity” (*hevley ha-tiflut*).⁶¹

Surprisingly, Ibn Tibbon does not mention any of the refutations of Alfarabi by Alexander, Themistius,⁶² or Averroes,⁶³ either in their writings or in Averroes’s

the intellect as a political end and of there being only political happiness were indeed propounded by him: cf. Neria, “Alfarabi’s Lost Commentary on the *Ethics*: New Textual Evidence,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 23 (2013): 69–99, esp. 75–78, 92–95.

58 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §75.

59 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §76. For Aristotle’s comments on the subject, see *De an.* 1.4.408b19–20; 2.1.413a4–7; 3.5.430a22–25, and *Metaph.* 12.3.1070a24–26. As is known, Aristotle’s statements on the dual aspects of the question—the human intellect’s ability to cognise the immaterial and the possibility that cognition of the supernal beings leads to conjunction and eternity—were open to varying interpretations.

60 Gershom ben Solomon copied this paragraph from Ibn Tibbon’s exegesis (PQ §76), along with some additions, into his *Ša’ar ha-Šamayim*. James T. Robinson transcribed the passage based on two manuscripts in his “Samuel ibn Tibbon’s Commentary on Ecclesiastes” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2002), 2:489–96. It is missing, he says, from the published editions of *Ša’ar ha-Šamayim*: see Ibn Tibbon, PQ §76 n. 100. Gershom ben Solomon’s version of this passage was also appended as a preface to one of Averroes’s *Three Treatises*, in which he introduces the passage by saying that it is pertinent to know the reasons for dissent between the sages on the topic of immortality: see Averroes, *Three Treatises*, 24 (Heb. text; all page numbers refer to the Hebrew section). See also Robinson, PQ §76 n. 100.

61 Note that in the sources that quote Alfarabi’s comments and in the *Three Treatises*, 10, 13, the term used is “an old wives’ tale” (*hevley ha-zeqenot*).

62 For an account of their theories on the subject, see Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes*, 7–43, 321–40.

63 Mainly in his *Three Treatises* and his *Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction* (Hebrew title: *Iggeret Efšarut ha-Devequt* [Arabic original lost], ed. and trans. Kalman P. Bland [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1982], §14 [Heb. text], 85 [Eng. text]). For Averroes’s theory of the intellect, conjunction, and immortality, see Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and*

*Three Treatises*⁶⁴ that he himself translated from Arabic and appended to some of the manuscripts of *Peruś Qohelet*.⁶⁵ The only comment by Averroes mentioned in his name is one that tries to explain away Alfarabi's denial of conjunction. It was not speculation that convinced him, Ibn Tibbon says in Averroes's name; rather, Abu Nasr's erroneous generalisation was based on his personal incapacity to attain conjunction. He reasoned that if his high intellect failed to achieve union with the active intellect, then immortality is not within reach of the human intellect in general. His mistake lay in his failure to realise that the environmental conditions of his time prevented him from actualising his intellectual capacities to the full.⁶⁶

Averroes, 258–340; Alfred L. Ivry, "Averroes on Intellection and Conjunction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 86 (1966): 76–85; Ivry, "Getting to Know Thee: Conjunction and Conformity in Averroes' and Maimonides' Philosophy," in *Adaptations and Innovations: Studies on the Interaction between Jewish and Islamic Thought and Literature, from the Early Middle Ages to the Late Twentieth Century, Dedicated to Professor Joel Kraemer*, ed. Y. Zvi Langermann and Josef Stern (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 143–56; Ivry, "Averroes Three Commentaries on *De anima*," in *Averroes and the Aristotelian Tradition: Sources, Constitution and Reception of the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd (1126–1198). Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium Averroicum (Cologne, 1996)*, ed. Gerhard Endress and Jan A. Aertsen, with Klaus Braun (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 199–216; Ivry, "Conjunction in and of Maimonides and Averroes," in *Averroes et les Averroïsmes juif et latin. Actes du Colloque International (Paris, 16–18 juin 2005)*, ed. Jean Baptiste Brenet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 231–48; Arthur Hyman, "Averroes' Theory of the Intellect and the Ancient Commentators," in Endress and Aertsen, *Averroes and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 188–98; Deborah L. Black, "Conjunction and Identity of Knower and Known in Averroes," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (1999): 159–84. See also Averroes, *Long Commentary on the De anima of Aristotle*, trans. Richard C. Taylor (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 433.

64 Averroes, *Three Treatises*, 5–18. In the introduction to the *Three Treatises*, 23, Ibn Tibbon ascribes the epistles to recent philosophers, not mentioning Averroes or his son.

65 The *Three Treatises* are appended to six manuscripts of Ibn Tibbon's commentary on Qohelet; two follow the preface and the others are at the end of the commentary. On the place and significance of the *Three Treatises* in the context of Samuel ibn Tibbon's *Peruś Qohelet*, see Robinson, "Samuel ibn Tibbon's Commentary on Ecclesiastes," (PhD diss.), 2:501–8, and his printed Hebrew edition: Ibn Tibbon, *Sefer Nefesh ha-Adam, Perush Qohelet le-Rabbi Shmuel Ben Yehudah ibn Tibbon*, ed. James T. Robinson (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, Rav David Moshe and Amalia Rozen Foundation, 2016), 12–13. On this question, see also Reimond Leicht, "The Place of Ibn Rushd's Translation in Samuel ibn Tibbon's Work," paper presented at the PESHAT Project conference, Hamburg, February 2019. Doron Forte quotes a letter sent by Rabbi Shem Tov ben Shem Tov to Eli Habilio in which he mentions the epistle that Maimonides addressed to Samuel ibn Tibbon praising Averroes as the successor of Aristotle and mentioning the *Treatise on the Intellect* that had reached him: see Forte, "Back to the Sources: Alternative Versions of Maimonides' Letter to Samuel ibn Tibbon and Their Neglected Significance," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 23 (2016): 47–90, particularly 65. If Shem Tov's version is correct, could it be that Ibn Tibbon turned to the *Three Epistles* on Maimonides's recommendation?

66 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §76 and *Three Treatises*, 9–10.

Ibn Tibbon deals with Alfarabi's contention again, without mentioning him by name, in connection with the verse "That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and deficiency cannot be numbered."⁶⁷ Ibn Tibbon reads into this verse a demonstrative proof of the impossibility of anything material becoming eternal. The demonstration is in a negative syllogistic format:

1. Man is crooked (since linked to matter);
2. A thing that is crooked cannot be straightened;
3. Man cannot be straightened, meaning he cannot become eternal.⁶⁸

He then expounds on this, saying that man's intellect is intellect in matter or requires a material substrate. Being connected to matter, man is inherently linked to privation and potentiality (crookedness and deficiency), which is a state of permanent lack and distortion that cannot be mended. It passes away when the material substrate disintegrates,⁶⁹ or, in Aristotelian formulation, anything that comes to be cannot become eternal.⁷⁰

The premise underlying Alfarabi's position (which is not explicated by Ibn Tibbon) is that the intellect becomes identical or conjoins to some degree with the object of its intellection. Should the human material intellect apprehend the immaterial beings, it would become immaterial like its objects.⁷¹ This conclusion would allow for something generated and finite to become eternal,⁷² and that is an impossibility.⁷³

67 Qoh 1:15. For more statements affirming the impossibility of mending the crookedness and finitude of man, see Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§553 and 585. The Hebrew *litqon* can also mean "repaired" or "mended," from the root TQN.

68 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §208.

69 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §206.

70 *De cael.* 1.12.281b25–283b21. This rule was evinced by Aristotle in connection with the eternity of the spheres. Averroes says that Alfarabi borrowed it in support of his denial of immortality: see Averroes, *Three Treatises*, 6, and *Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction* §§8, 14 (Heb. text), 50, 85 (Eng. text).

71 Averroes, *Three Treatises*, 7, 13. See *Metaph.* 12.7.1072b20–24, 12.9.1074b34–1075a4, and *De an.* 3.5.430a20. The triple identification of the intellect, the cognising subject, and the intellectually cognised object also appears in *Guide* 1:68, in Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Foundations of the Torah, 2:10, and in Maimonides, *Peruš ha-Mišnah*, ed. and trans. Joseph D. Kafih (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1965), "The Laws of the Fathers," 3:20 (p. 385). According to Neria, this argument, implied in Ibn Tibbon's confrontation with the philosophers' opposition to immortality, is Averroes's version of Alfarabi's stance according to which a generated material intellect cognising the immaterial should conjoin with it and become eternal (see Neria, "Alfarabi's Lost Commentary," 76–77, and n. 22).

72 Averroes, *Three Treatises*, 7–8, 13. This epistemological premise is not mentioned by Ibn Tibbon. However, it is mentioned in the citation of PQ §76 by Gershom ben Solomon in his *Ša'ar ha-Šamayim*. See note 59 above and his introduction to the *Three Treatises*, 24.

73 As noted above, Ibn Tibbon does not mention any of the refutations of Alfarabi, nor does he mention Averroes's criticism of Alfarabi's concept of the active intellect as an efficient cause, not a formal or final cause (Averroes, *Three Treatises*, 8, 11). This concept, according

According to Ibn Tibbon, therefore, Qoh 1:15 confirms Alfarabi's contention, providing demonstrative proof that the human intellect *adjoint to matter* cannot enter into conjunction with the supernal world. The fact that man's soul is brought into existence with the body was taken by the philosophers as a confirmation of man's linkage to matter and of the impossibility of extricating oneself from that state and attain immortality.

In his attempt to salvage the possibility of perdurance, Ibn Tibbon suggests that there might be "a part or a disposition within man's soul" that is not linked to matter that might, therefore, transcend temporality.⁷⁴ This solution, he says, is based on the majority of Aristotle's interpreters, and is, in fact, a mix of Aristotelian postulates and interpretations thereof. Without mentioning names, he is probably alluding to Themistius's concept of the material intellect as an eternal separate substance that is not linked to matter and to Alexander's understanding of it as a mere disposition, which as such has no existence outside of the intellect,⁷⁵ or to "something that may originate in it that is not generated" and that therefore is not subject to corruption.⁷⁶ This part, he says, either intellects the incorporeal beings or is the cause of the soul's cognizing the immaterial and thus uniting with it. "This is what the philosophers refer to as the 'agent intellect,'" the intellection of which leads to union with it, for "the intellect *in actu*, is identical with the intellectually cognized object *in actu* and the intellectually cognizing subject *in actu*,"⁷⁷ as mentioned in *Guide* 1:68. In uniting with the active intellect, the human material intellect becomes eternal. This is how the philosophers conceived the immortality of the soul.

What Ibn Tibbon is saying is that the above-mentioned demonstration is only relevant to what has been recognised as being linked to matter. If, however, it could be established that there is a part of the soul that is not related to or dependent on matter, if the verse "who knows the spirit of the sons of man,

to Averroes, also underlies his denial of immortality. He also does not mention the objection ascribed to Alfarabi by Averroes in his *Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction*, §8 (pp. 50–51), §14 (p. 108) (Heb. text), 85 (Eng. text), according to which a single disposition can receive a single type of form. If the material intellect could cognise forms abstracted from material objects as well as the forms of the immaterial beings and conjoin with them, this would attribute it with a disposition to receive diametrically opposite forms, which would be an impossibility. Averroes accepts the premise, but retorts that man possesses two dispositions for thought, one for the material objects and another for the immaterial, the second appearing upon the culmination of human intellection (Averroes, *Three Treatises*, 13). See Davidson, *Maimonides the Rationalist*, 181; Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect*, 329.

74 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §208.

75 Averroes, *Three Treatises*, 5–7.

76 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §211.

77 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §211.

whether it rises above" (Qoh 3:21) was an affirmation that the rare few can rise above, then a scientific demonstration could be provided for the possibility that the soul of man, that attains its full actuality, can survive to eternity.⁷⁸

If this were the case, Ibn Tibbon cautiously suggests, then it might be possible to invert the aforementioned syllogism, thus providing a demonstration of cause for the possibility of perdurance for he who labours *above the sun*. The argument would then be:

1. There is a part of man that is not linked to matter;
2. What is not linked to matter is not crooked/perishable;
3. The non-material part of man is not vanity/perishable.

However, Ibn Tibbon says, the existence of a part of man that is not made of or in need of matter that could become eternal has not been scientifically verified by philosophical investigation⁷⁹ and can therefore not be affirmed as an apodeictic truth,⁸⁰ or, in his words:

78 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §209.

79 Like his father-in-law Ibn Tibbon, Jacob Anatoli understood the first verses of Ecclesiastes as a demonstrative confirmation of the vanity of material existence. The proof, he says, is hinted at in the second verse of Qohelet. According to him, the first *havel havalim* in that verse stands for the middle premise of the syllogism, the second *havel havalim* is in lieu of the major premise, and *hakol hevel* is its conclusion. However, he goes beyond his father-in-law, who said that Solomon does not make any pronouncement concerning what is *above the sun*, nor, as we saw, does he consider that there is scientific confirmation of the existence of a part in man that is not adjoint to matter and therefore not perishable. Anatoli claims that based on the demonstrative proof of the vanity of material life, a dialectic proof can be inferred to be a reward for the select few who labour *above the sun*. In his introduction to *Malmad ha-Talmidim*, he evokes the rule from talmudic logic (*b. Ned.* 11a), *mikhlal law atah šomea' hen*, which translates as "the positive may be inferred from the negative" (translation taken from the Soncino Talmud, *Seder Nashim*, vol. 3, 27), meaning that from the negation of profit for labour that is in vain, one can infer the opposite conclusion; namely, that there is profit for those who pursue truth through toil in Torah and science. See Yehudah Halper's reference to Anatoli's claim regarding a demonstration of eternal reward and his remark that "it is somewhat ambiguous as to whether there are parts of human beings that are immaterial and so not destructible" (Halper, *Socratic Questions*, 175–76).

80 Averroes characterises one of Ibn Bajja's arguments for the possibility of conjunction as apodeictic: see Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes*, 327. In the first of the *Three Treatises*, Averroes qualifies Alexander's proof as demonstrative (*mofet*; 7). He also attributes this qualification to Themistius's theory (Averroes, *Three Treatises*, 8). It should be noted that the choice of terms was made by Samuel ibn Tibbon, who translated the *Three Treatises* from the Arabic original (which is now lost). According to Ibn Tibbon's vocabulary in his *Peruš ha-Millot ha-Zarot*, ed. Yehudah Even Shmuel (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1987), 63, the term *mofet* denotes an apodeictic demonstration, *burhān*. Ibn Tibbon also says that in several places, he uses the term *mofet* in an extended sense, which includes *re'ayah*, a dialectic proof of a lower scientific value. He also says that in his earlier works, he sometimes inverted the terms, using *mofet* for a dialectic proof and *re'ayah*

If there exists a part or a disposition within man's soul that does not require the *crooked*—that is, sub-lunar matter—it has not been proven whether this part can become eternal. It is because this has not been made clear to this sage [Solomon] by philosophical method that he will express himself as someone with doubt regarding the soul's immortality (according to one interpretation). He has doubt as to whether it contains any part that can *rise above*, which is possible only if it is not made from the *crooked*, and is not in need of the *crooked* for its generation.⁸¹

In fact, Ibn Tibbon casts doubt on this solution for two reasons. He questions the assumption that there is a part of man that is not linked to matter, as well as the possibility that man can achieve the perfection of the soul that will earn him immortality, as he says: "They [the philosophers] doubt the soul of man can *rise*, because they doubt man can possibly perfect his soul, such that it conjoin with the agent intellect."⁸² Since "it has not been proven" that there is a non-material part of man's soul, nor can it be established with certainty that man can attain the level of knowledge that would earn him immortality: scientific demonstration can prove the demise of the material only. It cannot provide the necessary argument that confirms apodeictically (*burhān*), beyond doubt, man's ability to attain the immaterial and thus live to eternity.

As the opposite of the demonstration that everything *under the sun* is vanity, the claim that what is *above the sun* is not—might have qualified as a dialectic proof.⁸³ Equally so, the fact that the premise that there might be a part of the soul that is not linked to matter is based on the opinion of the majority of the philosophers⁸⁴ qualifies it as dialectic reasoning. It could have sustained a dialectic proof had Ibn Tibbon not invalidated the premise by saying that

for a demonstrative proof, but that he later corrected them. Although *Peruš Qohelet* was, by all evidence, written after Ibn Tibbon's lexicographical *Peruš ha-Millot ha-Zarot* (see PQ §§91, 277; Fraenkel, *From Maimonides to Samuel ibn Tibbon*, 108–24, and Kneller-Rowe, Samuel ibn Tibbon's *Ma'amar Yiqqawu ha-Mayim*, introduction, section 3.2), and it is not clear when the *Three Treatises* were translated, since he claims that the above-mentioned proof has not been scientifically verified, one must understand the term *mofet* adjoined to Alexander and Themistius's arguments in an inclusive sense, which comprises the demonstrative and dialectical degrees of verification.

81 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §208.

82 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §475.

83 See Averroes's short commentary on the *Topica*, in Averroes, *Three Short Commentaries on Aristotle's "Topics," "Rhetoric," and "Poetics,"* ed. and trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1977), 32 (§13f).

84 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §211.

neither the existence of “a part or a disposition within man’s soul that does not require the crooked” nor “that this part can become eternal” has been proven.⁸⁵

This conclusion joins the passage cited above, saying:

In no way did Qohelet deny *profit* for anyone reaching this perfection, that is for him whose soul conjoins with the separate intellect. In fact Solomon said nothing at all—affirmative or negative—about he who labors “above the sun.” [...] Nor should you understand from this Sage’s dictum that he affirmed, in any manner, *profit* for the *man* in so far as he labors *above the sun*.⁸⁶

Towards the end of the discussion, Ibn Tibbon briefly advances another logical option to counter the argument that the soul is engendered and therefore cannot become eternal.⁸⁷ According to this suggestion, it would be possible for something generated to be incorruptible *a parte poste*.⁸⁸ This option can perhaps be read into Aristotle’s *De an.* 1.4.408b18–19 and is suggested by Maimonides in *Guide* 2:27–28 in his debate on creation versus eternity, the implication being that as in the context of cosmogony—where according to most, the world was created, but is indestructible—this possibility may also apply to the dilemma of the soul, which, although created with the body, may attain immortality.⁸⁹

Ibn Tibbon’s confrontation with the philosophical arguments against conjunction and immortality is relatively meagre and inconclusive. It confirms the claim against perdurance in the sub-lunar realm and leaves the question

85 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §212.

86 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §143.

87 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §210.

88 See Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§384–85.

89 In the second of the *Three Treatises* (13), Averroes accepts the possibility that the material intellect is engendered with the body. Nevertheless, conjunction is attained through the mixing of the material with the agent intellect. This solution, like many others, is not mentioned in Ibn Tibbon’s commentary. Against this, in PQ §242, Ibn Tibbon mentions the possibility of divine help assisting a person who cannot reach perfection through wisdom alone. This is modelled on Exod 33:22–23, where God tells Moses: “I will cover thee with my hand while I pass, I will take away my hand, and thou shall see my back.” This option is mentioned in connection with the limited nature of man’s intellect in his quest for metaphysical knowledge. In PQ §§268, 326, 328, and 613, Ibn Tibbon mentions the movements of the spheres that endow some men with greater aptitudes for perfection. However, this notion of help from without as a means of overcoming intellectual or ontological limitations is not mentioned in connection with the debate on conjunction and immortality. In MYH §§242–43, by comparison, conjunction is admitted without scepticism. The perfection of the intellect with the help of the agent intellect is described as the ultimate providence on humans.

of the reward in the hereafter without a resolute conclusion, either demonstrative or dialectic. The issue of political happiness as man's primary goal is perhaps addressed in the following chapters, but nowhere is there mention of Alfarabi's stance on this issue, or any other philosopher for that matter.

As we see, the theoretical investigation did not resolve the dilemma, leaving the question of man's ultimate felicity without a scientifically conclusive *dénouement*.

4.2 *The Inductive Search*

The way of scientific demonstration, as we have seen, did not yield an incontrovertible conclusion. In his exegesis of the verse "All this I have tried by wisdom. I said: I will get wisdom, but it is far from me" (Qoh 7:23), Ibn Tibbon openly admits: "Although he [Solomon] mentions only *wisdom*, it is true also with *knowledge* and *righteousness*," meaning that he tried to know "all related things as well by a demonstration of cause. That is, I will come to know the proximate and remote causes of everything in existence. *But it is far from me.*"⁹⁰

Having attempted to establish a "demonstration of cause" or a deductive syllogism based on causal premises, "of which" he tells us that "he had already despaired,"⁹¹ Solomon, says Ibn Tibbon, turns *en parallel* to a dialectical method.⁹² He sets out on an empirical investigation, using *havel havalim* as the guiding paradigm, in order to scrutinise human life in all its aspects, the purpose of the empirical investigation being to confirm (or infirm) through induction, based on personal experience, that everything material is vain and corrupt, and try, perhaps, to find arguments in support of the possibility of conjunction.⁹³

Within this endeavour, the author describes the futility of wealth, labour, and power. Surprisingly, perhaps, he includes wisdom and the human intellect among the subjects investigated and marked as *havel havalim*. Albeit admitting the superiority of wisdom—for it contains the knowledge of all that exists and, like light, makes the world accessible to man⁹⁴—and although he concedes,

90 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §606. This statement is followed by Ibn Tibbon's questioning of whether the term "far" is in the absolute, meaning that it is impossible for any man to grasp the knowledge of the causes, or whether "it is far off and difficult but not impossible" for the select few. See also Ibn Tibbon, PQ §607.

91 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §620.

92 See also Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§608, 617.

93 See Ibn Tibbon, PQ §101.

94 See Ibn Tibbon, PQ §245: "Light, by its nature, makes all bodies capable of being seen, but only within a certain distance. [...] This deficiency exists not in light itself but in those who receive it. That is, it results from the limitations of the visual organs, which experience fatigue when trying to apprehend any distant thing as it really is. All of this obtains with respect to wisdom as well." For the simile of light, see *De an.* 3.5.430a14–17.

like Maimonides, that knowledge of the divine and the supernal beings is the only avenue to conjunction with the deity,⁹⁵ he classifies wisdom among the futilities.

To the unasked question of how is it that Solomon puts wisdom and ignorance in the same category (Qoh 2:3), Ibn Tibbon answers:

This is certainly something one should inquire into and carefully consider: namely, how a sage such as Solomon could have considered wisdom and ignorance together in the same scale. The reason he gives for this is: *For what is the man that he comes [after the king] [Qoh 2:12].* That is, if man could apprehend that which was already made, I would not doubt in any way that *laying hold* of wisdom is better. But since man cannot apprehend this, perhaps *ignorance* is better *to lay hold of*.⁹⁶

What Ibn Tibbon is saying is that since the human intellect cannot attain the ultimate knowledge, the knowledge of the king and his governance of this world, intellection is lacking. It is therefore subject to corruption and is counted among the perishable qualities that do not lead man to immortality.⁹⁷

For more examples, see Avicenna, "On the Soul," in *The Salvation*, Natural Science, treatise 6, Hebrew translation in *Anthology of the Writings of Avicenna* [Hebrew], ed. Steven Harvey (Tel Aviv: The Haim Rubin Tel Aviv University Press, 2009) 172–73; Averroes, *Three Treatises*, 1; Averroes, *Long Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. Charles Genequand (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 410–11; Averroes, *Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction*, 43 (Heb. text); Alexander Altman, "Ibn Bajja on Man's Ultimate Felicity," in Altmann, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 84–88; Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes*, 14, 19–23, 50–51, 92–93, 212, 316–18.

95 See Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§435, 673–79, 682–85, and 696.

96 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §237.

97 What is implied here as well as in other passages is that partial intellection is as good as none, for it does not earn man perdurance. See Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§212, 224, 345, 348–50 and n. 262–63, §§413, 434, 464, 496, 550–52, and 749. The question as to whether intellection that has not attained demonstrative knowledge of metaphysics based on causal premises can lead man to conjunction with the active intellect and to immortality—and in particular Maimonides's stance on this question—was a matter of debate in the Middle Ages and still is among contemporary scholars. Against Pines's later position, which denies man the possibility of cognising metaphysical existents altogether (cf. his article "The Limitations of Human Knowledge"), see discussion of this question in Davidson, *Maimonides the Rationalist*, 201–11; Charles H. Manekin, "Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism: The Case of Maimonides," in Haliva, *Scepticism and Anti Scepticism in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Thought*, 86–105, esp. 98; Josef Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide* [Hebrew], trans. Yoram Navon (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2017), 14–17, 263–76. For Gersonides's discussion of perdurance of the intellect and his answer to this question, see

The intellect's incapacity to attain perfection, it is argued throughout the book, is due to its connection to matter. This is the core argument in the debate with Alfarabi's criticism and is mentioned in several other contexts. In the continuation of his commentary on Eccl 2:12, for example, Ibn Tibbon says:⁹⁸

For what is the man that he comes after the king. [...] Because his intellect is intellect in matter⁹⁹ [...]. Matter separates him from gaining knowledge of many things that exist in the world, especially what was at the beginning of nature. [...] If the human intellect could apprehend everything, then the wisdom of man indubitably would be perfect, and he would be perfect.¹⁰⁰

The woman, as a metaphor for matter,¹⁰¹ Qohelet tells us, is responsible for the demise of the soul and its incapacity to rise *above the sun*: "I find bitterness

Sara Klein-Braslavy, *Gersonides' Interpretation of the Stories of the Creation of Man and the Garden of Eden* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2015), 325–30.

98 For the effect of matter on the intellect, see Stern, *The Matter and Form*, 107, 114–19.

99 As in Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§241 and 245, where he explains: "But because man's intellect is intellect in matter, it suffers from fatigue, which prevents it from apprehending some things." See also Maimonides, *Eight Chapters*, in Maimonides, *Haqdamot ha-Rambam la-Mišnah*, ed. Isaac Sheilat (Jerusalem: Sheilat, Ma'aleh Adumim Publishers, 1996), chapter 7 (p. 246); *Guide* 3:9 (Pines, 2:436–37), and Manekin, "Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism," 97–98.

100 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §235. For the limitation of knowledge due to the connection to matter, see also Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§75, 241, 245, 334–37, 353, 617, 640, and 675. Man's limited cognitive capacity is also discussed in §§237–38, 589, 653–54, and 664.

101 Note that Ibn Tibbon follows Maimonides's symbolism of matter as female or woman rather than Plato's "receptacle" or "mother." As James T. Robinson suggests, Maimonides based this on Alfarabi in his summary of the *Sophistical Refutations*. See Robinson, "Some Remarks on the Source of Maimonides' Plato in *Guide of the Perplexed* 1.17," *Zutot* 3 (2003): 49–57. For the woman as the carrier of the material component of the human being against the male as the carrier of the formal aspect of mankind, see *Gen. an.* 1.20.729a5–10. Aristotle's position was the standard view of women in the Middle Ages. For women as a metaphor for matter, whether matter that leads man to perdition or matter that allows man to reach perfection, see also *Guide*, introduction (Pines, 1:13), 1:17 (Pines, 1:43), 3:8 (Pines, 2:431); Sara Klein-Braslavy, *Maimonides' Interpretation of the Adam Stories in Genesis: A Study of Maimonides' Anthropology* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Re'uven Mass, 1987), 198–208; Abraham Melamed, "Maimonides on Women: Formless Matter or Potential Prophet?", in *Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism*, ed. Alfred L. Ivry, Elliot R. Wolfson, and Allen Arkush (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), 99–134, esp. 100 and 123 nn. 6–7; Menachem Kellner, "Philosophical Woman Hatred in the Middle Ages: Gersonides versus Maimonides" [Hebrew], in *Me-Romi le-Yerušalayim, Sefer Zikaron le-Yosef-Barukh Sarmoneta*, ed. Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998), 113–28, esp. 121.

of death with the woman" (Qoh 7:26). And Ibn Tibbon explains: What is more bitter than death? It is the death of the soul,¹⁰² for she, the woman, prevents him from eating from the "tree of life,"¹⁰³ the life of the hereafter.¹⁰⁴ Matter, personified by the crooked woman, is the cause of man's inability to attain perfect knowledge and bearing.

This limitation, Ibn Tibbon says, extends beyond the incapacity to attain knowledge of the metaphysical beings. Not only can man not grasp the king and His angels, but he also cannot "see the back," which in Maimonidean terminology refers to the world that emanates from Him¹⁰⁵ and its working: "For man does not have the power to grasp this type of thing according to its true reality [...] [namely,] to apprehend the *works* let alone their agents."¹⁰⁶

To the limitation of man's intellectual capacity due to his link to the material, Qohelet adds the distance of the subject matter. According to Ibn Tibbon, the verse "For God is in the heavens and you are on earth" (Qoh 5:1) stresses the physical remoteness:¹⁰⁷

You can grasp divine matters only through knowledge of the powers of the heavens; but you are far from knowing them, because you are on the earth and therefore very far from them. It is sufficient for you to know what is in your own realm. This is why you ought to *make your words few* in divine matters.¹⁰⁸

According to Qoh 7:24, the remoteness is connected both to the distance and the depth of the subject matter, as it says: "Far off and exceeding deep, who can find it."¹⁰⁹

102 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §609.

103 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§610–11.

104 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §7. Cf. also Ibn Tibbon, PQ §74. In other passages, Ibn Tibbon mentions the possibility of finding a "woman of valor who desires and follows her husband," as in the "woman of valour" mentioned in Proverbs 31, or a woman "he can rule over with reason": see PQ §§44, 80, 364–68, 462, 612, 616, 625, and 631–32. Ibn Tibbon's (relatively) positive allusions to the woman occupy little space in comparison to his discussion of the woman being inherently linked to crookedness.

105 See Maimonides, *Guide* 1:38.

106 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §235.

107 Human cognition is restricted here, according to Ibn Tibbon, to deductions made from sense perception: "The only thing human wisdom can do is arrive at universal concepts by abstracting them from things or the accidents that inhere in things perceived by the senses" (Ibn Tibbon, PQ §235).

108 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §514.

109 See Ibn Tibbon, PQ §607. On the meaning of "far" as remoteness in distance, and therefore unknowable or remote because of rank, see Manekin, "Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism," 90–91.

Alongside the various explanations provided for the intellect's demise, Ibn Tibbon adds the fact that almost all facets of terrestrial life are governed by the celestial spheres and are, to a large extent, beyond man's control. For man's disposition, by which he gains knowledge, as well as other aspects of his life, depends on the motion of the heavens.¹¹⁰

Whether the limitedness is related to matter, to the unknowability of the subjects investigated, or to the motions of the heavens, since man cannot apprehend anything above the sub-lunar realm (physically or ontologically), Ibn Tibbon concludes: "Such a perfection, that is, a perfection that can protect him against destruction is not possible."¹¹¹ It should be noted that here too, as in the question of immortality, after passages that express doubt and scepticism about the possibility of intellection, Ibn Tibbon offers alternative readings whereby a few select men might attain perfect knowledge of the supernal realm.¹¹²

The same hesitant conclusion emerges from this empirical search; either everything under the sun is vanity, and worse, everything pertaining to man, including his intellect, is *under the sun* and therefore *havel havalim*, or there is hope that some individuals will transcend material limitations and reach perfection.

4.3 *The Method of Induction and Further Investigation*

Having given up hope of providing a causal demonstration of the ultimate reward for a person who labours *above the sun*, Solomon, as we saw, turned to empirical investigation, to an inductive search, which he referred to as reckoning (*hešbon*). While by "wisdom" Solomon meant "knowledge of the cause, for

110 On natural causality, see Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§149, 158, 252–54, 267–68, 273, 275–303, 323, 332, 384, 613–14, 640, 642, 672, and 748. For natural causality and its link to matter, see also Maimonides, *Guide* 3:12. In other passages, Ibn Tibbon mentions that at times the heavens may help the righteous to reach perfection (PQ §55). The extent of astrological determinism in his outlook is not clear. It is certainly prevalent on the material level, meaning that all occurrences that befall man *under the sun* are determined by the heavens. As to the question of man's freedom over his will and actions, here too, there are contradicting statements. An assessment of the extent of the impact of the heavens in Samuel ibn Tibbon's understanding is beyond the scope of this paper.

111 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §252. As mentioned above (note 25), according to Ibn Tibbon, even Solomon himself, the wisest of all men, could not escape "the accident of the fool" (PQ §253). See also PQ §455, where Solomon pleads that he should be among the saved few.

112 See, for example, his interpretation of the verse "All this have I tried by wisdom. I said: I will get wisdom, but it is far from me" (Qoh 7:23): "It is possible that with *far* he means: it is impossible for any man, by means of wisdom, to grasp knowledge of the cause of everything that exists in wisdom, [...] or, he means: it is far off and difficult—but not impossible—to apprehend" (Ibn Tibbon, PQ §606). For the possibility of man mastering matter and eating from the "tree of life," see also §§41, 44, 47, 51, 209, 352, 364, 373, 427, 440, 455, 460, 462, 542, 552, 612, 625, 631–34, 685, and 707.

this is true wisdom,” Ibn Tibbon says that by “reckoning, he means: demonstration through induction, which is a method of *reckoning* and counting. Such an investigation examines the first part and sets it aside, then the second, the third, and so on, as if counting them all.”¹¹³ Induction, according to Ibn Tibbon, is easier to understand on the one hand, and at the same time, in the present quest, even a demonstrative syllogism would require an inductive investigation, since it is based on sense perception.¹¹⁴ “This [type of induction],” he adds, “is used in many fields of science, for not all things can be proved through what exists above.”¹¹⁵

In so many cases, Ibn Tibbon says, it is not possible to arrive at universally valid conclusions through causal premises. This is particularly common when the objective of the investigation rests on premises obtained through experience. Since the objective of the empirical search was to examine the status of every being under the sun in order to establish whether or not all is vanity, the main part of the book is devoted to a systematic investigation of terrestrial existence through inductive syllogism (*heqeš ha-hippuši*):

He also identifies the method of instruction he will use in order to establish this universal premise [*hakol havel*], saying he will prove it by inductive syllogism. That is, he will examine the parts of the universal of which he posits *vanity*. After examining them and finding that *vanity* exists in all of them [...] he can establish the proposition that *all is vanity*. In this book, he will also prove this premise using a certain rather than an inductive syllogism. [...] For the most part, however, his proof relies on the method of induction.¹¹⁶

Through an inductive syllogism, it can be shown that if every individual (the *minor terms*) belonging to the category of the human species (*middle term*) is vanity (the *major term*), then it can be posited that *all* (humans) are vanity and therefore subject to corruption.¹¹⁷

113 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §608.

114 See Ibn Tibbon, PQ §101.

115 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §93 (with minor alterations).

116 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§100–101.

117 Induction is dealt with in Aristotle's *Top.* A.12105a10–20; *An. pr.* 2.23.68b7–36; *An. post.* 2.4.91a14–25; Alfarabi, *Alfarabi's Book of Dialectic (Kitāb al-Jadal)*, trans. David M. DiPasquale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 30.9 (p. 19), 120–27 (pp. 105–10); Averroes, short commentary on Aristotle's *Topica*, in Averroes, *Three Short Commentaries*, 6–11, 48–51. For a survey and analysis of induction in Aristotle, Alfarabi, and Averroes, see Yehuda Halper's paper delivered at the 26th Annual STEPМ Colloquium at Bar-Ilan University, 4–6 April 2022. The *heqeš ha-hippuši* is also mentioned in chapter 8 of

Contrary to the certain syllogism (*heqesh ha-amiti*), which deduces the conclusion from the universal or explicative middle term, an inductive syllogism proves the existence of the major term in the middle term through the minor term: "Many things, especially things with premises based on sense knowledge, can only be proved through what exists below them, [...]. That is, the universal is proved through its parts."¹¹⁸

The attempt to arrive at a universal conclusion on the basis of the examination of the particulars, Ibn Tibbon admits, cannot attain the degree of certitude that is grounded on causal premises "when we know the cause on account of which a thing is" (*An. post.* 1.2.71b). This type of demonstration, called a "demonstration of existence" (*mofet meš'ut*), is of a lesser scientific value than a demonstration of cause (*mofet sibbah*) or a demonstration of existence and cause, for it only proves the existence, not the cause.

Moreover, when the inductive syllogism is based on the totality of the parts of the whole, which is conceivable when the parts themselves are universals or eternal, its truth value is almost that of the certain syllogism.¹¹⁹ In most cases, however, as in medicine, the conclusion is drawn on the basis of a limited number of individuals and on the assumption that the attribution one has found to belong to the parts that have been investigated is present in all

Maimonides's *Treatise on Logic* [Hebrew], trans. Moshe ibn Tibbon, ed. Hayim Yehudah Roth and David Zvi Bennet (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1965), 52–53. See also Shalom Rosenberg, "Logic and Ontology in the Jewish Philosophy in the 14th Century" [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1974), 213.

118 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §93 ("This is contrary to the certain syllogism"). See Ibn Tibbon, PQ §92. Cf. Aristotle, *Top.* 1.12.105a13–16 (Aristotle, *The Complete Works: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984], 1:175): "Induction is a passage from particulars to universals, e.g. the argument that supposing the skilled pilot is the most effective, and likewise the skilled charioteer, then in general the skilled man is the best at his particular task." On the deductive and inductive syllogism, see also Joep Lameer, *Al-Fārābī and Aristotelian Syllogistics: Greek Theory and Islamic Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 41–63, 133–75.

119 In MYH, Ibn Tibbon says very little about the method of attaining certainty. In one passage, however, he might be alluding to the *heqesh ha-hippušit*, the inductive syllogism, and the *heqesh ha-amiti*, the deductive syllogism, when he says, in connection with Jacob's vision of angels ascending and descending the ladder, that the road to knowledge is not a horizontal path (referring, perhaps, to an inductive search), but a vertical trajectory, which aims at attaining knowledge of reality through its causes: "And he announced that that way is not a paved road on land, neither in the length of it nor in the breadth of it. But it is a way of escalation of the ladder, its feet entrenched in the land, and its top attaining the heavens" (Ibn Tibbon, MYH §342) (my translation from my edition of MYH). Reference to induction and deduction can also be found in MYH §§222–24, which describes the different literary formats of the Merkabah visions.

the parts of the whole.¹²⁰ “That is not perfect,” says Ibn Tibbon, “but it is not so very defective.”¹²¹

While he grants that an inductive syllogism that is not based on the totality of the parts of the whole is not valueless, Ibn Tibbon stresses that his search is not based on one, two, or a few more investigated subjects. Had he found one exception that would escape the attribute of vanity, he would have considered the induction faulty and the conclusion defective. Had he found one woman who transcends the bitterness of death, he would have withdrawn his negative appraisal of woman as being inherently linked to privation:

I examined the women *one by one*, by inductive demonstration [...]. That is, I searched her so carefully that I might reach the final conclusion possible by this method, so that I could see also if I could find a habitus—the privation of which is *bitterness of death*—in any *one* of them. If I could find this [habitus] existing in even one, I would know that *bitterness of death* does not exist with every woman. [...] If I do not find such a habitus to exist in any of them, not finding it would serve for me as proof of its privation.¹²²

Although he claims that a woman of valour does exist in theory,¹²³ the results of his search, he says, proved to him that “with every [woman counted] there is bitterness of death,” referring to all that is linked to matter, which is crooked and perishable.¹²⁴

On the basis of the same inductive method, Ibn Tibbon makes a similar statement concerning the fate of the righteous, saying that “had he seen that some [righteous men] are saved from *vanity*, he would remain silent or

120 And since the human being is the most accomplished being under the sun, the conclusion of his vanity pertains to all existents. See Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§88, 128–30, and 203.

121 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §95. In his short commentary on Aristotle's *Topica*, 50, Averroes seems to support the position that claims that in the case of induction “even if all the particulars are exhausted [...] [it] does not by itself and primarily set forth the essentially necessary predicate,” but, based on the assertion that “the lesser follows the greater,” he says that since induction is used only “for guiding [towards certainty] [...] we do not require that all of the particulars be scrutinized; rather, it is sufficient to scrutinize some.” In the following paragraph, however, Ibn Tibbon qualifies, perhaps critically, a defective syllogism as one that affirms a universal postulate upon examination of only several parts of the universal, with no certainty that it is present in the totality (Ibn Tibbon, PQ §96).

122 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §619.

123 See above, note 101.

124 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §617.

say that this is the final aim for some."¹²⁵ Here too, despite repeated suggestions that select individuals may attain perfection, an inductive search, he claims, did not support that possibility. Based on personal experience, he has not witnessed any righteous person saved from vanity.

Ibn Tibbon's search does not end here. Having proved through a demonstrative syllogism (partially based on Alfarabi's argument) that all material existents are crooked and perishable, and having reconfirmed this through meticulous, albeit imperfect, induction, Solomon, Ibn Tibbon says, attempts to further his inquiry. He sets out to understand the essence of matter and evil, its cause and purpose; to know whether "bitterness of death" is inherently and necessarily linked to matter, and in what way it is the source of all evil.¹²⁶ An explicative syllogism that reasons from the essence of matter, he hoped, might provide an answer. Thus, we are told:

He intends to investigate, search out, and seek *wisdom and reckoning, to know wickedness of folly* [Qoh 7:25]. [...] It is as if he says: my intention in seeking *wisdom and reckoning is to know wickedness of folly*, that is, to know their quiddity, the true reality of their existence, what they exist in, the cause of their existence insofar as they exist, even though they are evil and the cause of all evil—that is, why they exist at all.¹²⁷

In the following verses,¹²⁸ it seems that Ibn Tibbon found only partial responses to his quest, as he continues:

Having *found* by induction *bitterness of death* with the woman, I sought further knowledge of its cause. That is, I sought to know whether *bitterness of death with the woman* is necessary, according to her nature: whether or not it is possible she should exist without it. His answer: [*But a woman among all those*] *have I not found*. That is, I have not found any [woman] to exist without it. In all this, his purpose is to *find out* whether *bitterness of death*—that is, the *crookedness* and privation inhering in the

¹²⁵ Ibn Tibbon, PQ §653. See also PQ §87: "And he repeats *vanity of vanities* a second time so that you won't think that it is said of three or four things only. This is not how it is. Instead, he says it of everything he has examined inductively. And as a result of the thoroughness of his inductive examination of existing things, by which he found that every [individual existence he examined] is *vanity*, he can posit that this is also the case with all of them."

¹²⁶ Ibn Tibbon, PQ §608.

¹²⁷ Ibn Tibbon, PQ §608.

¹²⁸ See Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§606–34. Contradictions between passages, even when following one another, are frequent in Ibn Tibbon's exegesis.

woman—exists in her necessarily, without ever being separated from her. This is made clear in Chapters 8 and 10 of part III of the Noble Treatise.¹²⁹

The allusion to *Guide* 3:8 and 3:10 suggests a causal explanation for the link between matter and evil. Ibn Tibbon refers the reader to Maimonides's description of the essence of matter as privation, which is in a permanent state of desire to conjoin with a form, relinquish it, and conjoin with another. As such, says Maimonides: "It does not cease to move with a view to putting off that form that actually is in it and to obtaining another form. [...] It has then become clear that all passing away and deficiency are due solely to matter."¹³⁰ Aside from being the cause of human finitude, he continues, "all man's acts of disobedience and sin, [...] his eating and drinking and copulation and his passionate desire for these things, as well as his anger and all bad habits found in him, are all consequent upon his matter."¹³¹

Ibn Tibbon's position corresponds to that of Maimonides; namely, that the three forms of evil that are responsible for man's downfall¹³² are linked to the woman, to matter. This is the case whether it is natural disasters over which man has no control, as he says, "This is because he [man] is created from sublunar matter which is *deficient* and *crooked* [...] that he is necessarily a target for the arrows of the 'times' and other accidents,"¹³³ or whether it concerns the two other forms of evil, which man brings upon himself or upon his fellow man in his pursuit of physical pleasures, subordinating himself to matter, as we read:

This is also true of the other two species of evil mentioned in chapter 12: those that result from people's affliction of one another, and those that result from man's affliction of himself. These are not related to first matter in any necessary way. But the choices man makes are nevertheless

129 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §618. Here, Samuel ibn Tibbon claims that the causal demonstration reconfirmed the necessary link between crookedness and matter. This conclusion is also repeated in Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§610, 619, 622, and 626–27.

130 *Guide* 3:8 (Pines, 2:431). See also Josef Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides' Guide* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 98, 115–17, and 357.

131 Stern, *The Matter and Form*, 46, 97–99, 114–77, 356–58, 369, and 387–90. On matter as cause of all suffering, see also Robert Eisen, "Samuel ibn Tibbon on the Book of Job," *AJS Review* 24 (1999): 280–87.

132 He is referring to Maimonides's *Guide* 3:12. See, for example, Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§613–14, 633, and 640.

133 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §640. The disasters that befall man from natural causes are due to his being created from the deficient and crooked matter, but are not within his control (Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§613, 633, 640, and 643).

consequent upon matter. For were he perfect with respect to his form (in accordance with the perfection intended by it), he would not choose to injure his fellow man, or do anything that would injure himself. Instead, it is the woman who leads him astray and to sin.¹³⁴

Matter is therefore inherently connected to evil, for it is the cause, directly and indirectly, of all forms of corruption that befall man. This understanding reinforces the conclusion he had come to earlier, albeit from another perspective; namely, that vanity, and finitude are a necessary corollary of life *under the sun*.

Ibn Tibbon's search for an explicative demonstration is also referenced in the term "found" (*mešī'ah*), concerning which he says: "Wherever an expression is used in this book that means to find (*mešī'ah*), it refers to knowledge of the cause."¹³⁵ If we follow this semantic key and read the terms man/woman as metaphors for form and matter into the verse "One man among a thousand I found (*mašati*) but a woman among all those have I not found" (Qoh 7:28), we may understand the verse to convey, in an allegoric garb, that form alone, detached from matter, does not defy understanding, while the essence of matter and its relation to form is beyond human understanding.¹³⁶

So, where does this lead? The inductive syllogism reconfirms the demonstrative proof that whatever is linked to matter is vain and perishable. Towards the end of the discussion, Ibn Tibbon attempted to add a demonstration of cause to the forementioned conclusion, attempting to better understand the linkage between matter and evil. This final investigation convinced him of the necessary relationship between them, leaving almost no escape from the constraints of matter.

Did this deeper understanding of the causal relationship between matter and evil put an end to the ambivalence that accompanied Ibn Tibbon

¹³⁴ Ibn Tibbon, PQ §614. See also §§625, 632–33.

¹³⁵ Ibn Tibbon, PQ §379. Ibn Tibbon repeats this definition of *mešī'ah* in the context of understanding the secrets of the Torah: "Through knowledge of wisdom one can understand the Torah's principles, secrets, and mysteries. One can find the knowledge of holy ones, that is, of what they had concealed and made obscure and profound. This is why he calls it *a find*, as in 'It is exceeding deep, who can *find* it' [Qoh 7:24]" (Ibn Tibbon, PQ §107). See also PQ §§35–36, 617–19, and 754.

¹³⁶ This verse perhaps alludes to the suggestion mentioned earlier that if there is a part of man that is not linked to matter, it can conjoin with the immaterial and earn eternity. As we saw, the question of whether man can dissociate himself and transcend matter remains unresolved. On the unknowability of matter, see Daniel Davies, "Divine Knowledge and Providence in the *Guide of the Perplexed*," in *Interpreting Maimonides: Critical Essays*, ed. Charles H. Manekin, and Daniel Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 154–60.

throughout his work in *Peruš Qohelet*? Alternatively, did Ibn Tibbon finally accept that if everything *under the sun* is inherently linked to evil, labour *above the sun* can lead man to eternity? Does he take the inversion of the proof that all is *havel havalim* to be a valid dialectic proof of the contrary? Can one presume that this is implied?

In fact, Ibn Tibbon addresses this question again in connection with the verse: “For the living know that they shall die, and the dead know not a thing. Neither have they any more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten” (Qoh 9:5). In his exegesis of this verse, he says that although

it is a custom of this sage in this book to mention the accidents attached to one of two contraries, from which one can know the other accident that should be attached to the other contrary. *Living* and *dead* are like two contraries, for habitus and privation are considered contraries in a sense; and it is necessary that the accidents attached to them be like contraries. But the contrary of knowing a privation is not the knowing of habitus.¹³⁷

Here again, knowledge of the finitude of terrestrial life does not inform us about the contrary; the ability to transcend the limits of matter in order to gain eternity in the hereafter.

Did philosophy’s failure to provide a demonstrative proof that eternity of the righteous is impossible convince him of the non-viability of their stance, and therefore of the validity of the traditional position? It is difficult to answer this question with certainty.

From the metaphor of the poor and wise child, which refers to the select few who save their souls,¹³⁸ to passages that incite man to eat and drink for “there is one accident for the righteous and the wicked,”¹³⁹ the pendulum fluctuates from one position to another. Alongside the declaration that “God created man straight”¹⁴⁰ and cautioned him to cling to the tree of life, and, as is known, a

137 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §663.

138 As in Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§500–504 and 678 (but see, for example, PQ §704, where the child represents the evil inclination that rules over the material faculties of the soul). See also PQ §44, where he explicitly says that eating from the “tree of life” is possible and that “it is not necessary that every woman be a sinner and cause of sin.” PQ §612, for example, lauds the man who found a woman who desires and follows him with little coercion, or a woman he can rule over with reason. For more examples, see note 65.

139 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§655–56, and 666.

140 See Qoh 7:29. The term “straight,” it should be noted, stands here in opposition to the “crooked” matter that cannot be mended in Qoh 1:15.

command is given where there is freedom of choice,¹⁴¹ Ibn Tibbon interjects multiple question marks as to whether this is possible. Alongside declarations that freedom of choice is not under astral determinism, Solomon notifies man that “it is possible to miss the mark,”¹⁴² for “*he knows not* what the ‘times’ will originate [...] if he could grasp this, he could, by governance of his intellect, save himself from at least some evil. But *he knows not*, thus his *evil* is *great*.”¹⁴³ Moreover, alongside multiple declarations that accept the possibility that man can attain the highest level of knowledge, Ibn Tibbon says: “Far and exceeding deep what has been, who can find it” (Qoh 7:24). Although according to the text, one righteous man among a thousand could be found, *de facto*, he admits, as we have seen above, that he has not witnessed it.

Near the end of Qohelet, where Ibn Tibbon proposes alternative interpretations of the verse¹⁴⁴ “and the spirit returns to the God who gave it” (Qoh 12:7), as we have seen, he says: “It is possible to maintain that this verse gives decisive evidence supporting one of the views: that [...] he indicates rarity rather than doubt.”¹⁴⁵ Does this sentence tell us that Ibn Tibbon arrived at a solution? Did his doubts concerning conjunction and immortality finally dissipate? It would be tempting to think so if not for his words in the preceding paragraph: “While vanity is known to affect them all, eternal existence is not known to affect even one.”¹⁴⁶

In §475, Ibn Tibbon proposes an interim *resumé*:

Qohelet represents himself as someone who doubts—by way of philosophical investigation—whether the soul of man can *rise above*. That is, he shows that the force of their investigation does not extend beyond this [doubt]. [...] They doubt the soul of man can *rise*, because they doubt man can possibly perfect his soul, such that it conjoin with the agent intellect. That the soul *rises above* depends on this, as we said earlier. Because of this it should not be suggested that “above [*lema’alah*] the sun he has” was posited by Solomon [...]. That is, he did not posit anything with respect to the man concerning what is “above the sun.” All

141 On the issue of freedom of choice and determinism, see, for example, §§276, 279, 284, 323, 329–30, 372–73, 383, 542, 612, 623–29, and 641.

142 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §330. See also PQ §§330 and 345 for the possibility of missing the intended objective.

143 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §642.

144 See above, section 2.

145 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §748.

146 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §747.

he posited there was that the man has *no profit* above all other existents *under the sun*, which is something self-evident.¹⁴⁷

The soul's possibility of rising above is incumbent upon reaching intellectual perfection. Denying this possibility¹⁴⁸ is tantamount to negating the possibility of perdurance, as he says: "Since he [man] cannot apprehend everything [...], such a perfection, that is, a perfection that can protect him against destruction, is not possible."¹⁴⁹ The perfection required here implies that partial intellection will not earn man any measure of conjunction.¹⁵⁰ Within this context, one may perhaps understand the testimony of Solomon—the wisest of all men, as Ibn Tibbon recounts—that he himself had not achieved it.¹⁵¹

5 Conclusion

The greater part of Ecclesiastes exposes the futility of all terrestrial endeavours: everything that is connected to matter is vanity and therefore perishable. Towards the end of the book, Solomon, according to Ibn Tibbon, reinforces this conclusion by demonstrating the necessary link between matter and evil, which is the cause of its demise.

As for the declared purpose of the book, according to Ibn Tibbon, which is to expose the weakness of philosophical demonstrations denying immortality, thus sustaining the tradition of the forefathers, it has been fulfilled with partial success. Qohelet refers very briefly to the philosophers' arguments against perdurance, mainly to Alfarabi's challenge. This confrontation yields demonstrative proof of the finality of matter, thus strengthening the leitmotif of the book that everything *under the sun* is *havel havalim* even further. Solomon, according to Ibn Tibbon, suggests a hypothetical option that would allow for a part of man to survive to eternity. If, he says, there is a part of man that is not linked to or dependent on matter, then that part could conjoin with the active intellect and earn man eternal life. If that were the case, then immortality would be possible, or at least not impossible according to the rules of philosophy. However, he continues, this option remains hypothetical since it is doubtful that a part that is not linked to matter exists, and moreover, the

147 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §475. Ignorance as to man's final fate is also expressed in Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§143, 208, 474, 478, 480, 495, 512–13, 517, 550–52, 584, 606–7, 663, and 745.

148 See, for example, Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§233–50, 334, 512–13, 517, 521, and 606–7.

149 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §252. See also Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§408 and 550.

150 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §252. See above, note 97.

151 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §253. See above, note 26.

possibility that man can attain the level of knowledge that will earn him conjunction has not been confirmed “by philosophical method.”¹⁵²

Having thrown doubt on the theoretical option that might have salvaged the possibility of perdurance, Ibn Tibbon tells us that Solomon made no pronouncements concerning the hereafter, either to confirm or refute that possibility. In several places,¹⁵³ he repeats that no scientifically valid positive or negative inference can be made concerning what is *above the sun*. If no positive inference can be made concerning man's afterlife, then there is also no assurance of reward for the deserving few who labour *above the sun*. This realisation, in my understanding, is at the core of Ibn Tibbon's scepticism, wavering between the conclusion of his rational analysis that doubts or negates immortality and the traditional position that posits it as a tenant of belief.

Finally, in view of the declared intention found in the opening of Qohelet to expose the weakness of philosophical demonstrations denying immortality in order to sustain the tradition of the forefathers, one may question whether the doubts and uncertainties encountered in Ibn Tibbon's exegesis of Ecclesiastes reflect a genuine philosophical scepticism that searches for a demonstrable solution or an attempt to undermine the philosophical arguments to make way for adherence to traditional belief, what Howard Kreisel calls a “fideistic scepticism.”¹⁵⁴ In view of Ibn Tibbon's near disdain for knowledge based on tradition, I opt for “genuine philosophic scepticism.” For knowledge gained through tradition, says Ibn Tibbon, is *sikhlut*,¹⁵⁵ which Robinson translates as “ignorance” and some biblical translators render as “folly.” Ibn Tibbon defines it as “false belief.”¹⁵⁶ Following tradition contains positive aspects on the political level, but they cannot earn man his afterlife,¹⁵⁷ as he says: “Be content with the tradition passed on by the fathers. This is what he calls ‘ignorance,’ as we explained earlier. For a man has no true knowledge of what he receives by

152 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §208.

153 See, for example, Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§208, 475, and 663.

154 See Howard Kreisel, “Between Philosophic Optimism and Fideistic Scepticism: An Overview of Medieval Jewish Philosophy,” in Haliva, *Scepticism and Anti-Scepticism in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Thought*, 7–22. For an example of fideistic scepticism in sixteenth-century Italy, see Veltri, “Principles of Jewish Skeptical Thought,” 19–27. See also Maimonides's rebuttal of the possibility that his stance on the limitation of human knowledge is motivated by fideistic considerations (Maimonides, *Guide* 1:31).

155 See Qoh 2:13, where Solomon lauds wisdom over *sikhlut*.

156 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §246. In his commentary on Qohelet, Obadiah Sforno renders *sikhlut* as “sense perception” (*Miqra'ot Gedolot*, 28). Isaac ibn Latif defines it as “nullity” (*afisut*) (*Miqra'ot Gedolot*, 105) and Rabbi Isaac Arama as “void” (*Miqra'ot Gedolot*, 151).

157 Ibn Tibbon, PQ §349.

way of tradition.”¹⁵⁸ In view of his near disdain for knowledge based on tradition, one may wonder what this says about Ibn Tibbon’s understanding of Solomon’s final call to follow the guidance of the masters, to fear God and keep the Mitzvot.

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¹⁵⁸ Ibn Tibbon, PQ §597. See also Ibn Tibbon, PQ §§225–47 and 657.

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The Forgotten Branch

Mediators of Philosophical Knowledge in Eastern European Jewish Thought

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Abstract

This article addresses a lacuna in the scholarly understanding of Eastern European Jewish thought and its engagement with modern Western philosophy by highlighting the role of translators, popularisers, and Russian philosophers as mediators of philosophical ideas. It puts forth the claim that in order to understand Jewish thinkers' involvement with modern philosophy, one should consider these mediating materials rather than primary sources that were rarely read in Eastern Europe. To illustrate the import of these mediators, this article focuses on two thinkers, Abraham Isaac Kook and Shmuel Alexandrov, and examines an array of sources that moulded their ideas. Among the sources reviewed are Hillel Zeitlin's articles in the Jewish press, Eliezer Yitzhak Sheinbaum's translations and philosophy books, and a range of Russian philosophers. These are only some examples of the ways in which exploring this often-neglected terrain can yield a better understanding of the formation of Eastern European Jewish philosophy, a notion that can be further developed in future studies.

Keywords

Abraham Isaac Kook – Shmuel Alexandrov – mediators – Hillel Zeitlin – East European Jewish philosophy – popularisers – God-Seekers – Vladimir Solovyov – Nikolai Berdyaev

1 Introduction¹

For over a hundred years, scholars have discussed Eastern European Jewish thinkers' resemblance to and possible influence from modern Western philosophy. Ever since 1912, when Aharon Kaminka (1866–1950) compared the ideas of Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935) to those of the Jewish-French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941), scholars have explored this connection in Eastern European Jewish philosophy.² This discussion is particularly vivid where Kook is concerned, including debates discussing which philosophies most important for understanding his thought, whether Western philosophy should be considered more prevalent in his world than Kabbalah, and what theoretical challenges he was addressing.³ Other Eastern European Jewish thinkers who operated in intellectual and social proximity to Kook but who have received considerably less attention are no less interesting from this perspective and offer different versions of the connections between Jewish religious thought and Western philosophy. Even a brief review of this exchange of ideas is far beyond the scope of a single article. Instead, this paper aims to point out a key element in this domain of modern Jewish thought, an element that has yet to receive the scholarly treatment it deserves. This element is the mediator of

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 - 2 “Henri Bergson weiß sicherlich nicht, daß ein frommer Rabbiner in Palästina in hebräischen Essais seiner Philosophie der Intuition sehr nahe gekommen ist” (Aharon Kaminka, *Meine Reise nach Jerusalem: Skizzen aus Aegypten und Palaestina* [Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1913], 36).
 - 3 See, among others, Benjamin Ish-Shalom, *Rav Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook: Between Rationalism and Mysticism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993); Jonathan Garb, “Alien Culture in the Circle of Rabbi Kook,” in *Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought*, ed. Howard Kreisel (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2006), 253–64; Garb, “Rabbi Kook and His Sources from Kabbalistic Historiosophy to National Mysticism,” in *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and the Babi-Baha'i Faiths*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 77–96; Lawrence J. Kaplan, “Rav Kook and the Philosophical Tradition,” in *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and Jewish Spirituality*, ed. Lawrence J. Kaplan and David Shatz (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 41–77; Dov Schwarz, *The Religious Genius in Rabbi Kook's Thought: National Saint?*, trans. Edward Levin (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014); Yehudah Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

philosophical ideas, the vehicle by which these ideas were made available to a Jewish readership in Eastern Europe.

To that end, this article will put forth one main argument and two subsidiary ones. Its main argument is that the right context in which one should read Eastern European Jewish thinkers and their involvement with Western philosophy is not primary materials in languages that thinkers like Kook could not read, but rather the adapted versions of these ideas that had been remodelled by various mediators. Its first subsidiary argument is that those mediating materials and their writers were not passive messengers deprived of agency. As studies regarding the popularisation of natural sciences have shown, knowledge is not simply transmitted and translated in its pure form when it is brought forth to a new audience. Instead, it was often appropriated and reconstituted by popularisers, who refashioned it for their own ends or simply to assist their readers to orient themselves epistemologically.⁴ Consequently, if we wish to reconstruct the course of ideas from Western philosophy to Eastern European Jewish thought, we would do well to study the intellectual world of the mediators who made them available to Hebrew and Yiddish readers.

And thus, we come to this paper's second subsidiary argument: that in order to analyse the philosophy of major Jewish thinkers, we have to examine the writings of lesser-known figures. This is crucial for two reasons. The first is that lesser-known figures served as mediators of philosophical knowledge to the major thinkers in question. Either through their writings or through personal connections, they comprised the major thinkers' intellectual milieu and dramatically affected their ways of interpretation and thinking. The second reason is that lesser-known figures can be used as parallel test cases in which the process of appropriation and refashioning is more explicit, hence providing a point of reference for cases where this same process is harder to track down.

With these goals in mind, I will present two test cases that illustrate different aspects of the problem of mediators of philosophical ideas. The first is the aforementioned Abraham Isaac Kook, perhaps the most discussed Jewish thinker in Eastern Europe from the turn of the twentieth century. Kook's writings bring together a wide array of concepts, traditions, and ideas, and the vast scholarship analysing them exemplifies the need for contextualisation that is embedded in the notion of mediators. However, there are difficulties presented by these writings that do not allow me to rely on them alone in order to

4 See, for example, Marwa S. Elshakry, "Knowledge in Motion: The Cultural Politics of Modern Science Translations in Arabic," *Isis* 99 (2008): 701–30; Roger Cooter and Stephen Pumfrey, "Separate Spheres and Public Places: Reflections on the History of Science Popularization and Science in Popular Culture," *History of Science* 32 (1994): 237–67.

illuminate the role of mediators. As explained below, due to a lack of explicit references, almost every study of the sources that Kook used to formulate his ideas is a conjecture, and this study is no different. Based on biographical studies and a few rare cases where we know which sources Kook used, this study examines what kinds of sources he was most likely to have read at the time and which specific texts from these sources most strongly resemble the ideas that he formulated. After explaining the role of the Jewish press in Kook's intellectual landscape, the second and third parts of this article will analyse the works of two translators and popularisers of philosophical ideas in the Hebrew press. Taking their similar understanding of Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy as its point of departure, this article will claim that Kook's image of Schopenhauer can be traced back to the works of the young Hillel Zeitlin and Eliezer-Yitzhak Sheinbaum and will analyse what can be learned from reading Kook's writings against this background.

However, Kook's writings are too problematic to make the case for the importance of mediators on their own. Their philosophical ambiguity and lack of specific references force scholars to rely on speculation. Apart from leaving the importance of mediators open to debate, it also limits the scope of the enquiry to sources that are more likely to have been used by early twentieth-century Jewish thinkers. Other thinkers provide more elaborate references and thus expand the horizons of possible influences and sources of inspiration. One such thinker is Shmuel Alexandrov (1865–1941), who stands at the centre of the fourth part of this article. Alexandrov's writings point us to a different kind of mediator between German philosophy and Jewish intellectuals: Russian thinkers. Alexandrov was especially interested in the ideas of a specific strand in Russian philosophy, which, because of its neo-Idealist inclination, used a variety of German ideas while interpreting and re-shaping them for its own use. Alexandrov's writings can thus serve as a portal for further research on the formation of modern Jewish thought and the way it integrated different intellectual traditions, including figures such as Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900), Lev Shestov (1866–1938), and others who loom large over early twentieth-century Eastern European Jewish thought.

A fruitful point of reference for the philosophical knowledge of Jewish intellectuals at the time is Menachem Brinker's study of the engagement of prominent early twentieth-century Hebrew writers with Nietzschean ideas.⁵ According to Brinker, those secular writers, who often came from the same traditional background as their religious counterparts, did not necessarily

5 Menachem Brinker, *Modern Hebrew Literature as European Literature* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2016), 134–68.

need to read Nietzsche's original writings in order to discuss his ideas and their confluence with Jewish traditions. Some of them were influenced by popular catchphrases like "the death of God," the "transvaluation of all values," and the *Übermensch*; others received their knowledge by way of the Jewish press and other mediators, while still others studied German and read Nietzsche in the original. Even the writers who read the Saxon philosopher in German continued to read his writings and commentaries on them in other languages, most prominently in Russian.⁶ As Brinker points out, Nietzsche's ideas received a wide range of interpretations and were understood in various frameworks. Thus, exploring the context in which a thinker understood these ideas will go a long way in properly deciphering his writings, as I will argue below.⁷

The Jewish press, the Russian milieu, popularisers and translators, known and obscure figures, explicit and implicit references, and the ways in which ideas and texts were reshaped and rewritten are all crucial components of understanding the multilingual and multidimensional context that gave Eastern European Jewish thought its unique character. In order to do so, we need to change the way we imagine the individual thinkers that comprised this mosaic, from an image of omniscient scholars secluded in their multilingual libraries, articulating Jewish rebuttals to philosophy's eternal questions, to a more realistic image of mortal, limited thinkers who were able to harness different Jewish traditions thanks to decades of religious education, but who lacked the means to decipher a work of modern philosophy in German or French and thus had to rely on and be inspired by journals and popular literature. We should see such scholars as being rooted in the intellectual and political discussions of their time, prone to being influenced not by the original philosophies to which they referred, but by the shape those ideas took in the specific discursive fields to which they were exposed. Let us now begin with how this notion may change the way we read one of the most prominent thinkers of the time: Abraham Isaac Kook.

6 Brinker, *Modern Hebrew Literature*, 137–38.

7 A key feature in the intellectual sphere of the time was Eastern European versions of pessimism and decadence, which gave birth to a new understanding of German thinkers such as Nietzsche and Schopenhauer: see Hamutal Bar-Yosef, *The Russian Context of Hebrew Literature* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute Press, 2020), 33–60. A fruitful methodological point of reference is Carlo Ginzburg's study of the world and ideas of a sixteenth-century miller named Menocchio that includes a detailed analysis of the creative way in which he read and interpreted his sources based on the local culture around him. See Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

2 Abraham Isaac Kook, Hillel Zeitlin, and the Impact of the Jewish Press

A recent study by Yehuda Oren offers a new understanding of Abraham Isaac Kook's epistemology by presenting his writings against the background of the philosophy of Hermann Cohen. To be exact, Oren explores Kook's reaction to a lecture by Cohen that was translated into Hebrew and published in *Ha-Šiloah* in 1904.⁸ By so doing, he illustrates the potential of analysing Kook's ideas using popular contemporary materials, instead of presuming that an Eastern European thinker would have had a broad acquaintance with the writings of Western European thinkers. Oren's enquiry is based on a letter from Kook's son, Ševi Yehuda (1891–1982), who positioned his father's ideas as a response to Cohen's lecture.⁹ In the grand scheme of Kook's writings, this case is very rare, as there is very little other evidence of the philosophical materials he was reading. What we do have are numerous places where he alludes to philosophers and philosophical ideas. Among the ideas he mentions in passing are Spinoza's monism, Schopenhauer's pessimism, and Immanuel Kant's epistemology.¹⁰

These remarks led to elaborate studies discussing Kook's engagement with central themes of modern philosophy.¹¹ Most of these studies are speculative in nature, as they rely on philosophical similarities, based on comparisons between Kook's thought and selected passages from a certain philosopher or summaries of his main ideas, as current scholars understand them. These studies do not reveal what materials supplemented Kook's engagement with the philosophical ideas in question, nor the context in which he read them. However, several recent studies have started to change this picture and to portray Kook's treatment of Western philosophy in the context of the Hebrew

8 Yehuda (Yady) Oren, "Dogmatism, Criticism, Divine Ideals: Rav A.I. Kook's Concept of God in Light of H. Cohen," *Naharaim* 15 (2021): 1–25. I thank Yehuda Oren for sharing with me an early version of the article. See also Yosef Avivi, *Kabbalah of Rabbi A.I. Kook* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2018), 146–48.

9 For more on this letter, see Ish-Shalom, *Rav Avraham Yitzhak Ha-Cohen Kook*, 3–7, 243–44; Dov Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads: A Theological Profile of Religious Zionism* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 98; Jonatan Meir, "Longing of Souls for the Shekina: Relations between Rabbi Kook, Zeitlin and Brenner" [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 19 (2005): 800–803; Avivi, *Kabbalah of Rabbi A.I. Kook*, 146–48.

10 See, for example, Abraham Isaac Kook *Eder ha-Yaqar ve-Iqvey Hašon* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1984), 133–35; Kook, *Iggerot ha-Re'ayah* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1984), 48.

11 For a survey of the literature about Kook's engagement with philosophy, see Naama Bindiger, "Studying the Development of Rabbi Kook's Philosophy: The Current Bibliographic Basis and Overview of the Research" [Hebrew], *Alei Sefer* 30/31 (2021): 197–200.

press and other popular publications. Yehudah Mirsky, for example, has shown that Kook's grappling with Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas was based on the image of Nietzsche portrayed in the Hebrew press and the ways in which Jewish intellectuals used (and misused) his ideas for their own ends.¹² Jonatan Meir similarly stressed the importance of the Hebrew press and the milieu of modern Hebrew literature for the understanding of the intellectual context in which Kook operated.¹³

Taken together, Oren's, Mirsky's, and Meir's studies demonstrate the key role of the Jewish press, as well as that of translators and editors—the mediators who made the philosophy of Cohen, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer accessible to a thinker like Kook and others.¹⁴ These are the first kind of mediators I wish to point out: popularisers, which in our case means people who read philosophy in foreign languages—usually German, French, or Russian—and made this knowledge available to readers in Jewish languages, in our case Hebrew and Yiddish. From just a handful of writers in the mid-nineteenth century, the field had grown to dozens of writers publishing popular philosophical books and articles meant for Hebrew and Yiddish readers in Eastern Europe by the turn of the twentieth century. The rising popularity of the Jewish press and the burgeoning exchange of knowledge led to a growing interest in philosophy among the general public and secular and religious intellectuals alike. Writers such as Shlomo Rubin (1823–1910) and David Frischmann (1859–1922) provided translations of classic philosophical texts, Fabius Mieses (1824–1898) compiled the first of many Hebrew introductions to modern philosophy, journals published discussions of philosophical ideas, and travelling preachers used the names of Aristotle, Spinoza, and Kant to attract audiences to their sermons.¹⁵

12 Mirsky also mentions other thinkers in the same context, including Schelling, Spinoza, and Schopenhauer: see Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical Experience of Modernity: The Making of Rav Kook, 1865–1904* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2021), 91–96, 301–3.

13 Meir, “Longing of Souls for the Shekina.”

14 In so doing, they are developing a notion first presented by Eliezer Goldman; see Goldman, “Rav Kook's Relation to European Thought,” in *The World of Rav Kook's Thought* ed. Benjamin Ish-Shalom and Shalom Rosenberg (New York: Avi Chai, 1991), 139–48; Goldman, “The Structuring of Rabbi Kook's Thought (1906–1909)” [Hebrew], *Bar-Ilan University* 22/23 (1988): 87–120.

15 Simha Kahana, one of the most popular travelling preachers at the turn of the twentieth century, used to namedrop famous philosophers in order to impress his audience and used his reputation as a well-versed intellectual to attack Haskalah and Zionism. See his books *Magen ha-Talmud* (Warsaw, 1901) and *Qol Šimħa* (Warsaw, 1902). On Mieses and his possible influence on Kook's writings, see Goldman, “The Structuring of Rabbi Kook's Thought (1906–1909),” 100–102; Benjamin Ish-Shalom, “R. Kook, Spinoza and Goethe:

These writers and preachers were not neutral messengers. Whether they received their philosophical knowledge from source materials or from secondary sources, they reshaped it for their purposes and their audiences found it tainted with comments and interpretations. Therefore, when a young rabbi like Kook first tackled modern philosophical ideas, he did not obtain that knowledge in its “pure” form (if this ever existed), nor in the way in which these philosophical ideas are commonly understood today. Rather, he found them reshaped and repackaged. Even in the many cases where scholars like Kook enquired further, studied the necessary languages, and read the original materials, the context in which they operated, the questions they asked of the texts, and the answers they came to were a product of the context in which they operated and the modified picture that this context presented. And since, in most cases, their central sphere remained Hebrew or Yiddish intellectual discourses, the limited and fragmented reading of source materials could not have significantly changed that situation.

That is not to say that an original thinker like Kook was not capable of further developing philosophical ideas. However, his point of departure was not Spinoza’s, Kant’s, or Nietzsche’s original writings, but rather the versions he found in the writings of popularisers. Ignoring this chain of transmission and reading Jewish thinkers as though they were referring directly to the original texts and understood them as we do today can be misleading and problematic, as is demonstrated below.

In what follows, I wish to offer other sources that we know were available to Kook in his early years in Jaffa and to use his ideas to demonstrate the benefits such research may yield. To set the stage, let us consider a few excerpts from Rav Kook’s writings that discuss Schopenhauer’s notion of metaphysical voluntarism. These passages articulate one of the many versions of Kook’s all-encompassing metaphysical will, meaning the conception that the thing-in-itself or the essence of everything is will. For Kook, divine will can also be described as reason or spirit. In this assertion, he consolidates Schopenhauer’s voluntarist philosophy with George Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel’s notion of the all-encompassing spiritual intellect that manifests itself throughout history.¹⁶ This is how Kook puts it:

Modern and Traditional Elements in the Thought of R. Kook” [Hebrew], *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 13 (1996): 525–56; Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical Experience of Modernity*, 92.

16 On Kook’s affinity with Hegel’s ideas, see Avinoam Rosenak, “Halakhah, Aggadah and Prophecy in the Concept of the Land of Israel in the Light of Rabbi Kook’s Theory of ‘the Unity of Opposites’” [Hebrew], in *A Hundred Years of Religious Zionism*, ed. Avi Sagi and Dov Schwartz (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2003), 3:261–87.

The unity of spirituality *joins thought and will* within itself. Will is revealed in its true form; only superficially, as it appears to us, does will seem to differ from thought and intellectual conception. *This unification* leads us to the final unity of all being, until material and spiritual reality become values varying only in their outer garb. *Thought, will and all existence are bound together*, and as thought becomes more profound and magnified, will is magnified as well, and the increase of will is the increase of thought, and both are *the increase of material reality*, and the increase of material reality is their magnification.¹⁷

Making the case for an all-unity that marks his theosophy, Kook claims that matter, spirit, and will are not conflicting forces of reality, nor contradictory perspectives of understanding it. Rather, they are different ways of describing one unity, different manifestations of one reality. When this unity is magnified, all aspects of it are magnified with it, and when it fails, all aspects of creation fail with it. In another paragraph, Kook repeats this claim while explicitly addressing Schopenhauer's philosophy:

Schopenhauer's view of will is not far wrong in and of itself, but his misjudgment is that instead of understanding will as one of the guises of reality, the philosopher mistakes it for all of reality and its very cause. This is a fallacy, based on the contention that "we did not see" is no proof, whereas all those with spiritual awareness do see will, not as blind and deaf, but as full of wisdom and understanding. The deafness and dumbness of will are the manifestation of the lowest order of creative force in the practical dimension, and there is a higher purpose in leaving it in such a state of dullness, just as there is a purpose in denying animals human intelligence. And in the beginning will is all, containing all, and gradually twisting and turning, diminishing until it is reduced to its fundamental point and substance, solitary will with no other positive attribute.¹⁸

Schopenhauer's mistake, claimed Kook, was that instead of a multifaced unity of will, matter, and spirit, he saw only will and perceived it not as *one* of reality's aspects, but as its *only* aspect. This is because he found Schopenhauer's

17 Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot ha-Qodeš*, 2:430, trans. Ora Wiskind-Elper in Benjamin Ish-Shalom, *Rav Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook: Between Rationalism and Mysticism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), 65 (emphasis in original).

18 Abraham Isaac Kook, *Šemonah Qevašim*, 1:435 (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 2020), trans. Ora Wiskind-Elper in Ish-Shalom, *Rav Kook*, 69.

all-encompassing will to be in a degraded form as a “blind will,” meaning lacking any purpose or reason. This is a key aspect of Schopenhauer’s pessimism according to Kook: the metaphysical will has no purpose or telos. It drives humanity and the natural world to nowhere, creating suffering as it goes. Kook agrees with Schopenhauer that there is one all-encompassing will flowing through men and nature, but claims that this will can appear in various forms. The one that Schopenhauer is describing is only the most degraded form of the metaphysical will, and even this degeneration has a divine purpose. Despite all the vitality that Schopenhauer had infused into nature, Kook claimed it was not enough. The metaphysical will itself rises and falls and its redemption is dependent on the Jewish people and its formation as a modern nation. This bold claim stands at the centre of a third paragraph by Kook:

The worlds fell with the fall of the Will, man fell in the depth of sin, his will was diminished and dirtied, all went dark, and small, pathetic and gloomy. [...] And the blighted will, to its light will be returned, when strongly expressed in the will of the nation. His nation, *the great nation whose God is near it* [Deuteronomy 4:7] [...] when it takes hold of selfhood, will gather within it the entire soul of man [...] It will banish the evil, mendacity, filth, fears, shame, death itself, from the world [...] And this divine courage *lo is standing just behind our walls, the voice of my beloved, here he comes, skipping on the mountains, capering on the hills* [Song of Songs 2:9, 2:8].¹⁹

It is not the purpose of this article to delve into philosophical assertions. These three paragraphs and Kook’s criticism of Schopenhauer were thoroughly studied by others, as was Kook’s notion of the divine will and its place in his theology.²⁰ It is also not the aim of this article to enquire into which parts of Schopenhauer’s writings Kook had in mind when he wrote these passages, as he was probably not familiar with the original texts. He was, however, very well read as far as Hebrew literature was concerned, as is obvious from the studies

19 Kook, *Šemonah Qevašim*, 2:307–8, trans. Yehuda Mirsky, in Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in Time of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 101 (emphasis in original).

20 See Shalom Rosenberg, “*Orot Hakodesh* and Schopenhauer’s Thought: Rabbi A.Y. Hakohen Kook and the Blind Crocodile” [Hebrew], in *In His Light: Studies in the Thought of R. Avraham Yitzhak Hakohen Kook*, ed. Haim Chamiel (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1986), 317–52; Ish-Shalom, “Between Rabbi Kook and Goethe.” It is worth noting that neither of these scholars pointed out specific sections of Schopenhauer’s writings that Kook may have had in mind when he was writing these paragraphs, which was not due to a lack of erudition on their parts.

by Mirsky and Oren. So, let us consider two possible sources that may have shaped Kook's conception of Schopenhauer's philosophy.

The first is "*Ha-Ṭov ve-ha-Ra*" ("The Good and the Evil"), an article by Hillel Zeitlin (1871–1942) that was published in many instalments between 1899 and 1902 in the journal *Ha-Šiloah*.²¹ Back then, Zeitlin was still a young writer connected to a circle of poets and writers in the city of Gomel and trying to find his place in the Hebrew literary milieu.²² This detailed article was meant to prove his value as a writer, mainly to Aḥad Ha'am (Asher Ginzberg, 1856–1927), the editor of *Ha-Šiloah*.²³ Zeitlin's main intellectual goal at the time was to explore Jewish attitudes towards major philosophical issues and place them in the context of the world's intellectual history. "*Ha-Ṭov ve-ha-Ra*" followed that fashion, exploring different attitudes towards the question of the good and evil nature of the world, starting from ancient mythologies and concluding with modern philosophy. As Hamutal Bar-Yosef noted, the spirit of Schopenhauer's pessimism can be felt throughout Zeitlin's article.²⁴ It opens with the pessimism reflected in ancient Buddhist mythologies and concludes with Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy, as the natural inheritor of the ancient Oriental myths. In between, Zeitlin surveys an array of other sources and ideas, but the article's conclusion makes it clear that for him, Schopenhauer's pessimism is the most

21 Several studies claimed that Kook dramatically changed the content and nature of his thought following his immigration to Palestine in 1904, though there is no agreement on what this change entailed. See the overview of this claim in Bindiger, "Studying the Development of Rabbi Kook's Philosophy," 197–200. One might think that this would have affected Kook's engagement with Western philosophy or the materials he was reading. However, Yehudah Mirsky's recent book about Kook's Eastern European writings clearly shows that he was interested in and troubled by philosophical issues both before and after 1904. See, for example, Mirsky, *Towards the Mystical Experience of Modernity*, 91–96, 301–3. Whatever the case may be, this article deals only with Kook's writings from his days in Jaffa, which were written between 1904 and 1914. Zeitlin's article was published prior to Kook's immigration to Palestine, but could easily have been read both before or after that event, as journals in the style of *Ha-Šiloah* were treated as books and were read years after their publication. For the dating and chronology of Kook's writings, see Bindiger, "Studying the Development of Rabbi Kook's Philosophy," 188–96.

22 See Asael Abelman, "In the Thicket of Belief and Denial: The Spiritual Path of Hillel Zeitlin at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century" [Hebrew], *Kabbalah* 16 (2007): 129–50; Nathan Wolski, "Melancholy and Mysticism: Three Early Yiddish Essays by Hillel Zeitlin," *Kabbalah* 47 (2021): 39–92.

23 Zeitlin was hoping to convince Zinberg to give him a monthly stipend that would allow him to live off his writing; see the multiple letters in the Asher Ginzberg Archive at the National Library of Israel, Archival Division, ARC. 4⁰791 10 1916 a–c.

24 See Bar-Yosef, *The Russian Context of Hebrew Literature*, 42–44.

troubling and challenging question facing Western philosophy at the turn of the twentieth century.²⁵

In a chapter dedicated to Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann (1842–1906), Zeitlin describes the metaphysical will as the blind power of life itself, while incorporating passages from Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* which he translates directly from German.²⁶ According to Schopenhauer, Zeitlin claimed, the will manifests itself in all aspects of nature: in the forces shaping the inanimate, in the vital dynamics of plants and animals, and in the intellectual and religious urges of human beings. Every person sets goals for himself, aspiring to achieve one objective and then another, too narrow-minded to see that the goals have no end, that the pursue itself is what drives everything. Everyone sees themselves as an end to themselves, while in reality, they are all but tools in the hands of a blind all-encompassing will. The blindness and purposelessness of that will are at the core of Schopenhauer's pessimism, according to Zeitlin. It makes every human effort futile and drives every person through an endless series of needs, deficiencies, and misery. Life itself relentlessly makes us crave and desire, and that relentlessness causes constant suffering.²⁷

After mentioning some of Schopenhauer's "disciples," like Agnes Taubert (1844–1877) and Julius Frauenstädt (1813–1879), and their criticism of their "master," Zeitlin continues to discuss the pessimism of Taubert's husband, Eduard von Hartmann. According to Zeitlin, von Hartmann criticised Schopenhauer's notion of a completely blind and purposeless will. Indeed, in his view, the metaphysical will is not limited by reason or aspiring to a clear goal, but it strives for something, and thus it is not completely purposeless. It strives for a purpose that forever evades it, driven by a grand concept unknown to it. It is thus not simply will, but a metaphysical unconscious, pushing all aspects of creation towards a goal of which we can identify only traces. In that regard, as Zeitlin points out, von Hartmann aspired to create a synthesis of Schopenhauer's metaphysical will and Hegel's metaphysical Idea (*Idee*) or spirit (*Geist*), which he described as two sides of the Unconscious.²⁸ However, neither of these sides

25 Reprinted in Hillel Zeitlin, *Selected Writings* [Hebrew], vol. 1 (Warsaw: Tušiyah, 1911), 5–147.

26 Zeitlin, *Selected Writings*, 98–114.

27 Only the aesthetic experience gives us relief from this constant flow of suffering and thus opens the option to escape from life: see Zeitlin, *Selected Writings*, 102–7.

28 Zeitlin, 108–9. It is worth noting that this was not exactly von Hartmann's position. As Sebastian Gardner points out, von Hartmann presents a primordial duality rather than a unity of idea and will. This duality is a mistake that stems from the world's creation and existence, a mistake that can only be corrected by its negation: see Gardner,

can explain or remedy the Unconscious, and the endless striving continues to torture not only man—as Schopenhauer claimed—but all of existence. Thus, the most virtuous individuals, according to Zeitlin's von Hartmann, are those who recognise the futility of existence and come to complete despair.²⁹

At the article's conclusion, Zeitlin brings together various ideas he discussed, all enlisted in order to remedy the idea of life as constant suffering. "False prophets," he writes, "are men of peace."³⁰ They overlook the abyss of existence. Some of those who are brave enough to face the horrors of existence fall to despair, and that includes Schopenhauer and his school of "radical pessimists."³¹ However, Zeitlin continued to claim that it is was not an entirely grim view of reality that drove Schopenhauer to this pessimism. Rather, it was his "great aesthetic and moral demands" that made him expect so much from people and reality, expectations that they could not fulfil, leading to a crushing disappointment and a negation of all good.³² Zeitlin makes it a general rule: "The richer a man's internal world, the greater the dissonance between this world and the external one, and this ever-growing frustration leads him to pessimism."³³ And yet, there are others, from early Christians to Nahman of Bratslav, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Leo Tolstoy, who have the courage to accept and love all suffering, to see life itself running through them and appreciate life as inherently good, whereas Schopenhauer sees it as a cruel deception.³⁴ By not elaborating on this assertion, Zeitlin leaves the reader with no concrete philosophical solution to the problem of pessimism. He rather points to a series of role models who tackled that challenge head-on and promoted the love of life itself, despite its suffering.

"Eduard von Hartmann's Philosophy of the Unconscious," in *Thinking the Unconscious: Nineteenth-Century German Thought*, ed. Angus Nicholis and Martin Liescher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 186–88.

29 Zeitlin, *Selected Writings*, 111–14. Again, this is somewhat different from the way current studies read von Hartmann as being focused not on the individual's negation of his own aspirations, but on aspiring to bring the world as we find it to an end. See Gardner, "Eduard von Hartmann's Philosophy of the Unconscious," 186–88.

30 Zeitlin, *Selected Writings*, 146.

31 Zeitlin, *Selected Writings*, 146.

32 Zeitlin, *Selected Writings*, 144.

33 Zeitlin, *Selected Writings*, 144.

34 Zeitlin, *Selected Writings*, 146–47. On Zeitlin's understanding of Nahman of Bratslav's teachings and personality, see Hillel Zeitlin, *Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav: World Weariness and Longing for the Messiah. Two Essays* [Hebrew], ed. Jonatan Meir (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute Press, 2006). For Zeitlin's appreciation of Kook, see Hillel Zeitlin, "The Basic Line of Rabbi Kook's Kabbalah" [Hebrew], in *Sifran šel Yehidim* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1980), 235–37.

We can now put Kook's and Zeitlin's descriptions of Schopenhauer's philosophy alongside each other and point out their differences and similarities. It should be emphasised that all we have are philosophical similarities, not a philological or other historical testament that Kook ever read Zeitlin's article. But again, this is the case with most of the studies of Kook's treatment of modern philosophy, because of the nature of his writings. The main difference is that my discussion does not refer to Schopenhauer's original writings, which were not translated in full during Kook's lifetime, but rather to a mediating text, published in Hebrew, in a journal that Kook used to gain philosophical knowledge, as is revealed elsewhere. As we have seen, Kook was fascinated by the notion of the all-encompassing metaphysical will, but troubled by its description as blind and purposeless and by the pessimist conclusion that Schopenhauer drew from this. Much like Zeitlin's description of von Hartmann's philosophy, Kook blamed Schopenhauer for not fully understanding the nature of the will and claimed that it is not completely blind and purposeless. However, unlike Zeitlin's von Hartmann, Kook was not satisfied with an unconscious drive towards an unknown purpose. He wished to bring Hegel and Schopenhauer even closer, claiming that "thought, will and all existence are bound together."³⁵

In order to support this claim, Kook introduced a historical dimension to the idea of the all-encompassing will. For the German Idealists, it was the spirit (*Geist*) or the idea (*Idee*) that evolve and become more self-conscious throughout history, while will always remain the same. But for Kook, the will can rise and fall, evolve and degrade. Its "deafness and dumbness" is a product of a metaphysical process, "the fall of the will."³⁶ In its exalted form, the all-encompassing will is a divine will, full of purpose, spirit, and thought; it is one aspect of divine vitality, a sublime unity that comprises the world and everything in it. That allows Kook to put forward an optimistic vision of the evolvment towards an unknown goal, which was starkly opposed to the perspective offered by "Schopenhauer and his colleagues."³⁷ Just like Zeitlin, Kook presented Schopenhauer as the leading figure of a group of thinkers taken with the notion of life itself as endless misery. These thinkers, Kook claimed, were leading humanity to a dead end, creating a global trend of hatred towards life itself. This drift could only be countered by "true sages, the righteous of their time and [...] the deep understanding that the core of this blind will holds a concealed wisdom."³⁸ Not unlike Zeitlin, the pessimistic notion is answered by

35 Kook, *Orot ha-Qodeš*, 2:430, trans. In Ish-Shalom, *Rav Avraham Yitzhak Ha-Cohen Kook*, 65.

36 Kook, *Šemonah Qevašim*, 2:307, trans. In Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in Time of Revolution*, 101.

37 Kook, *Šemonah Qevašim*, 4:124.

38 Kook, *Šemonah Qevašim*, 4:124 (my translation).

a unique group of role models, who will uncover the divine purpose hidden in the depths of the blind will.³⁹

Nevertheless, the solutions the two thinkers proposed to the problem of pessimism were quite different. While Zeitlin offered an individual solution, following Jewish and non-Jewish role models who struggled with pessimism and came back to take a positive view of life and existence, Kook was not satisfied with this. Seeing “the fall of the will” as a metaphysical process, he sought a way to reverse that process and redeem the metaphysical will. As we saw earlier, for Kook, the answer will be found through the Jewish people’s rediscovery of themselves as a nation and the amendment of their national will, which is connected to the divine will. One cannot find such an idea in Zeitlin’s writings, but there are similar notions in the writings of other Eastern European Jewish thinkers from that time, as we will soon see.

Another key difference between Zeitlin’s and Kook’s treatments of Schopenhauer’s philosophy is the ethical and aesthetic aspects of Schopenhauer’s pessimism. As we saw earlier, Zeitlin claimed that it was Schopenhauer’s “great aesthetic and moral demands” that led him to radical pessimism when he realised that his high expectations could not be fulfilled.⁴⁰ Kook neglects the aesthetic part of this argument altogether and never refers to aesthetic experience as a remedy for pessimism.⁴¹ However, the ethical part of Zeitlin’s argument reappears in one of Kook’s most famous passages. First printed in an article in 1913, the paragraph entitled “Ha-Nešamot šel ‘Olam ha-Tohu” (“The Souls of the World of Chaos”) discusses the value of people who aspire to damage the fabric of society and destroy the known order. In a combination of kabbalist language and Zeitlin’s psychological analysis, Kook writes as follows:

Souls of chaos [*nešamot de-tohu*] are higher than souls of establishment [*nešamot de-tiqun*]. They are very great; they seek much of existence, that which their vessels [*kelim*] cannot support. They seek a very great light; they cannot tolerate whatever is finite, defined and estimable. [...] Their infinite longing will not end. They are garbed in various vessels; they aspire way beyond the limit; they aspire and fall. They see that they are imprisoned in laws, in circumscribed conditions that do not allow

39 Intriguingly, Kook also described Schopenhauer and his followers as “disciples of Balaam” and his “wicked eye.” See Kook, *Šemonah Qevašim*, 4:124. That also might have been triggered by Zeitlin, who called Schopenhauer “the blind-eyed [prophet]” (*stum ha-‘ayin*), a term used in the Bible to describe Balaam. See Zeitlin, *Selected Writings*, 146–47.

40 Zeitlin, *Selected Writings*, 144.

41 In part, this can be attributed to Kook’s vision of art as a craft whose dangers only the righteous can avoid. See, for example, Kook, “Ṭvi‘at ‘Eyn Ayah,” *Hamizraḥ* 1 (1903): 352–54.

[one] to expand beyond limit to unstoppable heights, and they fall into depression, into resignation, into anger, and from rage—into wickedness, malice, lowliness, ugliness, abomination, destruction, and all manner of evil. These [souls of chaos] are revealed in the brazen of the generation. [...] Their soul is very high—from the lights of chaos. They have chosen destruction and they destroy; the world is rubbed out by them, and they with it. But the essence of courage contained in their will is the point of holiness.⁴²

Granted, this passage is not explicitly referring to Schopenhauer or to pessimism. Nevertheless, it is eerily similar to the idea put forward by Zeitlin twelve years earlier concerning the noble source of radical pessimism and the destructive tendencies of the most virtuous souls. If this analysis is correct, then tracing the sources of Kook's acquaintance with Western philosophy can tell us more than merely how he came upon a certain idea. It also offers the potential of exploring new paths and intellectual connections between Kook and his contemporaries and—more generally—within the milieu of Eastern European thinkers. Let us now explore the writings of another member of the same milieu, who may also have contributed to Kook's understanding of Schopenhauer's philosophy.

3 A Trailblazer of Modern Hebrew Philosophical Discourse

Though not usually included in discussions about Rav Kook's sources, Zeitlin is nevertheless a fairly well-known figure and has received plenty of scholarly attention in recent years. But if we wish to reconstruct the intellectual sphere in which thinkers like Kook and Zeitlin operated, we would do well to enquire further into the worlds and writings of those who have hitherto remained on the margins of Jewish intellectual history. Such authors, some of whom may lack the originality or brilliance of thinkers like Kook, were nevertheless proficient in German, French, or Russian philosophy and played a crucial role in bringing this knowledge to a Jewish readership. One such author who had a special interest in Schopenhauer and metaphysical voluntarism was Eliezer-Yitzhak Sheinbaum (1855–1929). Since very little information about Sheinbaum can be found in previous studies, I will briefly introduce him and his writings before we move forward.

42 Abraham Isaac Kook, *Orot* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1950), 122, translated by Bezalel Naor as "The Souls of the World of Chaos" (2021), <http://orot.com/the-souls-of-chaos/>.

Eliezer-Yitzhak Sheinbaum was born into a prominent family in Kobryn in present-day Belarus. His father, Yosef Shlomo, known as Yoshe Minkes, was one of the wealthiest members of Kobryn's Jewish community. Yoshe hired a private tutor for Eliezer Yitzhak, who taught him the Bible, the Talmud, Hebrew grammar, and Russian. Sheinbaum also grew under the influence of his two elder brothers-in-law: first Eliezer Edelstein, who possessed a rich library holding books in various languages and was considered Kobryn's local Maskil, and later Zalman-Sender Kahana-Shapira (1850–1923), a great-grandson of Hayyim of Volozhin. From age fourteen to eighteen, Sheinbaum studied Torah with Kahana-Shapira, who later headed the well-respected yeshiva in Malech and was famed as a Torah scholar and miracle worker.⁴³ Despite Kahana-Shapira's best efforts, Sheinbaum continued to visit Edelstein's house and library and used Moses Mendelssohn's Pentateuch edition (1780–1783) to learn German, to which he added Polish and French.⁴⁴ Kahana-Shapira was able to prevent young Sheinbaum from attending a gymnasium, but he could not stop his appetite for knowledge. Wishing to earn a gymnasium diploma, Sheinbaum taught himself Greek, Latin, and mathematics (it is hard to say to what degree), but eventually took the exams only around 1900, when he was forty-five, as part of an unsuccessful effort to become a state rabbi.⁴⁵

In 1877, when he was twenty-two, Sheinbaum married Naomi Rakhmilevitch and moved to her father's estate, where he worked in the family business. After a while, he became a successful merchant in his own right, and in the late 1890s, he settled in Gomel, where he became involved in various Zionist initiatives and supervised the city's modern Talmud Torah.⁴⁶ He was especially known for the lectures he gave on various topics: the Bible, the history of the Holy Land, the Jewish claim to it, and so on. He also spoke about philosophical matters, a special area of interest that he had developed from a young age. One such lecture was printed as a Hebrew booklet titled *Ha-Šiyonut ve-ha-Maṭeryaliyut* (*Zionism and Materialism*, 1906). In this essay, Sheinbaum portrays Zionism as a movement of will and spirit and an arch-rival of materialism. From this point on, undermining materialism became the focus of Sheinbaum's intellectual mission.

43 On Minkes, Edelstein, and Kahana-Shapira, see Yekhezkel Kotik, *Journey to a Nineteenth-Century Shtetl: The Memoirs of Yekhezkel Kotik*, trans. Margaret Birstein, Sharon Makover-Assaf, and Dena Ordan, ed. David Assaf (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 470.

44 See Eliezer-Yitzhak Sheinbaum, *Me'ever la-Huṣṣiyut*, introduction by Hugo Bergman (Jerusalem: Drom, 1930), 5–8.

45 Sheinbaum, *Me'ever la-Huṣṣiyut*.

46 Sheinbaum, *Me'ever la-Huṣṣiyut*, 15–20.

Heavily influenced by the ideas of Aḥad Ha'am, Sheinbaum focused his intellectual efforts on philosophical discourse. Acknowledging the lack of systemisation in Aḥad Ha'am's thought and believing that Marxist philosophy played a crucial role in swaying the Jewish youth for the cause of socialist movements, Sheinbaum sought to establish a philosophical foundation for cultural Zionism, while undermining historical materialism. After putting this notion forward in his *Zionism and Materialism*, Sheinbaum gave it a very different outlook in his first major work: *Yesodey ha-Meṣi'ut we-ha-Hakarah* (*On the Foundations of Reality and Perception*, 1913). Based on an article that Sheinbaum published in *Ha-Šiloah* in 1909, *On the Foundations of Reality and Perception* is an introduction to the issues of substance and perception in modern philosophy that is designed to lead the reader past the foundations of modern materialism and into the waiting arms of metaphysical voluntarism. In its moderate yet unmistakable polemic tone, the book aimed at stripping Marxism of its philosophical glamour and at presenting an alternative that could resonate with Jewish cultural nationalism.

In 1913, Sheinbaum and Naomi visited Palestine for the first time and decided to move to the Holy Land. In order to make the proper arrangements, they returned to Gomel, but World War I and the Soviet revolution forced them to stay put. Naomi passed away sometime after the revolution, and Sheinbaum did the best he could to protect the local Zionist organisation from the wrath of the new regime. In 1921, he received permission to leave the Soviet Union and to immigrate to Palestine. Passing through Lithuania, he met his brother-in-law and previous tutor, Rabbi Zalman-Sender Kahana-Shapira, and the two travelled together to the Holy Land. They both settled in Jerusalem, where Sheinbaum spent the last decade of his life working on his book *Me'ever la-Ḥuṣiyyut* (*Beyond Sensory Perception*, 1930).

Apart from articles in different journals, he published five main works: two on political issues, one translation of an introduction to philosophy by Wilhelm Jerusalem (1854–1923), and two philosophical works. His rich archive holds, among other things, the groundwork for a collection of translated writings by the Jewish-French philosopher Bergson and a large collection of philosophical letters. These writings, even the political ones, deal mainly with epistemology. They aim to undermine Marxist and empiricist epistemology and to uphold a system of metaphysical voluntarism, mostly feeding off German thinkers such as Fichte and Schopenhauer. In short, Sheinbaum's philosophy emphasised the metaphysical importance of individual and national will and their connection to the sublime, ideas that he thought should be a central pillar of the nascent Zionist culture. He published his works in Hebrew because he aspired to establish a modern Hebrew philosophical debate, which would produce a Zionist

philosophy, so to speak. That may explain his publication of a mixture of an original philosophy of his own making and introductory philosophical articles for the masses in places such as *Ha-Šiloah* and *Ha-Tequfah*, as well as translations of works by Wilhelm Jerusalem and Henri Bergson. In this aspiration to create a modern philosophical discourse in Hebrew, he was the predecessor of Hugo Bergman, a fact to which Bergman himself alluded when he wrote the following about one of Sheinbaum's works:

Were such a book to be published in a non-Jewish language, it would certainly spark debates, responses, and be made known to the masses. [However], we pass over it in silence. Indeed, the path of systemic-scientific literature in our language is a difficult one.⁴⁷

At the centre of Sheinbaum's philosophy, we find a systematic philosophy of metaphysical voluntarism. Before we consider how this philosophy may have influenced Kook, let us see what made Sheinbaum himself gravitate towards this philosophical position:

It is a shame that there is still no Jewish literary work that deals with this philosophy [of metaphysical voluntarism], while the nations have dedicated thousands of books to it. It deserves special attention from every sage who wishes to establish the Jewish revival on humanistic foundations and to create a grand synthesis of Judaism and humanism. I genuinely believe that if we fulfil the great dream of Jewish liberation and a revival of its language and spirit, we will also establish a Hebrew Jewish philosophy, and it cannot be other than real-idealistic, meaning voluntarist. Only such a philosophy can be paired with Judaism and prosper.⁴⁸

The notion of seeing Schopenhauer's philosophy as enabling a creative and vibrant world, not bound by the "cold" and "mechanical" world guided by the static rules of reason, gained immense popularity in the early twentieth

47 Sheinbaum, *Me'ever la-Hušiyut*, 23 (my translation).

48 Eliezer-Yitzhak Sheinbaum, *Ha-Šiyonut ve-ha-Maṭeryaliyut* (Vilnius, 1906), 20–21. Later, Sheinbaum adds: "It is easy to see that Judaism and materialism are incompatible according to this view and cannot live under the same roof. A philosophy that denies any autonomous moral force that cannot recognise any aspiration to progress, only material forces of necessity, a philosophy that grimaces when it hears the name 'teleology' and mocks any spiritual ideal—such a philosophy undermines the foundations of Judaism and puts out the candle of Israel" (Sheinbaum, *Ha-Šiyonut ve-ha-Maṭeryaliyut*, 7 [my translation]).

century. This trend was accompanied by rising curiosity about the Orient and the occult, in part due to Schopenhauer's use of Buddhist sources and because the gate he had opened to what lies beyond the realm of reasonable consciousness had also enabled occultists, mystics, and other bearers of neo-Romanticism to walk through it. In Central Europe, this trend inspired a new interest in Judaism and especially in Jewish life in Eastern Europe, which had not been "corrupted" by rationalism.⁴⁹ This return to the "origins" of Judaism probably played a role in Bergman's interest in Eastern European thinkers and led to his engagement with Sheinbaum. In Eastern Europe, however, things went a little differently. Romanticism and nostalgia still played a major role, but both Jews and non-Jews had no need of exotic traditions, as they had their own religious tradition to fall back on.⁵⁰ It was not the "lifeless" reason of the bourgeoisie that troubled the imagination of the Russian neo-Romanticists, but rather the utilitarian materialism of the socialist movements and the threat of revolution, a threat that was soon realised. A group of early twentieth-century Russian thinkers thus turned the opposite way: to Romanticism and neo-Idealism. Exploring the limits of rational consciousness, they recruited German philosophy in order to undermine the philosophical foundation of materialism.⁵¹

Sheinbaum used the ideas of Schopenhauer, von Hartmann, and Fichte in a similar way. His erudition allowed him access to their original writings and, as evident in his proud nationalistic stance, the luxury of setting aside the Christian interpretation they sometimes received and replacing it with cultural Zionist ideas. At the centre of this stands an all-encompassing divine will that Sheinbaum identifies with Aḥad Ha'am's notion of national spirit. He makes this connection clear in another paragraph at *Ha-Šiyonut we-ha-Maṭeryaliyut* (1906):

According to this philosophy [of metaphysical voluntarism], reality in its entirety is the product of an original will that manifests itself in the universe, and it keeps evolving, keeps getting closer to a goal that our reason

49 Paul Mendes-Flohe, "Fin-de-siècle Orientalism, the *Ostjuden* and the Aesthetics of Jewish Self-Affirmation," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 1 (1984): 96–139.

50 Eastern Europe also introduced a different understanding of decadence and symbolism, which had a crucial impact on the ways thinkers such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were read in that arena. See Bar-Yosef, *The Russian Context of Hebrew Literature*, 33–60.

51 For more on this strain of Russian philosophy, see Nel Grillaert, *What the God-Seekers Found in Nietzsche: The Reception of Nietzsche's Übermensch by the Philosophers of the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008); Andrzej Walicki, *The Flow of Ideas: Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to the Religious-Philosophical Renaissance* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2015), 721–48.

cannot comprehend. This goal is what all creation strives for. Every part of creation, no matter how tiny, every human being and every nation is a fraction of the rivers of the divine will that flows in every part of creation. Just like the little cells that comprise the body are only parts of a whole organism, of the will that gives this organism life, although each and every one seems to us as a separate entity, with its own life and aspirations, so are individuals only singular voices, peoples, and nations—chords in the grand symphony of creation [...]. The national will reveals itself to us out of the nation's beliefs and history, language and spirit, costumes and heroes.⁵²

Returning to our main point, I think we can now find some similarities between Sheinbaum's metaphysical voluntarism and that of Kook. Both deny Schopenhauer's notion of blind noumenal will and claim that this will is not only divine, but also has purpose and reason. We saw a similar tendency in Zeitlin's description of von Hartmann's philosophy. However, von Hartmann claimed that the metaphysical will, or the unconscious, lacks clear reason, whereas Sheinbaum's use of Fichte's philosophy makes it more similar to Kook's vision of the divine will. Another key point of similarity is the focus of the national will as an access point for the noumenal will and a way to amend it. As we saw earlier, this element cannot be found in Zeitlin's individualist perspective, but Aḥad Ha'am's notion of the national spirit and its influence on Sheinbaum made this notion much more appealing to a national thinker like Kook.

This is not to say that the two thinkers present the same philosophical system. Far from it. We may look at Kook's monistic philosophy, which claims that will, spirit, and thought are one, as a commentary on Sheinbaum's philosophy, as adding to it what he saw as a more comprehensible treatment of the subjects than Sheinbaum offers. Kook also added other notions and perspectives based on his rabbinic background, mainly from the world of Kabbalah, which, as Yehuda Mirsky points out, has a long history of describing the divine will as the essence of all beings.⁵³ As Eliezer Goldman demonstrated several decades ago, this confluence of kabbalistic themes with German Idealist can be found in *Qorot ha-Filosofyah ha-Ḥadašah* (*History of Modern Philosophy*, 1887) by Fabius Mieses, another Hebrew populariser of modern philosophy. In Mieses's

52 Sheinbaum, *Ha-Šiyonut ve-ha-Maṭeryaliyut*, 22 (my translation).

53 Mirsky, *Rav Kook*, 100.

work, Schopenhauer's philosophy is explained in quasi-kabbalistic terminology, which many writers followed, perhaps including Kook.⁵⁴

Published before and during Kook's early period in Jaffa, when he wrote the *Eight Notebooks* in which he tackled Schopenhauer's pessimism, Zeitlin's, Mises's, and Sheinbaum's writings give us valuable input on the way in which German Idealism was read and interpreted in the early twentieth-century Hebrew milieu, establishing the intellectual field in which Kook was operating, the ideas to which he reacted, and the audience he had in mind. Among other things, this brings us one step closer to reconstructing his philosophical goals. By way of example, Sheinbaum highlights the teleological nature of the noumenal will in order to undermine the blind purposeless nature of materialism. It is not impossible that Kook was troubled by similar notions, meaning that his criticism of the blind will was not bound strictly to Schopenhauer, but to a variety of non-teleological philosophies prominent in early twentieth-century debates, be they Marxist materialism, European variations on Buddhism, Aharon David Gordon's vitalism, or something else. Hence, his polemic with Schopenhauer is not an abstract philosophical voyage, but rather a concrete debate with prevalent contemporary notions. Exploring other sources of influence on Kook's ideas and the intellectual terrain in which he operated will provide us with a better historical understanding of his ideas and allow us to avoid anachronistic interpretations based on the idea that he was reading straight from the writings of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Schelling, or Hegel.

4 The Often-Neglected Locality

The discussion in parts 2 and 3 of this article exemplifies the problem with examining the notion of mediators only through the lens of Kook's writings. As we lack explicit references in these writings, we have to rely on philosophical similarities in order to figure out what sources Kook read and how he interpreted them, making it much harder to pin down the philosophical consequences of that process. Another problem created by this ambiguity is the limited scope of possible sources of inspiration, which somewhat limits the significance of mediators. Lacking explicit references, we can only try to reconstruct the most likely chain of transmission, leaving out less likely options. The relevance of these options becomes apparent when we examine other thinkers who provide more explicit references, and, by doing so, uncover a new context

54 Mises, *Qorot ha-Filosofyah ha-Hadašah*, 140–51. See Eliezer Goldman, *Judaism without Illusion* (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2009), 99–112.

for early twentieth-century Jewish thought. To illustrate the potential of such an examination, I will turn to another Jewish thinker from that time, Shmuel Alexandrov, and to the new kind of mediator unearthed in his writings: modern Russian philosophers.

Because of the dominance of German thinkers in the canon of modern Western philosophy, we sometimes forget that for most Jewish intellectuals in Eastern Europe, Russian was their first non-Jewish language. Some could read non-Jewish languages and some could not, but all of them felt more comfortable in Yiddish, Hebrew, or Russian. Even for a thinker like Sheinbaum, who knew German and Greek and read Schopenhauer and Marx in the original, most of the foreign-language references found in his studies are to Russian sources. In that regard, it is probable that even when he read German sources, he read them in the context put forward by contemporary Russian debates, and the same can be said for other thinkers. The scarcity of studies of the Russian context of modern Jewish thought is especially surprising, since—unlike in the case of Kook's writings—we have plenty of direct references to Russian sources in the writings of Jewish thinkers. Having said that, explicit references can sometimes be misleading, as we will soon see.

Alexandrov was a contemporary of Kook and a fascinating thinker in his own right. He was born in Borisov and spent most of his life in the nearby city of Bobruisk, both in present-day Belarus. His major works are a complete commentary on Tractate Avot and three volumes of collected letters drafted to various recipients, including Kook, Aḥad Ha'am, Micha Josef Berdyczewski, and Mosheh Leib Lilienblum.⁵⁵ Following the Bolshevik revolution, when his connection to other world Jewish centres was cut off, Alexandrov became a spiritual mentor to rabbis and yeshiva students from across the Soviet Union. His letters reveal the hardship of religious life in the early stages of the Soviet regime. These letters, some of which have been printed and some of which remain in manuscript, also reveal an original and nuanced philosophy that integrates various sources, including Kabbalah and Marxism, as well as Western and Russian Orthodox philosophy.⁵⁶

Alexandrov had an extensive correspondence with Kook between 1902 and 1914. In these letters, Alexandrov referred to a variety of Russian sources, ranging from Russian translations of Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) and Max Nordau

55 Shmuel Alexandrov, *Mikhtavey Mehqar u-Biqqoret*, 3 vols. (Vilnius: Romm, 1907–1932).

56 On Alexandrov and his philosophy, see Ehud Luz, "Spiritualism and Religious Anarchism in the Teaching of Shmuel Alexandrov" [Hebrew], *Daat* 7 (1981): 121–38; Schwartz, *Faith at the Crossroads*, 12–14, 63, 114–16; Isaac Slater, "Religious Cultural Zionism: Religion and Nationalism in the Thought of Shmuel Alexandrov" [Hebrew], *Daat* 82 (2016): 285–319.

(1849–1923),⁵⁷ through works of Narodnik sociologists like Peter Lavrov and Nikolai Michalowski,⁵⁸ to the writings of religious philosophers like Nikolai Berdyaev and Vladimir Solovyov.⁵⁹ Unlike Kook's mentions of German philosophers, Alexandrov's references are often detailed, specifying the works' names and sometimes volume and page numbers and even differences between editions. Taking together the entirety of Alexandrov's letters, those printed in his three-volume collection *Mikhtavey Mehqar u-Biqqoret* (*Letters of Inquiry and Critique*, 1907–1931) and the dozens left in manuscript, one can clearly see his acquaintance with contemporary Russian discourse.

Solovyov and Berdyaev (1874–1948) held a special place in Alexandrov's thought. Solovyov was the towering figure of Russia's silver age, casting his shadow over art and philosophy alike. Berdyaev was a part of a group of Russian thinkers who took Solovyov's Christian Orthodox neo-Idealism one step further in order to fight the rising tide of positivism and materialism. This group was known as the "God-Seekers," and Alexandrov addressed them directly when he referred Kook to one of their seminal collections: *Problemy Idealisma* (*Problems of Idealism*, 1902).⁶⁰ For Alexandrov, the God-Seekers were Solovyov's pupils and their "master" was the model of an ideal modern religious philosopher. The unique blend he found in the writings of the Russian mystic, which brought together German Idealism, Christian Orthodoxy, and esoteric traditions like Jewish and Christian Kabbalah, combined with Solovyov's enthusiastic defence of Judaism and the rabbinic tradition, all ignited Alexandrov's imagination as he sought answers to the intellectual challenges of his time.⁶¹

57 Alexandrov, *Mikhtavey Mekhkar u-Bikoret*, 1:9, 24.

58 Alexandrov, *Mikhtavey Mekhkar u-Bikoret*, 1:24; Alexandrov, letter to Abraham Isaac Kook (MS), autumn 1909, Gnazim: The Asher Barash Bio-Bibliographical Institute of Hebrew Writers, Tel Aviv, Shmuel Alexandrov archive (143).

59 Explicit references to the works of Beredeyev and Solovyov can be found in numerous places in Alexandrov's writing, especially prior to the revolution. See Alexandrov, *Mikhtavey Mehqar u-Biqqoret*, 1:27–28, 30; 2:8–11; 3:55–56; Alexandrov, letter to Binyamin Menashe Levin (MS), spring 1910, Gnazim: The Asher Barash Bio-Bibliographical Institute of Hebrew Writers, Tel Aviv, Shmuel Alexandrov archive (143).

60 Shmuel Alexandrov, letter to Abraham Isaac Kook (MS), autumn 1909, Gnazim: The Asher Barash Bio-Bibliographical Institute of Hebrew Writers, Tel Aviv, Shmuel Alexandrov archive (143).

61 On Solovyov's treatment of Judaism and his use of kabbalistic themes, see Vladimir Solovyov, *The Burning Bush: Writings on Jews and Judaism*, ed. and trans. Gregory Yuri Glazov (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016); Judith D. Kornblatt, "Russian Religious Thought and the Jewish Kabbala," in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 75–95; Maria Carlson, "Gnostic Elements in the Cosmogony of Vladimir Soloviev," in

Though Solovyov featured more prominently in Alexandrov's printed writings, those still in manuscript make it clear that Alexandrov understood Solovyov through the lens of Berdyaev's writings. Alexandrov adopts the main features of Berdyaev's thesis of new religious conciseness, including its harsh criticism of the "old" religious establishment and its emphasis on individual consciousness as the central value of philosophy.⁶² These elements fitted perfectly with Alexandrov's vision of a religious cultural revolution, which entailed the abolition of all religious laws as part of a new stage of religious consciousness. Aided by these ideas, Alexandrov abandoned the notion of a nationally accepted, moderate, and gradual cultural change, and towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, he developed the concept of a cultural revolution led by a small avant-garde of creative individuals.⁶³

The most obvious influence of Berdyaev's and Solovyov's writings on Alexandrov is his understanding of Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of the *Übermensch*, which brings us back to the notion of mediators and their impact on Jewish thought. Alexandrov's idea of the religious *Übermensch* (or *adam 'elyon* in Hebrew, literally "a higher man") first appears in a letter from 1909, but it is not fully developed until his writings from the 1920s. The first of these letters is a response to a question from a communal rabbi named Avraham Yosef Guttman as to why Guttman should keep his rabbinic position in the face of Soviet persecution and the crumbling community. Alexandrov writes the following:

The talmudic phrases "The whole world was created for me" (*b. Sanh.* 37a) and [...] "The whole world exists in the merit of one righteous human being" (*b. Yoma* 38b) are not empty words; they possess real meaning. Devout believers and honest religious philosophers can sense that meaning. This doctrine has a solid base in the theory of the individualists in general and in Nietzsche's theory of the *adam 'elyon* [*Übermensch*] in particular. That is the doctrine of Judaism in all its various aspects throughout history. According to it, God can destroy many worlds and create better

Russian Religious Thought, ed. Judith D. Kornblatt and Richard F. Gustafson (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 49–67. On Solovyov's reception and his impact on contemporary Hebrew literature, see Hamutal Bar-Yosef, "The Jewish Reception of Vladimir Solovyov," in *Vladimir Solov'ev: Reconciler and Polemicist*, ed. Wilven den Bercken, Manon de Courten, and Evertvan der Zweerde (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 363–92.

62 On Berdyaev and his philosophy, see Walicki, *The Flow of Ideas*, 739–42.

63 Isaac Slater, "A Forgotten Variety of Religious Zionism: The Thought of Shmuel Alexandrov," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 74 (2023): 140–63.

ones, assisted by the *adam 'elyon* who survived the upheaval, because the *adam 'elyon* works with God to create the world.⁶⁴

What we have here is an explicit reference to Nietzsche, giving his ideas an unusual religious interpretation, where the *Übermensch* is a devout believer, able to recognise God's plan in the triumph of heresy. Without further context, we might think that Alexandrov formulated this interpretation independently, which is far from impossible. However, the manuscript material reveals the identity of these unnamed "honest religious philosophers." In a letter to Binyamin Menashe Levin (1897–1944), Alexandrov rejected the idea that Nietzsche's philosophy leads only to pessimism and nihilism, writing:

I would like to inform you that in our country [Russia, as Levin was studying in Switzerland at the time], one can find idealist philosophers who arrived at liberalism and monotheism by engaging with the writings of individualists and the masters of *ha-adam ha-'elyon* [...] those idealists who yearn for the divine are, generally speaking, the followers of the philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, who is known for his pure righteousness.⁶⁵

Indeed, a religious interpretation of and polemic with Nietzsche's ideas was a major theme in the philosophy of the God-Seekers. Following Solovyov, thinkers such as Berdyaev and Demitry Merejkovsky (1865–1941) sought to combine Nietzsche's *Übermensch* or the *Chelovekobog*, meaning "Godly man," with the Christian *Bogochelovek* or Humanly God, which they saw as the two sides of Jesus Christ.⁶⁶ Alexandrov took these ideas and implanted them into a Jewish philosophy that aimed to handle the challenges of the early Soviet Union, as

64 Alexandrov, *Mikhtavey Mehqar u-Biqqoret*, 3:5 (my translation).

65 Shmuel Alexandrov, letter to Binyamin Menashe Levin (MS), spring 1910, Gnazim: The Asher Barash Bio-Bibliographical Institute of Hebrew Writers, Tel Aviv, Shmuel Alexandrov archive, 143 (my translation). See also Isaac Slater, "God Has Wrapped Himself in a Cloak of Materialism': Marxism and Jewish Religious Thought in the Early Soviet Union," *Religions* 14, no. 5 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050673>.

66 On this school of thought and its version of Nietzschean philosophy, see Grillaert, *What the God-Seekers Found in Nietzsche*; Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, "A New Spirituality: The Confluence of Nietzsche and Orthodoxy in Russian Religious Thought," in *Sacred Stories: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Russia*, ed. Mark D. Steinberg and Heather J. Colman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 330–57. For more on Alexandrov's engagement with these thinkers's ideas, see Konstantin D. Burmistrov, "Towards the History of Russian-Jewish Intellectual Contacts: Vladimir Soloviev and Rabbi Shmuel Aleksandrov" [Russian], in *Russian-Jewish Culture*, ed. Oleg Budnitskii, Olga Belova, and Victoria Mochalova (Moscow: Rosspen, 2006), 302–14.

they were posed to him by Rabbi Gutman. If we go back to this paragraph, we can see that Alexandrov accepts the fate of rabbinic culture in those grim circumstances. God is bound to destroy the world as we know it, but He is also planning to create a new one. From other passages, we learn that Alexandrov means a new religious world with a new theology, not unlike Berdyaev's "new religious consciousness," which for Alexandrov meant a Jewish religion without religious laws. Alexandrov claimed that every single believer could play a crucial role in moulding this world. Such a believer would be the partner of God, a co-creator, if you will. By putting forth this notion comprised of Nietzschean ideas, Russian philosophy, and kabbalistic themes, Alexandrov was attempting to give hope to individuals holding up the rabbinic tradition against the yoke of Communist persecution.

A further instance of the influence of Russian philosophy on Alexandrov's writings can be found at another point in his correspondence with Guttman, where Alexandrov urges him to transcend the traditional image of God and create a new one: "Make yourself a God to follow! With your own powers, make yourself a God and worship him!"⁶⁷ Alexandrov explains to Guttman that this bold assertion is a product of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's aesthetics, according to which "art brings together the infinite spirit and the finite matter" and therefore "when the artist paints his painting, he is creating God."⁶⁸

Once again, we find a reference to a German philosopher expressing an idea that the philosopher himself did not express.⁶⁹ Though not mentioned explicitly in his writings, I would claim that this aspect of Alexandrov's philosophy cannot be understood without acknowledging another school of contemporary Russian philosophers, the Marxist "God-Builders." Thinkers such as Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875–1933) and Maxim Gorky (1868–1936) introduced God-building in order to sway the masses for the Marxist cause. They argued that a new God, created by man, could lead humanity to a Marxist revolutionary redemption.⁷⁰ Alexandrov used this idea and brought it back to the realm of religious philosophy, combining it with Schelling's aesthetics and Berdyaev's new religious consciousness in order to urge Guttman to create a

67 Alexandrov, *Mikhtavey Mehqar u-Biqqoret*, 3:50 (my translation).

68 Alexandrov, *Mikhtavey Mehqar u-Biqqoret*, 3:51 (my translation).

69 Hence, describing Alexandrov as a "Schellingian" thinker is far from accurate: see Luz, "Spiritualism and Religious Anarchism in the Teaching of Shmuel Alexandrov."

70 See Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 68–86; David G. Rowley, *Millenarian Bolshevism 1900–1920: Empiriomonism, God-Building, Proletarian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1987), 136–72.

new image of God as a crucial stage in realising his vision of a new Jewish religious consciousness.⁷¹

Other Jewish thinkers found other Russian philosophies just as appealing. Zeitlin debated the existential philosophy of Shestov, himself a Russian-Jewish thinker who followed Nietzsche's path;⁷² Aharon Shmuel Tamares (1869–1931), Aharon David Gordon (1856–1922), and others were impressed by Tolstoy's pacifism and individualistic religious philosophy, while Avraham Yehuda Heyn (1880–1957) sought to interlace Pyotr Kropotkin's anarchism with Habad Hasidism.⁷³ This shortlist is far from complete, in a field that is far from exhausted. Still, putting aside the issue of Russian philosophy and Jewish thought, one has to consider the effect of such an environment on how Jewish thinkers read Western philosophy in the Russian empire. Mediated by debates in Russian literature and their ripple effect on Jewish publications, Jewish treatments of Western philosophy were affected by local agents. Ignoring this locality would lead to misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Jewish thought in the twentieth century.

5 Conclusion

Early twentieth-century Jewish religious thought is marked by its eclecticism, integrating various sources into a rich tabula of complex, often paradoxical ideas. This is especially true in Eastern Europe, where modern philosophy met the depth and breadth of Jewish traditions, from the rabbinic tradition, through the kabbalistic one, all the way to Hasidism and the Jewish enlightenment, which also saw a resurgence of medieval philosophy. As if integrating modern philosophies with those ideas was not complicated enough, those philosophies reached a Jewish religious readership through mediators who were far from neutral messengers. Both philosophical popularisers and Russian thinkers played a crucial role in that process, as they repackaged and reshaped the knowledge they transmitted according to their needs and aspirations.

Illustrating the arc of that process will significantly contribute to scholarly debates on different levels. When considering a specific thinker, this

71 The first to point out Alexandrov's connection to the "God-Builders" was Avraham Bick in his *Midraš Smukhim*, 53–63. See also Slater, "God Has Wrapped Himself in a Cloak of Materialism."

72 See Lee Bartov, "Deposed Idols and Abandoned Temples: A Reexamination of the Affinity between Hillel Zeitlin and Lev Shestov" [Hebrew], *Daat* 85 (2018): 229–68.

73 On Tamares and Heyn, see Hayyim Rothman, *No Masters but God: Portraits of Anarcho-Judaism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 161–81, 201–28.

illustration will take a crucial step towards what Daniel Boyarin calls a “micro-history of ideas.”⁷⁴ Pointing out and analysing the specific materials read by thinkers like Alexandrov and Kook will help us to better understand the intellectual context in which they operated, trace the process by which they formulated their philosophy, and explain the concrete aims of their arguments. Thus, for example, during the discussion of Sheinbaum’s and Zeitlin’s writings as possibly having influenced Kook’s notion of the all-encompassing will, I claimed that Sheinbaum’s anti-materialistic bent could help us better understand Kook’s goals in his critique of Schopenhauer. Likewise, understanding Alexandrov’s use of Nietzsche’s ideas according to the interpretation of the Russian God-Seekers provides a concrete context to his philosophy that is crucial to understanding the formation of his ideas.

On the macro level, following Shmuel Eisenstadt’s thesis of “multiple modernities” in the realm of social history,⁷⁵ tracing the route of philosophical knowledge from Western to Eastern Europe (and beyond) can play a crucial role in putting forth what we may call “multiple modern philosophies.” Just as Eisenstadt pointed out the different forms and faces worn by core elements of modern civilisation in different places and contexts, we can follow the various interpretations given to core ideas of Western philosophies in different settings and through the convergence of diverse intellectual traditions. We already saw how both Jewish and Russian Orthodox thinkers gave Nietzsche’s individualistic atheism a religious interpretation, as they used the anthropocentric force of the *Übermensch* to explore the modern individual’s relationship with the divine. We also witnessed how Rav Kook used Schopenhauer’s voluntarism to reinterpret kabbalistic themes and how he and Sheinbaum used voluntarism to reinforce Jewish cultural nationalism. Similar notions can be found with regard to *Lebensphilosophie*, existentialism, and pragmatism, all concepts that are currently being explored in relation to Jewish philosophy in the twentieth century. Taken together, these notions portray twentieth-century Jewish thought as reflecting a broad arc of intellectual traditions and the continuing debate about their implementation in various contexts.

Whether in micro or macro, a historical perspective on Jewish thought in Eastern Europe must consider the specific sources that gave it its unique character. Exploring this often-neglected terrain would yield a far better

74 Daniel Boyarin, *Socrates and the Fat Rabbis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), xi–xiv.

75 See Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

understanding of the formation and original purposes of prominent ideas that continue to play a major role in the Jewish world even today.

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Spinoza's Moral Scepticism

An Overview of Giuseppe Renzi's Interpretation

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Abstract

The twentieth-century Italian philosopher Giuseppe Renzi considered Spinoza's morality to fall within the realm of scepticism. My paper will first examine the premises of Renzi's statement according to which Spinoza's philosophy is the most accomplished expression of "moral scepticism." Second, I will discuss how his view may be harmonised with Spinoza's idea of intellectual life as the supreme good, along with the morality based on this principle. In the final part of this paper, I will claim that although Renzi's image of Spinoza as a sceptic may be considered an interesting but questionable theoretical experiment, his shedding light on some sceptical issues in the *Ethics* must be viewed as a serious contribution to the still pioneering study of Spinoza's relation to scepticism. Therefore, the last section will focus on the concept of moral relativism and to what extent it may be considered valid evidence that the *Ethics* shows some influences from early modern scepticism.

Keywords

Giuseppe Renzi – Spinoza – *Ethics* – scepticism – relativism

1 Introduction

Spinoza's relationship to scepticism and the possibility of identifying sceptical tendencies in his philosophical system have been highly debated topics in recent years.¹ It is, however, mostly unknown that there were some twentieth-century

¹ Stephan Schmid, "Spinoza against the Sceptics," in *A Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2021), 276–85; José María Sánchez de León Serrano,

Italian philosophers who undertook fruitful explorations as to whether there are some sceptical leanings woven throughout the solid rational mesh of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Before exploring the case of Giuseppe Rensi's (1871–1941) *Spinoza*, we should also mention in this regard the striking article titled *L'ultimo mio Spinoza* [My Last Spinoza]² by the poet, philosopher, and playwright Guido Ceronetti (1927–2018), which was published in 1978. His contribution should be read as a poetic allusion to the search for a pessimistic and sceptical attitude behind the metaphysical optimism of Spinoza's *Ethics*. In a few particularly evocative phrases, Ceronetti wondered whether Spinoza

really knew the human heart, because geometric knowledge can only give a partial account of it. The muddle of our heart made Spinoza doubtful. We must furthermore consider Proposition 28 of part 2 of the *Ethics*,³ in which the Body's affections are defined as “confused” in relation to the Soul, to be very human.⁴

Ceronetti accused Spinoza of having avoided really engaging with human suffering in his *Ethics* via the concept of tragedy: “He patiently deletes any trace of it. Spinoza has a sense of what suffering is, but he covers the spilt blood with his grave cloak, which screams tragedy!”⁵ Ceronetti explained that “while Spinozistic philosophy understands everything, Spinoza did not do so,” and continued:

“Spinoza on Global Doubt,” in *Sceptical Doubt*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 147–64; Sánchez de León Serrano, “The Place of Skepticism in Spinoza's Thought,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 35 (2018): 1–9; Oded Schechter, “Spinoza's Miracles: Scepticism, Dogmatism, and Critical Hermeneutics,” in *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies* 2018, ed. Bill Rebigier (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 89–108; Peter Dominik, “Spinoza on Skepticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 220–39; Alison Peterman, “Spinoza on Skepticism,” in *Skepticism: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Diego E. Machuca and Baron Reed (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 342–54; Michael Della Rocca, “Spinoza and the Metaphysics of Scepticism,” *Mind* 116 (2008): 851–74; Dominik Perler, “Spinozas Antiskeptizismus,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 61 (2007): 1–26.

- 2 Guido Ceronetti, “L'ultimo mio Spinoza” [My Last Spinoza], *Barukh Spinoza (1632–1677): Nel terzo centenario della morte (La rassegna mensile di Israel* 44, no. 2 [1978]): 108–15.
- 3 Benedictus de Spinoza, *Ethics* 2, P28, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza, Volume 1*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 113: “The ideas of the affections of the human Body, insofar as they are related only to the human Mind, are not clear and distinct, but confused.” All subsequent citations will refer to this edition.
- 4 Ceronetti, “L'ultimo mio Spinoza,” 108. From now on, all the English translations of Ceronetti's Italian works are my own.
- 5 Ceronetti, “L'ultimo mio Spinoza,” 109.

He is perplexed, evidently nauseated, humanly defeated by something obscure and inscrutable; namely, by the mystery of insanity, by children, by those who have a sick soul, or those who commit suicide. In the final Scholium of *Ethics* 2, Spinoza confessed: “I don’t know what to think about those who hang themselves,” and later, he added, “nor about *pueri, stulti, vesani*, etc.” Here is the gap [...] I am moved by that Spinoza’s ‘etc.’ [...] He fears the irrationality of children, beings who are not understandable in a Spinozistic manner, endowed with a vivid imagination (like women with a prophetic gift, which is the antithesis of rational knowledge), and moreover, he fears something unacceptable to him; namely, that one could contemplate, understand, and love God through an alternative path.⁶

Ceronetti was especially impressed by those passages of Spinoza’s work in which his metaphysical optimism was unable to reconcile itself with a kind of moral pessimism or scepticism that he believed to be deep inside Spinoza’s mind.

Almost fifty years earlier, Giuseppe Renzi had not only alluded to this issue, but had written an entirely sceptical interpretation of Spinoza’s morality, a view meant to show how realist Spinoza’s ethics was in contrast to what a long tradition of interpreters had advocated on his behalf.⁷ In 1929, in a short monograph, Renzi systematically outlined one of the most original readings of Spinoza’s philosophy by labelling Spinoza as a sceptic and his *Ethics* as one of the most accomplished expressions of “moral scepticism.”⁸ Renzi’s view, together with his eccentric and multifaced philosophy, is unfortunately almost unknown in Europe except for Italy and France, and for this reason, this paper also aims to fill this longstanding gap by providing the reader with a general overview of both Renzi’s own philosophy and his interpretation of Spinoza. Indeed, as already noted by one of the interpreters of Renzi’s thought, each of his published essays or monographs must be considered chapters of a single book, one that expresses his own philosophy. However, it has been specified that he pursued this goal without manipulating the doctrines taken into account, but rather by interpreting them through the lens of his own perspective. This would explain why he came to such unusual conclusions,

6 Ceronetti, “L’ultimo mio Spinoza,” 111.

7 There is a tremendous amount of literature on Spinoza’s so-called absolute rationalism. In this regard, I refer to the masterpiece by Martial Guérout, *Spinoza*, 2 vols. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1968–1974). See also Pierre-François Moreau, *Spinoza et le Spinozisme* (Paris: PUF, 2019).

8 Giuseppe Renzi, *Spinoza* (Rome: Formiggini, 1929). Renzi continued to make revisions of this book throughout his life and a new edition of it was published by his pupils after his death in 1941. A more recent edition was published by Aragno Editore in 2019.

which were indeed the most plausible according to his theoretical premises.⁹ Spinoza's philosophy played a significant role in the development of Rensi's own thought, especially as far as the ethical core of his works is concerned: from his first writings, Spinoza's morality is interpreted in a sceptical way.

My paper will first examine the premises of Rensi's statement according to which Spinoza's philosophy is the most accomplished expression of "moral scepticism." Second, I will discuss how Rensi's view may be harmonised with Spinoza's idea of intellectual life as the supreme good, along with the morality based on this principle. In the final part of this paper, I will claim that although Rensi's image of Spinoza as a sceptic may be considered an interesting but questionable theoretical experiment, his shedding light on some sceptical issues in the *Ethics* must be viewed as a serious contribution to the still pioneering study of Spinoza's relationship to scepticism. Therefore, this last section will focus on the concept of moral relativism and to what extent it may be considered valid evidence that the *Ethics* shows some influences from early modern scepticism.

2 The *Ethics*'s Scepticism

It must be said that the originality of Rensi's thinking is mostly related to the fact that he runs against the overall aim of the debate on ethics in the first half of the twentieth century. While this was mostly committed to a search for general principles grounded on rational thinking as a source of universal ethical models, Rensi's inquiry instead aimed to concretely understand human life and the contradictory impulses ruling human habits. His goal was to reach a greater awareness of the relativity of individual behaviours and the standards motivating them, and so to provide politics with some guidelines that would help to produce more effective rules than merely the truest version of them. Rensi's caustic sceptical thinking burst into the Italian culture of the time, which had mostly been shaped by Catholicism and Neo-Idealistic philosophy. Although his scepticism often recalls Sextus Empiricus,¹⁰ from a gnoseological perspective he nevertheless significantly distances himself from it, for

9 See Aniello Montano, "Giuseppe Rensi interprete di Spinoza," *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 50 (1995): 118.

10 On the sceptical sources of Rensi's thinking, see Fabrizio Meroi, "Lo scetticismo nel pensiero di Giuseppe Rensi," *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 51 (1996): 59–85; Emidio Spinelli, "Giuseppe Rensi e le radici greche dello scetticismo," *Syzetesis* 7 (2020): 25–49; and Spinelli, *Le radici del passato. Giuseppe Rensi interprete degli scetticismi antichi* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2021).

two main reasons: first of all, he had a specific target in his polemical strategy, which was Idealistic arguments and principles; second, his scepticism arises from the idea that materialism is the only indisputable certainty. Furthermore, it must be mentioned that ancient sceptics overlooked the question of whether a reality outside our perception can exist and that for them, the search for a practical criterion in life was the only issue to question. In contrast, Rensi believes that reality exists by itself and that it is naturally knowable, but that this cannot be achieved *a priori*—namely, deduced by reason—as “it is necessary to appeal to experience. Scepticism does not deny the truth of facts, but [denies] that they are rational, deducible from reason”;¹¹ namely, that the truth may be gathered from reason’s eternal and universal principles. On the contrary, according to him, knowledge is made up of single facts and not of universality, and there is no indisputable truth, but only interpretations of it. As he wrote in his 1926 *Apologia dello Scetticismo* [Apology for Scepticism]: “Scepticism does not deny a truth which sooner or later changes and which becomes different from [how it was] before, or relative.”¹² From agnoseological ontological perspective, Rensi is a realist; he believes that there is a Being existing in itself responding to its own rules and independent from a knowing subject. He confers on the human mind the task of acknowledging the truth of Being, but of refusing to organise it according to subjective categories. Rensi clarifies that if the contrary was possible—namely, if our mind could provide Being with categories—then its truth would be not only perfectly knowable by our mind, but would even be a product of it. If one accepts that rational knowledge is possible, then we should suppose that things have reasons, which is “like introducing a *finctio* of ourselves or a subjective disposition in them.”¹³ Thus, in Rensi’s view, scepticism may even be considered complementary to Spinoza’s thought, which he greatly admired, because it:

Resolutely contemplates a reality deprived of Good and Bad, Beautiful and Ugly, Perfection and Imperfection (as he describes them “*notiones quas fingere solemus*,” or as “*modi solummodo cogitandi*” and as “*praeiudicia*”); namely, a reality which has been de-rationalised, de-spiritualised, whose perfection consists only in its being like it is.¹⁴

11 Giuseppe Rensi, *Apologia dello Scetticismo* (Rome: Formiggini, 1926), 32. None of Rensi’s works has been translated into English so far. For this reason, from now on all translations of Rensi’s books are mine.

12 Rensi, *Apologia dello Scetticismo*, 36.

13 Rensi, *Apologia dello Scetticismo*, 37.

14 Rensi, *Apologia dello Scetticismo*, 37.

Rensi's interpretation of Spinoza's morality is indeed meant to stress all those elements that may allow him to include that very same morality within the realm of scepticism. In this regard, in this section, I will examine the premises of Rensi's statement according to which Spinoza's philosophy is the most accomplished expression of "moral scepticism."

The first page of Rensi's monograph may be considered a manifesto of his theoretical adventure through Spinoza's system. In a few lines, he discussed what he considered to be the main aspects of Spinoza's philosophy; namely materialism, irrationalism, and scepticism. He wrote:

Spinoza's great attempt is to look at reality not with human eyes, but with those of reality itself, if it had them. It is a fearless realism that has never been overcome. It is a perfect atheism, *merum Atheismus*, as many of his contemporaries had already seen, if one represents God as he is commonly conceived in religions. For this reason, one may completely misunderstand the *Ethics* if the word "God" is not first deleted from our mind; and according to Johannes Clericus, some have said that in an alleged Dutch draft of it, the word did not appear at all. On the other hand, "Nature" was the only word that appeared. There is in Spinoza a kind of materialistic inclination and (contrary to the usual opinion) a radical irrationalism, and a wide trace of scepticism—these are the traits that characterise the heroic thought of Spinoza.¹⁵

The first important step in Rensi's sceptical interpretation is to renounce to the word "substance" when he refers to Spinoza's Nature in order to avoid any theological interpretation of it. Furthermore, he justified Spinoza's use of the word "God" as a poetic licence, comparable to Lucretius's expression *alma Venus* used to refer to Nature as the origin of everything.¹⁶ Thus, Spinoza's Being or Nature should not be understood as a source of morality, ideals, or as a realm of forms. This Being has no goals, and according to it, there is no Good or Bad; there has no reason to be, it is a being-there. In this regard, Rensi also took advantage of the interpretation of Carl Gebhardt—whom he considered to be one of the most profound scholars of Spinoza's philosophy—which stated that his system was "die letztliche Überrationalität des Seins."¹⁷

15 Rensi, *Spinoza*, 7–8. For his reference to Johannes Clericus, see Jean Le Clerc, *De l'incrédulité, où l'on examine les motifs & les raisons générales qui portent les incrédules à rejeter la religion chrétienne. Avec deux lettres où l'on prouve directement la vérité* (Amsterdam, 1696), 358.

16 For this, see Montano, "Giuseppe Rensi interprete di Spinoza," 121.

17 Rensi, *Spinoza*, 41.

As we have seen in the aforementioned quotation, according to Rensi, Spinoza's *Ethics* is a "fearless" philosophical construction thanks to its attempt "to look at reality not with human eyes, but with those of reality itself, if it had them."¹⁸ This realistic and materialistic inclination underlined by Rensi's view thus automatically involved the question of the place of human beings in such a system. Rensi recalled the preface to part 3 of the *Ethics* in order to describe what a human being is according to Spinoza: a human being is a simple *particula*, a small segment of Nature or Being, "which merely lives in the anthropomorphic illusion of being a kingdom by itself, above or outside Nature."¹⁹ There is no mankind or humanity in general in Spinoza's view, according to Rensi, but only individuals; there is no will, but only singular wills, and the illusion of having free will. Spinoza's doctrine introduced the human being as a *spiritual automaton*, so called because its affects are ruled by those same determined laws that affect every other thing of Nature. According to them, a human being can only act in accordance with these laws, and thus each behaviour and action must not be judged, but studied as if it were a geometric figure. Rensi insisted on this aspect and wrote:

Egoism, love of self, survival instinct or will to live. These are the sources from which all our affects gush [...]. We are at the mercy of them, or better to say we are them. Our essence (as well as the essence of everything), as Spinoza always says, is [...] *conatus, appetitus, cupiditas* (Eth. 2, P7–9, Sch. 54, Dem. 56, 57). The subject is nothing other than a game and conflict between affects. A subject outside or independent of them, something that could be above them, able to rule or dominate them, does not exist. A passion gets the better of another passion, and these are the only things which always follow one another.²⁰

Rensi's reading is meant to stress this point in order to justify the sceptical consequences affecting Spinoza's morality. The rigid determination ruling the whole of Being does not apply any exception to human life, into which good and perfection then disappear; absorbed into the same being of things, freedom vanishing and melting into necessity: "Freedom and necessity both of the whole of Being and of human beings became one and the same thing; namely, acting in accordance with the laws of its own nature."²¹ If, according

18 Rensi, *Spinoza*, 41.

19 Rensi, *Spinoza*, 41.

20 Rensi, *Spinoza*, 54.

21 Rensi, *Spinoza*, 55.

to Spinoza, intellect and will are one and the same, Rensi argued, then this means that knowledge and *cupiditas* are also the same thing, and so every idea involves in itself the will to be true; namely, the *conatus*. He underlined that if “knowing” and “wanting” something are identical within Spinoza’s system, then “good” for each individual is merely what seems to be beneficial for one’s own survival according to one’s own nature. In this way, Spinoza made any distinction between utility and ethics vanish, and according to Rensi, he prepared the ground for an adamant moral scepticism or a-moralism. His reading intends to show that moral scepticism is a direct consequence of Spinoza’s metaphysics, a system in which perfection merely consists in the things’ being as they are and in which virtue is the same thing as seeking out for one’s own utility. Rensi described Spinoza’s morality as follows:

Each person has their *own* “morality,” each person acts according to their *own* “morality,” and criminal behaviour also responds to its *own* “morality.” [...] There is no such thing as one absolute morality that applies to all. I would say that there is no morality, no “ought to do” different from what one likes to do, something which looms over the latter. Moral scepticism or a-moralism could not be more adamant and solid.²²

He supported this statement by recalling Spinoza’s well-known letter to Willem van Blijenbergh from 1665, in which he wrote:

If there was a mind to whose individual nature the pursuit of sensual pleasure and knavery was not contrary, is there a reason for virtue that should move that mind to do good and refrain from evil? This question presupposes a contradiction. It is like asking: If it agreed better with the someone’s nature to hang himself, would there be reasons why he should not hang himself? But suppose it were possible that there should be such a nature. Then I say (whether I grant free will or not) that if anyone sees that he can live better on the gallows than at his table, he would act very foolishly if he didn’t go hang himself. Someone who saw clearly that he would enjoy a better and more perfect life or essence by being a knave than by following virtue would also be a fool not to be a knave; for acts of knavery would be virtue in relation to such a perverted human nature.²³

²² Rensi, *Spinoza*, 65.

²³ Benedictus de Spinoza, *Correspondence*, ed. Jonathan Bennett (2017), 43 (letter 23 to van Blijenbergh, 13 March 1665), <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/spinoza1661part2.pdf>, accessed 8 May 2021.

From this argument, Renzi deduced that Nature has not endowed human beings with the rational capacity to make absolute distinctions between good and bad, which is visible both at the individual perspective, with the experience of interior conflicts that lead every person to make decisions without any certain criterion, and in society, which is constantly divided by struggles and disagreements. Renzi's statement that Spinoza is a follower of sceptical principles is based on the idea that according to him, Spinoza's ethics is not valid for the whole of human nature; indeed, he stressed that Spinoza did not believe in a universal mankind: each person retains the supreme right to decide what is good and bad for himself, preventing the possibility of a single morality that is valid for all.²⁴ Renzi's view aimed to show the moral relativism of Spinoza's philosophy, a relativism that he—for good reasons—put forth as an expression of scepticism. Indeed, relativity and relativism had also played a significant role from an ethical point of view, first within ancient sceptical philosophy, as is evident from Sextus Empiricus's discussion in some *tropoi* of his *Outlines of Scepticism*, and later resurfacing in the early modern sceptical revival clarifying its gnoseological value. Renzi underlined the sceptical relativism emerging from Spinoza's *Ethics* and wrote that according to him,

A person who clearly feels happy to be committing bad deeds instead of virtuous ones would be insane if he did not commit bad deeds, because for him, they would be an expression of virtue; also, given the ideal of a human nature devoted to love of spiritual life, one may say that this hypothesis is as absurd as the one stating that a person would prefer to live on the gallows than at his table.²⁵

3 Moral Scepticism and Spinoza's Idea of Intellectual Life as the Supreme Good

However, how can the alleged moral scepticism of the *Ethics* derived from Renzi's reading be harmonised with the indisputable foundation of Spinoza's philosophy; that is, the idea that intellectual life is the supreme good for human beings? As anticipated, this overview of Renzi's interpretation of Spinoza will proceed by examining the solution he envisaged in order to reconcile the *Ethics's* alleged inner scepticism and Spinoza's rational trust in intellectual life as mankind's main source of happiness. Renzi's view also does not waver when

²⁴ See Renzi, *Spinoza*, 86–87.

²⁵ Renzi, *Spinoza*, 88–89.

it has to deal with this point: from the premise that a universal human nature does not exist, he drew the conclusion that even the principle that intellectual engagement is the highest good for human beings cannot be considered universally valid or an essential trait of mankind, but rather as something that is naturally subjective, along with the morality based on such a principle. According to Rensi, “the *exemplar* of human nature, whereof the essence is *cupiditas*, and then its good consisting in an intellectual life, must be understood as a particular ideal conceived by Spinoza and spirits akin to him; this is the ideal of human nature valid *for them*.”²⁶ He clarified his statement by saying that Spinoza's ethics has a personal and subjective meaning, and he continued as follows:

The “*exemplar naturae humanae*” is merely a “heuristic pretense,” the heuristic pretense of the human being envisaged by Spinoza and by those who share his view. His entire ethics is a simple “as if.” It is an ethics conceived for human beings *as if* their essence was a love of intellectual life.²⁷

According to Rensi, Spinoza does not reject the sceptical principle that there is no unique morality that is valid for all—and thus absolute—even at this stage of his philosophy. Rensi underlined that Spinoza's ethics is not universally valid; instead, it is a specific morality conceived as such by a few human beings—to whom Spinoza belongs—who are endowed with a particular “excellent nature.”

In order to clarify this point, it may be useful to recall another of Rensi's works, his 1910 *Antinomie dello spirito* (Spiritual Antinomy), which was written almost ten years before his monograph on Spinoza and in which he was already an important reference point. This book has been defined as a key work for a general understanding of Rensi's speculation on morality, which

26 Rensi, *Spinoza*, 85 (emphasis in original). In this regard, there are some passages of Spinoza's *Ethics* in which he clearly expressed his intention to remind to a “model of human nature,” as below: “For example, Music is good for one who is Melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf. But though this is so, still we must retain these words. For because we desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature which we may look to, it will be useful to us to retain these same words with the meaning I have indicated. In what follows, therefore, I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves. By evil, what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model. Next, we shall say that men are more perfect or imperfect, insofar as they approach more or less near to this model” (*Ethics* 4, preface, 208).

27 Rensi, *Spinoza*, 85–86 (emphasis in original).

was based on the denial of the idea common to all moral doctrines that morally acceptable behaviours consist in acting against our inclinations. On the contrary, he believes that moral values cannot be dictated and made coercive through fear or laws; furthermore, they cannot be taught or learnt thanks to a personal effort. According to Renzi, acting morally is a “gift” given by Nature or by God.²⁸ He bolstered his argument by recalling the last proposition (P42) of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, which states that “blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself; nor do we enjoy it because we restrain our lusts; on the contrary, because we enjoy it, we are able to restrain them.”²⁹ Renzi is of the opinion that a person must already be endowed with this divine gift by Nature; namely, they must already be informed about what blessedness is, as only in this case will one be able to defeat all negative inclinations.³⁰ In his 1912 *Il genio etico* (The Ethical Genius), Renzi stressed the concept of the *élitaire* nature of moral deeds: he believed that they were not the result of a free or utilitarian decision on the subject’s part, but that they were like an interior inclination independent from the will that does not even have the capacity to refrain it. For this reason, Renzi defined moral deeds as perhaps even leading a person to sacrifice himself.³¹ In this regard, in his posthumous book *La morale come pazzia* (Morality as Folly), Renzi also described virtue—namely, moral disposition—as a kind of “holy folly” which entirely possesses a person as far as self-sacrifice.

This short excursus may be useful to better understand the meaning of Renzi’s conception of Spinoza’s ethics as a “specific ethics” meant for a few human beings endowed with a particular “excellent nature.” According to Renzi, these kinds of people adjust their deeds to a human ideal shaped by their own noble natures. For this reason, this kind of ethics, he underlined, cannot be based on any precepts. He wrote: “To give precepts would be vain, because everything is absolutely determined. This ethics merely provides the one who accepts this ideal as an *exemplar* of human nature with some practical guidelines.”³² Renzi recalls that according to Spinoza, “intellectual life is liberating and a source of happiness, is the superior form of life, is supreme blessedness: but one must estimate its value and feel the fascination with it; it is like this for *those people* who feel it.”³³ Renzi’s aim of underlining the relative value of Spinoza’s ethics is particularly clear in the following passage:

28 See Aniello Montano, “La morale nel pensiero di Giuseppe Renzi,” *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 60 (2005): 693.

29 Spinoza, *Ethics* 5, P42, 307.

30 See Montano, “La morale nel pensiero di Giuseppe Renzi,” 649.

31 Montano, “La morale nel pensiero di Giuseppe Renzi,” 696.

32 Renzi, *Spinoza*, 86.

33 Renzi, *Spinoza*, 87 (emphasis in original).

Intellectual life truly and absolutely corresponds to the supreme good. However, this statement must not be understood as if it was acknowledged or esteemed as the supreme good by all. [...] They are two different things. I'm certain that my view of what is good is the truest and highest one, but I am also certain that it cannot be valid for all. Are these two incompatible statements? These are the two statements combined together by Spinoza. Only at this point may one shed light on the full coherence of his thought, denied by many interpreters or acknowledged by some others only by removing the first of the abovementioned principles, though both belong to him.³⁴

Rensi believes that Spinoza's greatness undoubtedly consisted in the following point:

He was able (perhaps he was the only one among the philosophers) to keep his eyes open on two apparently incompatible truths and coherently integrate them: on the one hand, that of ethical scepticism and the non-existence of a sole morality valid for all; on the other, that of intellectual life being the supreme good and of the morality based on it being the superior form of morality. Let us take the example of the life of an angel and that of a toad. A judge in charge of evaluating them both would have no doubts that the angel's life is the superior one and the happiest one. Yet this reason is not enough to convince the toad of the same or to compel the toad to recognise it as such. On the contrary, the toad would be unhappy living like an angel, and he would rather consider this to be a bad thing.³⁵

Like the angel and the toad, a person who completely devotes himself to an intellectual life, accepting poverty and sacrifice, will not judge someone else who is ready to do anything to advance up the social ladder, but will merely say to him, "since you are as you are, *you* are right to do what you do; in the light of *your* nature, what you do is *your* 'virtue.'"³⁶ Rensi's interpretation of Spinoza's moral philosophy based on Spinoza's statement that "each person acts according to his own nature" must be read as a celebration of his own conviction regarding the non-existence of universal moral rules that are always valid for all. On this principle, Rensi, in his unfinished and posthumous book *La morale come pazzia*, fully developed his idea of morality, which he described

34 Rensi, *Spinoza*, 87.

35 Rensi, *Spinoza*, 88.

36 Rensi, *Spinoza*, 88 (emphasis in original).

as follows: "It is not a product of wisdom or knowledge, but of intuition, it is a fundamentally a-rational morality, not objective or measurable; it is like an irrational or better to say 'crazy' impulse."³⁷ In his *Autobiografia intellettuale* (Intellectual Autobiography) of 1939, he returned to his unfinished book, specifying that he had not had the opportunity to complete it, but if he had ever had the chance to do so, "he would have mapped out the guidelines of a morality which is extremely anti-utilitarian, absolutely a-dogmatic, individualist, sceptical in the sense that it rejects any universalism and rationalism."³⁸ As correctly underlined by Montano, Renzi's vision of morality here is not valid for all and it is very aristocratic and not teachable, as already mentioned above; it appears to be senseless and also unsuccessful, because "it does not transform anyone who is not naturally good into a good person, and between a person possessed by this 'moral craziness' and someone guided by unscrupulous ambitions, the latter will always win; immorality usually wins."³⁹ This kind of morality must also be considered to be free, because it is a divine or natural gift, and finally as risky, because a person who acts morally may even risk his own life.

This summary of Renzi's conception of morality may explain the great fascination that Spinoza's *Ethics* may have exercised over his thinking: an ethics which in his view had the merit of reconciling—thanks to his moral scepticism—individuality and many facets of human nature and the idea that spiritual life is the highest good, along with the morality based on it. Although according to Renzi, Spinoza rejected the idea of merit or demerit, because each person essentially acts according to his own nature, he nevertheless underlined that the question of the source of human contentment remains, which recalls that of eternity:

This is what reveals our real self, our nature. A specific behaviour qualifies human nature, the nature each one has; it determines whether someone's nature may be identified with things which have just a shadow of Being, which must therefore be destroyed and dissolved, or with eternal principles. When a human being manages to identify himself with the latter, despite his passing nature and even if defeated and killed, he will become immortal, because his Self will be made immortal in those eternal principles.⁴⁰

37 Renzi, *La morale come pazzia*, ed. Alessandro Fersen (Modena: Guanda, 1942), 223.

38 Renzi, *Autobiografia intellettuale. La mia filosofia. Testamento filosofico* (Milan: Dall'Oglio, 1989), 49.

39 Montano, "La morale nel pensiero di Giuseppe Renzi," 703 (my translation).

40 Renzi, *Spinoza*, 89.

4 The Moral Relativism within Sceptical Philosophy

As aforementioned, Renzi's argument is essentially grounded on the assumption that the second and third stages of knowledge in Spinoza's philosophy, which lead human beings to consider intellectual life as the supreme good in itself, are not valid for all, but must be conceived merely as a "model" and also considered as such only by Spinoza and the few others who share his view. Thus, Renzi's argument in favour of a sceptical interpretation of the *Ethics* took advantage of the following passages of Spinoza's writing in which he stated that "desire is the very essence of man (by Def. Aff. 1), i.e. (by IIIP7), a striving by which a man strives to persevere in his being,"⁴¹ thus "the striving to preserve oneself is the first and only foundation of virtue. For no other principle can be conceived prior to this one (by P22) and no virtue can be conceived without it."⁴² However, Renzi stressed P32 of *Ethics* 4, according to which human beings "can disagree in nature insofar as they are torn by affects which are passions; and to that extent also one and the same man is changeable and inconstant"⁴³ and "insofar as men are torn by affects which are passions, they can be contrary to one another."⁴⁴ The impossibility of establishing universal moral values due to the acknowledgement of the different impulses guiding the deeds of human beings is at the origin of Renzi's admiration of Spinoza's thinking. According to him, Spinoza's *Ethics* had deprived reality "of Good and Bad, Beautiful and Ugly, Perfection and Imperfection (as he describes them '*notiones quas fingere solemus*,' or as '*modi solummodo cogitandi*' and as '*praeiudicia*')."⁴⁵ Spinoza's most important achievement, in Renzi's view, was de-rationalising reality itself and making its perfection consist only in its being as it is.

It is true that Spinoza was a nominalist who believed that there is no universal human nature, but only individuals (*Ethics* 2, P40, Sch. 1), and there is also no universal will, but only many singular volitions (*Ethics* 2, P51; Cor. and Dem.), but it cannot be denied that according to him, the love of an intellectual life—namely, human life ruled by reason, which constitutes the highest form of good—should be considered a universally valid archetype (*Ethics* 4, preface). Renzi's reading of Spinoza's philosophy, in contrast, stressed the elitism of such an *exemplar* of human nature, justifying it as a natural or divine gift only intended for some people. Renzi misinterpreted Spinoza's gnoseological

41 Spinoza, *Ethics* 4, P18, Dem., 221.

42 Spinoza, *Ethics* 4, P22, Cor., 225.

43 Spinoza, *Ethics* 4, P32, 231.

44 Spinoza, *Ethics* 4, P33, 231.

45 See Spinoza, *Ethics* 4, P33, 231.

theory: in the *Ethics*, he considered knowledge to be a rigid and motionless thing, believing that human nature cannot change and that accepting the contrary would be like acknowledging that a person could transform his own essence. Renzi seems to deny a pivotal concept of Spinoza's doctrine which stated that human beings may pass from a lesser to a greater perfection and the opposite; furthermore, according to Spinoza, this does not mean that

someone is changed from one essence, or form, to another. For example, a horse is destroyed as much if it is changed into a man as if it is changed into an insect. Rather, we conceive that his power of acting, insofar as it is understood through his nature, is increased or diminished.⁴⁶

By denying this aspect of Spinoza's *Ethics*, Renzi instead grounded and developed all his arguments on the assumption that each person is ruled by the search for his own utility, meaning by this the lowest one conceived by nature; namely, something suggested by momentary impulses and particular conditions. In this way, Renzi excluded the possibility that people may achieve their true utility—namely, their rational utility, which best preserves their being—by contributing to the building of civil society.⁴⁷

Despite the discrepancy in Renzi's interpretation of Spinoza's gnoseology, he shed light on a meaningful aspect of his *Ethics*; namely, the relativity of human perceptions and moral values, which Spinoza considered in depth together with their ethical difficulties. Before providing a formal definition of "good" and "evil," Spinoza refers to them as labels—namely "modes of thinking"—applied by human beings to things:

As far as good and evil are concerned, they also indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another. For one and the same thing can, at the same time, be good, and bad, and also indifferent. For example, Music is good for one who is Melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf.⁴⁸

46 Spinoza, *Ethics* 4, preface, 208.

47 See Spinoza, *Ethics* 4, appendix, chap. 9, 268: "Nothing can agree more with the nature of anything than other individuals of the same species. And so (by VII) nothing is more useful to man in preserving his being and enjoying a rational life than a man who is guided by reason." See also in this regard Montano, "Giuseppe Renzi interprete di Spinoza," 137.

48 Spinoza, *Ethics* 4, preface, 208.

Good and evil are thus “*notiones quas fingere solemus,*” or “*modi solummodo cogitandi*” and “*praeiudicia.*” These labels do not really say anything about the thing defined as good or evil, but more about the person and his will or desire for something which according to Spinoza is at the origin of whether we judge something to be good or evil. Therefore, moral values directly follow from the person’s state of wishes and wills. In *Ethics* 3, P39, Sch., he wrote that

each one, from his own affect, judges, or evaluates, what is good and what is [evil] [...]. So the greedy man judges an abundance of money best, and poverty worst. The ambitious man desires nothing so much as esteem and dreads nothing so much as shame.⁴⁹

Spinoza added to his definition of good and evil that “by good here I understand every kind of joy, and whatever leads to it, and especially whatever satisfies any kind of longing, whatever that may be. And by evil, every kind of sadness and especially what frustrates longing.”⁵⁰ The relativity of these values, which also does not change when completed by the affects of joy and sadness—because we experience that no kind of joy may be considered a result of mindful desire—is a weakness in his *Ethics* of which Spinoza seems to be aware and which he is committed to overcoming. What makes the development of his ethical naturalism more plausible is the necessity of formulating a concept of perfection based on a human model; therefore, he conceives of the “human mind’s power of thinking its perfection; joy as an increase in that power or passage to a greater perfection; and sadness as a decrease in that power or passage to a lesser perfection”.⁵¹

For because we desire to form an idea of man, as a model of human nature which we may look to, it will be useful to us to retain these same words with the meaning I have indicated. In what follows, therefore, I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves. By evil, what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model. Next, we shall say that men are more perfect or imperfect, insofar as they approach more or less near to this model.⁵²

49 Spinoza, *Ethics* 3, P39, Sch., 170.

50 Spinoza, *Ethics* 3, P39, Sch., 170.

51 Spinoza, *Ethics* 3, P11, 149.

52 Spinoza, *Ethics* 4, preface, 208.

This premise allowed Spinoza to develop his ethical naturalism in a consistent way in which striving for his own preservation is one and the same thing as building the premises for a fruitful living together:

For the more each one seeks his own advantage, and strives to preserve himself, the more he is endowed with virtue (by P20), or what is the same (by D8), the greater is his power of acting according to the laws of his own nature, i.e. (by IIP3), of living from the guidance of reason. But men most agree in nature, when they live according to the guidance of reason (by P35). Therefore (by P35C1), men will be most useful to one another, when each one most seeks his own advantage, q.e.d.

Schol.: What we have just shown is also confirmed by daily experience, which provides so much and such clear evidence that this saying is in almost everyone's mouth: man is a God to man.⁵³

The necessity of formulating an ideal human being based on the guidance of reason shows the inner difficulties of Spinoza's moral theory and his awareness of the more common irrationality ruling human nature as follows:

Still, it rarely happens that men live according to the guidance of reason. Instead, their lives are so constituted that they are usually envious and burdensome to one another. They can hardly, however, live a solitary life; hence, that definition which makes man a social animal has been quite pleasing to most. And surely we do derive, from the society of our fellow men, many more advantages than disadvantages. So let the Satirists laugh as much as they like at human affairs, let the Theologians curse them, let Melancholies praise as much as they can a life that is uncultivated and wild, let them disdain men and admire the lower animals. Men still find from experience that by helping one another they can provide themselves much more easily with the things they require, and that only by joining forces can they avoid the dangers that threaten on all sides—not to mention that it is much preferable and more worthy of our knowledge to consider the deeds of men, rather than those of the lower animals. But I shall treat this topic more fully elsewhere.⁵⁴

53 Spinoza, *Ethics* 4, preface, 234.

54 Spinoza, *Ethics* 4, preface, 234.

If the main attempt of Spinoza's *Ethics* was to show that reason must be considered the only way to achieve a universal commonality among mankind,⁵⁵ then this should persuade us that the relativity of human perception and its consequence for morality were serious issues that Spinoza considered and struggled with.

The relativity of ethical values highlighted by Rensi's interpretation has been widely debated, first within ancient sceptical philosophy and later clarifying its gnoseological value in the early modern sceptical revival. In the eighth, ninth, and tenth *tropoi* of Sextus's *Outlines of Scepticism*, gnoseological and moral relativity represents a general leitmotif of his arguments.⁵⁶ His sceptical relativism demolished the same concept of the absolute, affecting the notions of signified and signifier, alike and unlike. It showed the great variety of human opinions and the impossibility of qualifying what an object is, but only how it appears to be, and then finally the obligation to suspend judgement concerning the nature of things. Not only is knowledge then reduced to a mere relationship depending on the connection between the knower and the knowable, but what especially emerges from the last *tropos* is the absence of a unique concept of moral behaviour. Through a rich variety of examples, Sextus demonstrated that morality is a product of the laws, customs, and beliefs of each population, such as in this case: "Among us it is unlawful to marry your own mother or sister; but the Persians—especially those of them thought to practice wisdom, the Magi—marry their mothers, Egyptians take their sisters in marriage."⁵⁷

The subjectivity of knowledge and also of morality reappeared in a more radicalised form in early modern times, first in the sceptical thought of Michel de Montaigne. In his work, the relativity of the gnoseological process suggested by Sextus's *Outlines* was increased by the Stoic doctrine of the many sides of the human soul that was very popular during this period: according to this, the contradictions of human behaviour, its extremes or sudden changes, could be

55 In his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, especially its concluding chapter 20, Spinoza also underlines the merits of democratic government and the freedom of thought and expression. According to him, they are of considerable value because they effectively support the accomplishment of a rational life and consequently of a universal commonality.

56 On the trope of relativity, see Tad Brennan and Jongsuh J. Lee, "A Relative Improvement," *Phronesis* 59 (2014): 246–71. See also Michela Torbidoni, "Il metodo del dubbio nel Socrate di Simone Luzzatto," in *Filosofo e rabbino nella Venezia del Seicento. Studi su Simone Luzzatto*, ed. Giuseppe Veltri (Rome: Aracne, 2015), 218–25; Giuseppe Veltri, *Alienated Wisdom* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 217–24.

57 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, ed. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), book 3, 197–98.

explained by the sentence *virtutes esse animalia*.⁵⁸ This would justify the complexity of human conduct, which is indeed due to the existence of different “animals” or appetites orienting each deliberation. In the chapter of his essays entitled “On the Inconstancy of Our Actions,” he wrote:

Our normal fashion is to follow the inclinations of our appetite, left and right, up and down, as the winds of occasion bear us along. What we want is only in our thought for the instant that we want it: we are like that creature which takes on the colour of wherever you put it. What we decided just now we will change very soon; and soon afterwards we come back to where we were: it is all motion and inconstancy.⁵⁹

Shortly after this, he stated:

Not only does the wind of chance events shake me about as it lists, but I also shake and disturb myself by the instability of my stance: anyone who turns his prime attention on to himself will hardly ever find himself in the same state twice. I give my soul this face or that, depending upon which side I lay it down on. I speak about myself in diverse ways: that is because I look at myself in diverse ways. Every sort of contradiction can be found in me, depending upon some twist or attribute: timid, insolent; chaste, lecherous; talkative, taciturn; tough, sickly; clever, dull; brooding, affable; lying, truthful; learned, ignorant; generous, miserly and then prodigal—I can see something of all that in myself, depending on how I gyrate; and anyone who studies himself attentively finds in himself and in his very judgement this whirring about and this discordancy. There is nothing I can say about myself as a whole simply and completely, without intermingling and admixture.⁶⁰

The many facets of the human soul, together with the great variety of human laws and customs, may be considered the common thread of Montaigne’s famous *Essays*, as is evident from the fascinating gallery of images presented there. This great diversity is furthermore increased by a comparison of the habits of past and present days. As underlined by Richard Popkin,

58 See Giuseppe Veltri, “Dannare l’universale per il particolare?” *Colpa individuale e pena collettiva pel pensiero di Rabbi Simone Luzzatto*, *La rassegna mensile di Israel*, 77, nos. 1–2 (2012): 72–73.

59 Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, ed. and trans. Michael Andrew Screech (London: Penguin, 2003), 364.

60 Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 367.

Montaigne's re-evaluation of this issue within his thought was symptomatic of a new sceptical awareness that originated from the study of the ancient world in the early modern era and the new challenges of modern times thanks to new geographical discoveries and scientific revolutions. As already noted by Popkin, "in both of these newly found worlds Montaigne discerned the relativity of man's intellectual, cultural, and social achievements, a relativity that was to undermine the whole concept of the nature of man and his place in the moral cosmos."⁶¹

This brief overview is meant to point out that scepticism represented one of the many expressions of an era of general revolt against dogmatic certainties. It deeply shaped the intellectual battles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in which "the effect of his [Sextus's] thoughts upon the problem of the criterion stimulated a quest for certainty that gave rise to the new rationalism of René Descartes and the 'constructive scepticism' of Pierre Gassendi and Marin Mersenne."⁶² Indeed, a more rational thinker could also not avoid facing them, and even those like Spinoza, who certainly rejected it, may have nourished their own philosophy with sceptical arguments. As is known, scepticism troubled intellectual debates in early modern times from theology to all areas of human interest, and its inner complexity was commensurate with the great challenges of the modern era originating from the new geographical discoveries, scientific advancements, and the new critical approach to Holy Scripture. Thus, ancient sceptical tools were found in different forms in the philosophical discussions of modern sceptical thinkers, and even Spinoza's anti-dogmatism seemed not to be indifferent to them, despite the consistency of his rational system.

5 Conclusion

Putting forth different arguments, the majority of scholars agree that Spinoza was not involved in the struggle with the sceptical renaissance of his days and that the core of his philosophical system holds itself back from the possibility of sceptical doubt. Among the last studies, an exception on this issue is constituted by the work of José María Sánchez de León Serrano, who argues that Spinoza's very naturalism may lead to sceptical conclusions. He claims that Spinoza is certainly not indifferent to scepticism and that his anti-scepticism

61 Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 44.

62 Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 18.

cannot be a direct consequence of either his naturalism or his concept of true ideas. The core of this argument is, in short, the following:

How can the human mind, whose perception of nature is unavoidably partial, attain adequate knowledge *at all*? We can, thus, define in more precise terms the difficulty that naturalism entails. From the absolute perspective of nature, everything fits perfectly, and there are no gaps; thus, knowledge is not a difficult issue, and skepticism does not pose a serious challenge. From the partial perspective of the human mind, by contrast, there is an unavoidable gap or disagreement between how things appear to us and how they actually are. As a result, the skeptical challenge resurfaces.⁶³

I agree with his conclusion that “skepticism, thus, turns out to be an internal difficulty generated by naturalism itself, rather than something external to Spinoza’s philosophy”⁶⁴ and that Spinoza was not only aware of it, but even committed to overcoming this issue.

The case of Rensi’s monograph deserves special attention, because it deals with the issue of sceptical doubt within Spinoza’s philosophy from a perspective—that of morality—which has not been taken into account so far. Spinoza’s naturalism, and more specifically the unavoidable and unsolvable partiality of human perception, is at the origin of Rensi’s sceptical interpretation of Spinoza’s morality, which despite the aforementioned inconsistency may nevertheless be considered significant not only in the current debate on Spinoza’s connection to scepticism, but also as a useful tool for a deeper comprehension of the core of his ethics itself. Rensi’s theoretical experiment has the merit of having explored and highlighted some aspects of Spinoza’s moral philosophy which—even more than his ontology—made it possible to take an unusual path and interpret Spinoza as a sceptical and unethical thinker, as well as a promoter of an irrational philosophy. Scepticism, irrationalism, and empiricism are the key aspects of Spinoza’s thought that emerge from Rensi’s reading: his uncommon interpretation defends the statement that his ethics not only lacked precepts and categorical imperative, but also discarded the possibility of a collective morality. On the contrary, it established different individualities striving to preserve their lives: plurality and relation became the only concepts by which Rensi could describe the Spinozistic substance and Spinoza as a mature promoter of a sceptical ethics that eventually turns itself into a sort of a-moralism.

63 Sánchez de León Serrano, “The Place of Skepticism in Spinoza’s Thought,” 5–6.

64 Sánchez de León Serrano, “The Place of Skepticism in Spinoza’s Thought,” 2.

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Mobility and Creativity

David de' Pomis and the Place of the Jews in Renaissance Italy

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Abstract

Many scholars believe that mobility was one of the elements that characterised the history of the Jews in the early modern period. They also maintain that this movement from one country to another influenced the cultural productivity of many Jewish intellectuals. David de' Pomis was one of the most important figures in the Jewish community of the Italian Renaissance. After being expelled from the State of the Church, he moved to Venice in 1569, where he wrote his works. Throughout his life, he attempted to find a way to recover from the trauma of expulsion, and he did so by explaining Judaism to a Christian audience through a variety of means: translations from Hebrew into the vernacular; speeches to Christian authorities; a trilingual dictionary; and a Latin apologia of Judaism. The languages that de' Pomis used and the works he decided to write were the daughters of his experiences, which gave birth to an entirely new body of work. Thus, if the combination of the two experiences—mobility and creativity—underlies the history of European Jewry in the early modern period, then de' Pomis's story and work represent a recognisable but as yet unexplored fragment of the broader history of the Jews in Italy during the Renaissance.

Keywords

mobility – expulsion – Jews in Italy – apology – creativity – Renaissance – David de' Pomis – Venice

1 Introduction

The expellee has been ripped from his usual environment. Habit is a blanket that hides the state of things. In the habitual environment, only changes are perceived, but not permanence. In exile, everything is unusual. Exile is an ocean of chaotic information. Exile is uninhabitable, because it is unusual. In order to inhabit it, one must first transform the information whizzing around it into meaningful messages; one must process the data. It is a question of survival: if you do not perform the task of processing the data, you will end up swallowed by the waves of exile. Data transformation is synonymous with creation. The expellee must be creative if he does not want to go to ruin.¹

The words of Vilém Flusser, a Czech Jewish philosopher who was forced into exile first to Brazil and then to France, perfectly fit the character of David de' Pomis, particularly the idea that creativity in exile is triggered by the necessity of processing the chaos of data that emerges when the exiled person is abruptly removed from their usual environment, which is a blanket that allows them to perceive changes, but not permanence. In fact, de' Pomis's intellectual life was characterised by this very fracture, between a before, in which he lived a quiet, untroubled life in the territories belonging to the State of the Church, and an after, in which his exile in Venice forced him to reckon with completely different living conditions. While the former period was characterised only by his occupation as a physician, the latter (in which his literary production occurred) was marked by a feverish writing activity that aimed to help him to cope with the event that had radically transformed his life. For this reason, his personality and work differ from those of the other Jewish intellectuals such as Azariah de' Rossi, Judah Moscato, and Abraham Portaleone, who were more typical examples of Italian Jewish thinkers living in the second half of the sixteenth century.

2 The Trauma of Expulsion

De' Pomis was born in Spoleto in 1524 to a family of bankers. In the 1530s, he started studying medicine, first in Todi and then in Perugia, where he graduated in 1555.² He began his medical practice in Magliano Sabino, though he was

¹ Vilém Flusser, "Exil und Kreativität," *Spuren* 9 (1985): 104–9 (my translation).

² For de' Pomis's life, see Guido Bartolucci, "Pomis, David (de')," *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* 84 (2015): 682–85. The main sources are (up until 1588) the Hebrew introduction

interrupted by the decrees issued by Pope Paul IV (1476–1559) that prevented Jewish doctors from treating Christian patients (1555). After leaving the territories of the State of the Church, de' Pomis was first accepted into the service of Count Niccolò Orsini and then that of the Sforza family, but recurring difficulties prevented him from working. When Pius V ascended the papal throne (1504–1572), de' Pomis was obliged to leave the State of the Church and moved to Venice, most probably after 1569.

The description of the first years of de' Pomis's activity, mainly provided by his Hebrew autobiography, which was published in 1587, outlines the sufferings he endured in exile, where every city that welcomed him was described in biblical terms as “city of refuge” and where, due to the difficult environmental conditions, he had to cope with the loss of most of his family.³ Therefore, despite his arrival in Venice, the exile heavily conditioned his life, above all inducing him to rethink the relationship between his people and the Christian world around him.

After his arrival in Venice, de' Pomis established a dense network of friendships beyond the borders of the lagoon city: the Grimani family—particularly Giovanni, Patriarch of Aquileia—Margaret of Savoy, Giacomo Contarini, Pasquale Cicogna, and Francesco Maria II, Duke of Urbino.⁴ He also became a

to *Şemaḥ David* (David de' Pomis, *Şemaḥ David. Dittionario novo Hebraico, molto copioso, dechiarato in tre lingue, con bellissime annotationi e con l'indice latino e volgare, de tutti li suoi significati* [Venice: Giovanni di Gara, 1587], 5r–v); Ariel Toaff, *Gli ebrei a Perugia* (Perugia: Deputazione di Storia Patria dell'Umbria, 1975), 146–49; Toaff, “Il commercio del denaro e le comunità ebraiche ‘di confine’ (Pitigliano, Sorano, Monte San Savino, Lippiano) tra Cinque e Seicento,” *Italia Judaica. Gli ebrei in Italia tra Rinascimento ed Età barocca. Atti del II Convegno internazionale, Genova 10–15 giugno 1984* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1986), 99–100. The main biographies of de' Pomis give 1525 as the year of his birth. This date may have come from his account of the loss of part of his father's estate in 1526–1527, in which he reports that this occurred in 5287, two years after his birth (de' Pomis, *Şemaḥ David*, 5r; Toaff, *Gli ebrei a Perugia*, 133). The Jewish date was interpreted as the Christian year 1527, fixing his birth to 1525. However, in a letter written to Ferdinando I de' Medici in August 1593, de' Pomis explicitly states that he was born in 1524 (Florence, Archivio di Stato, Archivio del Principato, vol. 840, l. 882r: “Sono nato nel 24”). Another testimony confirming the year 1524 is found in the introduction to his medical treatise *Enarratio brevis*, which was published in Venice in 1588, in which he declares himself to be sixty-four years old (David de' Pomis, *Enarratio brevis, de senum affectibus praecavendis atque curandis rationali methodo decorata, aequae atque praestantissimis arcanisque auxiliis in quibusdam profligandis morbis, insignita in qua, quod singulae humani corporis prave constitutiones haud absque innati caloris oppressione defectuae, oriri possint, passim liquidoque ostenditur* [...] [Venice: Giovanni Verisco, 1588], *2v). It is therefore likely that given that the Jewish year began at the end of September, the year 5287 mentioned by de' Pomis should be understood as 1526. All the translations from the Latin and vernacular of de' Pomis's works are my own.

3 De' Pomis, *Şemaḥ David*, 5r.

4 See the letters and the introductions to his Latin and vernacular works quoted in this article.

prominent member of the city's Jewish community and came into the circle of the great Venetian rabbis of the time, such as Baruch Calimani, Samuel Jehuda Katzenellenbogen, and Abigdor Cividale, as well as the intellectuals who were involved in the press, such as Isaac Gershon.⁵

When he arrived in Venice in 1571, de' Pomis, who was forty-seven years old, published his first writing, a translation of the book of Qohelet.⁶ Before this date, there is no evidence of any work, so it can be assumed that the papal policies and the suffering they caused him (the deaths of his wife and children), as well as the complete destruction of the environment in which he had grown up, encouraged him to write. His works, therefore, clearly express the trauma that marked the first half of his life and represent his creative attempt to respond to it. It is important to stress one aspect: de' Pomis was not exiled among foreigners, as he immediately became integrated into the Venetian Jewish community. He continued to work as a doctor there, as evidenced by his speeches on the plague that struck Venice in 1577. His trauma lies, above all, in the radical change in his living conditions: in his having been forced to abandon a model of life that he could not find in the Venetian ghetto and that he would attempt to recover, for example, by asking the Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand I de' Medici, to allow him to teach Hebrew at the University of Pisa during the last years of his life.⁷ In this period, Venice was also becoming an inhospitable place for Jews because of the conflict between the republic and the Ottoman Empire. This conflict, in fact, had led Venetian society to believe that the Jews were a threat to the security of the republic because of their secret alliance with the Turks. In 1571, the Venetian Senate approved the non-renewal of the Jews' *condotta* and their consequent expulsion from the city at the request of one of its inhabitants, Alvise Grimani.⁸

5 See de' Pomis, *Şemaḥ David*, 5v.

6 De' Pomis, *L'Ecclesiaste di Salomone. Novamente dal testo hebreo tradotto e secondo il vero senso nel volgar idioma dichiarato dall'eccellente phisico M. David de' Pomi Hebreo* (Venice: Giordano Ziletti, 1571); de' Pomis, *Discorso intorno a l'humana miseria e sopr'al modo di fuggirla con molti bellissimoi esempi et avvertimenti [...]* (Venice: Appresso Giordano Ziletti e compagni, 1572). On the use of the vernacular in the works of Italian Jews, see Alessandro Guetta, *Italian Jewry in the Early Modern Era* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 94, 248 n. 7.

7 Florence, Archivio di Stato, Archivio del Principato, vol. 839, f. 534, David de' Pomis, letter to Ferdinando I de' Medici, 4 June 1593 (see Ariel Toaff, *Il prestigiatore di Dio. Avventure e miracoli di un alchimista ebreo nelle corti del Rinascimento* [Milan: Rizzoli, 2010], 122–23).

8 On this episode, see Benjamin Ravid, "The Socio-Economic Background of the Expulsion and Readmission of the Venetian Jews, 1571–1573," in *Essays in Modern Jewish History: A Tribute to Ben Halpern*, ed. Frances Malino and Phyllis Cohen Albert (London: Associated University Press, 1982); Benjamin Arbel, "Venezia, gli ebrei e l'attività di Salomone Ashkenasi

3 The First Works

What happened during those years strengthened de' Pomis's commitment. He began to write a series of works in the vernacular, both printed and handwritten, in which he attempted to show that Judaism and Christianity were linked by a common destiny.

In the first treatise, which was dedicated to Giacomo Contarini, de' Pomis glorifies the institutions of the lagoon city, comparing them to the biblical model in terms of divinity and efficiency.⁹ He begins his speech by praising Venice, which is based on the heavenly order, as a model and example for all earthly governments, which should build their laws and institutions on it.¹⁰ The constitution willed by God is a republican one, and this is clearly demonstrated in the king's law that Samuel presents to the people, a *ius* according to which the ruler is above all laws and tyrannises his subjects.¹¹ The words of the

nella guerra di Cipro," in *Gli ebrei e Venezia, secoli XIII–XVIII: Atti del convegno internazionale organizzato dall'Istituto di storia della società e dello stato veneziano della Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia, Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, 5–10 giugno 1983*, ed. Gaetano Cozzi (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1987), 163–90. This decree, however, was entirely revoked.

- 9 David de' Pomis, *Breve discorso nel quale se dimostra la maestà divina haver particolar cura e custodia della republica Venetiana e che li oderni di essa sono nel publico governo alle divine Mosaice constitutioni conformi* (Modena, Biblioteca Estense, Fondo estense, Italiano 981, alpha H.9.2). Now published in Guido Bartolucci, "Venezia nel pensiero politico ebraico Rinascimentale: Un testo ritrovato di David de' Pomis," *Rinascimento* 44 (2005): 225–47. See also Guetta, *Italian Jewry in the Early Modern Era*, 86–87. For the Venetian model in Jewish political thought, see Avraham Melamed, "The Myth of Venice in Italian Jewish Thought," in *Italia Judaica. Atti del I convegno internazionale, Bari 18–22 maggio 1981* (Rome: Multigrafica editrice, 1983), 401–13.
- 10 De' Pomis, *Breve discorso*, fols. 7r–7v: "Se alcuna republica è in questa nostra età sotto la divina regola costituita, la venetiana, è veramente manifesto, è vivo essemplio d'ogni celeste ordine, regolatrice, (senza dubbio), di molt'altri magistrati, over sembante et idea, dalla quale non pochi prencipi della christianità formano le lor perpetue e religiose leggi." ("If any republic in this age is constituted under the divine rule, the Venetian one, it is truly manifest, is a living example of every celestial order, the regulator [without doubt] of many other magistrates, that is the semblance and idea from which not a few princes of Christianity form their perpetual and religious laws").
- 11 De' Pomis, *Breve discorso*, fols. 7v–8r: "Ma quanto sia grata ad Iddio, parlando universalmente, il dominio della republica, si può assai bene comprendere da queste sue santissime parole scritte nel primo libro de' Re, perciocchè, essendosi sdegnato contra 'l popolo che dimandò per suo capo un re, non volendo più stare sotto forma di republica, disse per bocca del profeta Samuel" ("But God's gratefulness for the dominion of the republic, universally speaking, can be very well understood from these most holy words of his, written in the first book of Kings, for when he was angry at the people who demanded a king as their leader, not wanting to be governed as a republic, he spoke through the mouth of the prophet Samuel"). This is followed by a quotation from the famous passage

judge, de' Pomis writes, are a way of dissuading the Jews from demanding a single king and instead encouraging them to choose a government with many leaders, in which it will be more difficult for everyone to contribute to an unjust policy and, above all, in which both the harm and the public interest affect everyone and not just a single person.¹² He contrasts this anti-monarchical vision with the moment when Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, advises him to seek help from wiser men when judging cases (explained in Exod 18). In describing this episode, which led to the selection of the heads of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens from among the people, de' Pomis compares the institutional structure found in the book of Exodus to the four organs of the Venetian Republic: the Great Council, the *Pregadi*, the *Quarantia*, and finally the Council of Ten.¹³ The short treatise on the Venetian magistrates concludes with a prophetic introduction in which de' Pomis offers an interpretation of some passages from Isaiah and Daniel. In fact, he claims that God loved the Republic of Venice so much that he would never abandon it to a tyrant (identified with Sultan Selim II), but would always defend it: this resulted from the Hebrew prophecies that spoke of the future victory of the Christians over

in 1 Sam 8:11–18. In this presentation, de' Pomis does not devote much space to the figure of the king, as if he rejects his legitimacy outright. His analysis in his explanation of the term *melekh* in his dictionary is different: cf. de' Pomis, *Şemah David*, 125v–26v.

- 12 De' Pomis, *Breve discorso*, fols. 10r–10v: “Si vede con quanto bel modo persuade il popolo a non mutarsi del publico governo, dipingendoli tutti li costumi del tiranno quali possono facilmente derivare da vero che sia principe assoluto e con difficoltà, è di raro da una repubblica essendo composta di molti capi, la onde è quasi impossibile che tutti concorrino a pervertire la ragione e tanto maggiormente essendo il danno e l'utile pubblico e non di un solo” (“One can see how nicely he persuades the people not to change their public government, depicting all the customs of the tyrant that can easily derive from the fact that he is an absolute prince, and this is rarely the case in a republic, since it is composed of many leaders, so that it is almost impossible for all of them to pervert reason, and all the more so since the damage and the profit are public, and not just for a single person”).
- 13 De' Pomis, *Breve discorso*, fols. 12r–12v: “Lo essortò a far elettione di huomeni possenti e leali, che havessero il timor d'Iddio, amatori della verità et inimici de l'avaritia e che di questi tali alcuni d'essi fussero costituiti Signori di Migliaia, cioè del Gran Consiglio et alcuni d'essi Centurioni che sono di minor numero com'a dire del numero di Pregati, li Signori de Cinquanta erano simili alli Signori della Quarantia, li Decani era il consiglio di Diece” (“He urged him to elect mighty and loyal God-fearing men, lovers of truth and enemies of avarice, and for some of them to be made Lords of Thousands—that is, of the Great Council—and some of them Centurions, who are fewer in number than the number of the Pregati, the Lords of Fifty were similar to the Lords of Forty, the lords of ten were [like] the Council of Ten”). For the history of this episode in early modern political thought, see Avraham Melamed, “Jethro's Advice in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish and Christian Political Thought,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 2 (1990): 3–41.

the Turks.¹⁴ This second part was not original, but came from another speech he had written earlier, which was more clearly prophetic and in which he had announced the Christians' victory in the Mediterranean.¹⁵ De' Pomis was writing just after the Christian League had been founded in order to counter the Turkish threat, and it was precisely this political decision that enabled him to draw a parallel between the Jewish and Christian worlds at one point in his work. Indeed, he writes:

The word with which St. Jerome translates *Pactum* in Hebrew is *berit*, meaning *berith*, which brings as much relief as the word *assecurazione de pace*, "confederation," or, better and more properly expressed, a covenant: in this way it signifies the pact that God made with Abraham and his descendants, from which this most sacred word "religion" arose.¹⁶

The Hebrew word *berit*, the covenant by which God bound the people to himself first with Abraham and then with Moses and which was the constitutive

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- 14 De' Pomis, *Breve discorso*, fols. 21r–21v: "Questo picciol raguaglio mi è parso dare del magistrato che ordinò Iddio alli Hebrei, per mostrare che non è molto da esso difforme quello della republica Venetiana, la quale il Creator del tutto promette di custodirla e di liberarla dal tiranno" ("This little comparison seemed to me to be given by the magistrate that God ordained for the Hebrews, to show that it is not very different from that of the Venetian republic, which the Creator of all promises to protect and to free from tyranny").
- 15 David de' Pomis, *Discorso meraviglioso di David de Pomis, fisico ebreo, sopra la guerra promossa da Selim, imperator de' Turchi, e sopra quel che succederà in fin al tempo dell'universal pace, con la lega de' principi christiani in essa compresi e da comprendersi*. [...] (Bologna, Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio, Ms. A 428). Another copy of the work was sold by Christie's in 1998 as New York, lot. 408, sale number 8105 (London, Robinson Trust, Ms. 2535); see Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Iter Italicum. Accedunt alia itinera. A Finding List of Uncatalogued or Incompletely Catalogued Humanistic Manuscripts of the Renaissance in Italian and Other Libraries*, vol. 4: *Great Britain to Spain* (London: Warburg Institute; Leiden: Brill, 1989), 231b. On the composition date, see de' Pomis, *Discorso meraviglioso*, fol. 26r: "Ma felicissimo sarà colui che si troverà nel mille trecento 35 giorni dopo la detta profanatione che viene ad essere, secondo il tempo corrente nel millecinqueseento settantasette, cominciando a contare il principio della lega nel millecinqueseento settanta uno et seguitando in fin al compimento della settimana revelata a Daniel" ("But the most fortunate will be the one who finds himself 1335 days after the said desecration, which, according to the present calendar, begins in 1577, beginning to count the league in 1571 and continuing until the completion of the week revealed to Daniel").
- 16 "La voce interpretata da San Hieronimo *Pactum* in hebreo dice *berit* cioè *Berith*, che tanto rilieva quanto che 'l nome di assecurazione di pace, confederatione, o per dir meglio e più propriamente lega: non altrimenti significa il patto che fece Iddio con Abraam, e con gli suoi descendent, onde hebbe origine questo santissimo nome religione" (de' Pomis, *Discorso meraviglioso*, fol. 20r. The reference is to *Vulg. Dan 9:24*).

basis of Judaism, consists of the same “substance” as the covenant through which the Christian states allied themselves in order to fight their common Turkish enemy: it is a generating principle of political unity and moral obligation. De’ Pomis thus attempts to show both the ethico-moral and in some sense also the juridical framework in which Christians and Jews coexisted.

This commonality is also evident in the interpretation of Isaiah’s and Daniel’s prophecies contained in the discourse: the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent liberation of Jerusalem would be the moment when God would forgive the people of Israel for their sins and allow them to return to the ancient homeland they had abandoned after the destruction of the Temple.¹⁷ De’ Pomis tries to make his enemies reconsider their views on the Jewish presence in Venice: not only are the Jews not allied with the Turks against the Christians, but, on the contrary, the Ottoman Empire represents a common threat to both peoples.

De’ Pomis’s two works on Qohelet, published in 1571 and 1572 respectively, also illustrate his desire to restore a certain type of relationship between Judaism and Christianity and to construct a new image of the Jewish tradition by transforming the content of a work like Qohelet into a treatise on ethics. In the first work, this aspect particularly emerges in the comparison between the Hebrew text of Qohelet (translated into the vernacular) and the commentary, in which the content of the work, a neutral (non-confessional) religious sentiment, becomes a tool for fighting sceptical, pessimistic thinking. De’ Pomis presents the second text as a discourse on philosophy that can be an antidote to the sceptical positions of Greek philosophy, acknowledging the Jewish character of the work, whose meaning can be understood only if we rediscover the ancient tradition to which Ecclesiastes belonged. De’ Pomis’s quotations, taken from the Prophets, the Psalms, and also from rabbinic literature, represent the threads from which his reflections are woven: one must understand that an ethically upright life, based on respect for the law, is the only way to receive a reward in the world to come. De’ Pomis constructs this perspective without reference to Christianity, as if to remind his audience that the Jewish tradition can also share the principles of Christian society, against the “poisons” of certain positions that come from Greek philosophy. Thus, he not only acknowledges the Jewish origin of his work, but also once again affirms that Judaism and Christianity are on the same side against a common enemy: where the

17 De’ Pomis, *Discorso meraviglioso*, fol. 31r: “Ne solamente gli vuole aggradire di perdonare gli loro peccati tutti, ma anco rimettergli nell’Antico stato, consegnandogli da ovunque sono dispersi” (“He will not only forgive them all their sins, but also restore them to their former state, and deliver them whithersoever they are scattered”).

adversary was once the Ottoman Empire, it is now the atheism of classical philosophy.¹⁸

There is a final element that can be read in light of the previous interpretations. One of the accusations traditionally levelled against the Jews was that they spread the plague. On the occasion of the epidemic that struck Venice between 1576 and 1577, de' Pomis not only intervened as a physician, but also presented three speeches to the doge in which he presented solutions to contain the contagion.¹⁹ Thus, he followed the humour theory on which the assumptions about the causes and spread of the plague were based and proposed a series of solutions associated with the use of health officers and health policies.²⁰ He also referred to the Jewish scriptures and reminded the doge that the Bible describes the technique of removing harmful atoms from substances by washing.²¹

4 Explaining and Defending Judaism

While in his vernacular texts, de' Pomis builds a parallel between Christianity and Judaism, attempting to demonstrate a common destiny, in his Latin works

18 De' Pomis, *L'Ecclesiaste di Salomone*; de' Pomis, *Discorso intorno*. For these works, see Guetta, *Italian Jewry in the Early Modern Era*, 169–71; Guido Bartolucci, “Hebraeus semper fidus. David de' Pomis e l'apologia dell'ebraismo tra volgare e latino,” in *Umanesimo e cultura ebraica nel Rinascimento italiano*, ed. Stefano Ugo Baldassarre and Fabrizio Lelli (Florence: Pontecorboli editore, 2016), 59–89; Bernard Dov Cooperman, “Cultural Pluralism from the Ghetto: What Might It Have Meant?,” in *Non contrarii, ma diversi: The Question of the Jewish Minority in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Alessandro Guetta and Pierre Savy (Rome: Viella, 2020), 32–38.

19 David de' Pomis, *Brevi discorsi et efficacissimi ricordi per liberare ogni città oppressa dal mal contagioso, proposti in diversi tempi secondo l'occorenze, al serenissimo prencipe di Venezia dall'eccellente dottor David de' Pomis hebreo [...]* (Venice: Gratoso Perchacino, 1577). See Carlo M. Cipolla, *Public Health and the Medical Profession in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

20 “Io ne posso render buon conto per esser stato del continuo nella travagliosa tempesta visitando alle porte maggior quantità delli feriti, di quella che si conveniva alle mie deboli forze, la onde l'isperienza oltre la dottrina d'Hyppocrate e di Galeno mi mostrava qualche difesa contra l'oppressione de si gran nimico” (de' Pomis, *Brevi discorsi*, A2v) (“I can well explain this, for I have been constantly in the storm, and I have seen more wounded at the gates than my feeble forces could cope with, so that experience, as well as the teachings of Hippocrates and Galen, have shown me some defence against the oppression of this great enemy”); “Nulla dimanco ho voluto anco ponerle in carta a fine Vostra Serenità ne possa far partecipi li Clarissimi Proveditori della Sanità a ciò da essi siano poste in essecutione” (de' Pomis, *Brevi discorsi*, B3r) (“I also wanted to put them on paper so that Your Serene Highness could share with the health officers what they have put into practice”).

21 De' Pomis, *Brevi discorsi*, C3r.

he goes one step further. Ten years had passed since he composed the treatises (the early 1570s), a period of relative calm for the Venetian Jewish community, during which de' Pomis had exclusively devoted himself to his activities as a physician. In 1587, he published an important linguistic work, *Şemaḥ David. Dittionario novo Hebraico*, in three languages: Hebrew, Latin, and the vernacular. This is a two-column work (one devoted to Hebrew lemmas, the other to foreign lemmas appropriated by the Hebrew language) in which de' Pomis presents the most important terms in the Hebrew language in three idioms. It was inspired by the great Hebrew lexicons of the past, from David Kimchi to the most recent by Elias Levita dating to the beginning of the sixteenth century, but it also referred to the Christian lexicographical works of its time, such as the work of the Christian Hebraist Marco Marini.²² His work was the first to use the three languages, and in a very unique way, for he devotes a separate space to each Hebrew (and Aramaic) entry in both Hebrew and Latin and also in the vernacular. However, the three versions of each entry are not simply translations of the same text; rather, each subject is often analysed from different angles (depending on the language in which the sections are written). An interesting example of how the interaction between the three languages works can be found in the three introductions. The first, which is written in Latin, is dedicated to the history of the Hebrew language and its progressive assimilation of words from other languages, such as Greek, Latin, or Arabic (especially in the *Gemara*), and it ends with a celebration of Aramaic, which, through the Targum, illuminates and clarifies the darkest passages of the Torah.²³ The second introduction, which is written in the vernacular, recounts the reasons that led de' Pomis to publish the text and identifies the noble and learned Christians as those who insisted that this work be published so that in his words, "it would help many to understand the meaning of the entries written by various Jewish authors on various sciences."²⁴ The third, in contrast,

22 Kimchi and Elia Levita were the two main sources of the work. De' Pomis quotes Marco Marini at the end of the Latin introduction, and Marini's lexicon was printed by the same publishing house as *Şemaḥ David* in 1593 ("Reverendus praesertim Abbas ac Doctissimus Dominus Marcus Marinus, qui non parum apud latinos haebraicam linguam illustravit" [de' Pomis, *Şemaḥ David*, A3v]). See Marco Marini, *Arca Noe. Thesaurus linguae sanctae novus* (Venice: Giovanni di Gara, 1593). For Elia Levita as a lexicographer, see Emma Abate, "Elias Levita the Lexicographer and the Legacy of *Sefer ha-Shorashim*," *Sefarad* 76 (2016): 289–311. For *Sefer ha-Şoraşim* in early modern Europe, see Saverio Campanini, "Thou Bearest Not the Root, but the Root Thee.' On the Reception of the *Sefer ha-Shorashim* in Latin," *Sefarad* 76 (2016): 313–31.

23 De' Pomis, *Şemaḥ David*, A3r–3v.

24 De' Pomis, A4r–4v.

which is written in Hebrew, reconstructs the events of de' Pomis's life, or rather the sufferings he endured.²⁵

The three successive texts offer the possibility of reading the entire work as a tool not only for scholars, but also for those who wanted to find out about the principles of the Jewish tradition, an explanation that de' Pomis considered essential for preventing the repetition of the events that had caused him so much pain. In fact, he does not hold back from explaining the Jewish tradition to Christians: thus, he not only deals with political institutions such as the king (*melekh*), but also gives very long explanations of concepts such as Torah, sacrifice (*qorban*), or poverty (*raš*), in which he examines the meaning of these terms, referring not only to the Bible, but also to rabbinic literature and to Jewish lexicography, such as David Kimhi's *Sefer ha-Šorašim*.²⁶ There is a particular question regarding the relationship between the three languages; that is, the role that each language plays in the treatment of the respective subjects. Some scholars have argued that the distinction reflects de' Pomis's desire to help Jewish scholars to perfect their Latin and Christians their Hebrew, reserving the vernacular for more detailed explanations of certain aspects of his people's tradition or to present anecdotes about his life or the history of Judaism.²⁷ The relationship between the renderings in the three languages, however, is not always constant: sometimes the Hebrew and the Latin agree while the vernacular treats the subject by emphasising its most miraculous or extraordinary aspects; at other times, however, the relationship changes and the vernacular translates the Hebrew more carefully—for example, while the Latin is reduced to a few lines.²⁸ The overall impression is that de' Pomis's intended each entry to be read in its entirety, for only from the combination of the three languages would the overall meaning emerge.²⁹

25 De' Pomis, A5r–5v.

26 See note 22 above.

27 Andrew D. Berns, *The Bible and Natural Philosophy in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 109–93.

28 See, for example, the item *yahalom*, *diaspro*, where the Latin consists only of the name of the stone while the vernacular translates the Hebrew entry (de' Pomis, *Šemaḥ David*, 48r), or the item *pašať*, where the quotations from Elias Levita are only found in the vernacular and Hebrew sections (de' Pomis, *Šemaḥ David*, 185r).

29 For example, in the vernacular part of the entry for *qorban*, he writes: “Et avendo io a bastanza detto della divisione e differenza delli sacrifici nelle altre due lingue [...] me pare cosa vana replicarla nella volgare. Solo, al mio parere non è inconveniente dar qualche notitia in questo idioma della innumerabile quantità di animali che quel santo luogo si santificavano” (“And having said enough about the division of and difference between the sacrifices in the other two languages [...] it seems to me a vain thing to repeat it in the vernacular tongue, except that, in my opinion, it is not inconvenient to give some

A particular case is represented by the word *mašīah* (“messiah”), in which de’ Pomis seeks to illustrate the principles of his religion. After having listed the references to the biblical passages in which the term appeared in the Hebrew and Latin sections, he concludes in the vernacular:

This word *mašīah* has the same meaning as *christos* in Greek, which means “anointed,” because all the Jewish kings were anointed with holy oil. Since it is a name of great respect, both among the Jews and in the writings of the Christians, I thought it was appropriate to quote all the passages of the Targum in which this word is mentioned, so that everyone who wishes to know can read the passages cited and will find the chapters in which the words *mešīah*, *mašīah*, or *Christo* are mentioned.³⁰

Starting from the “neutral” definition of the Messiah as the anointed one, de’ Pomis adds that anyone can discover the meaning of this term by checking not only the passages of the Hebrew Bible, but also its Aramaic translation (in Latin, “Caldaica translatio”); that is, the Targum, which, as mentioned in the Latin introduction, often clarifies the Torah’s obscure Hebrew passages. This obviously refers to the centuries-old Christian practice of using this very text (the Targum) to convince the Jews to accept Jesus as the Messiah, whose true prophetic message, according to the Christians, was always rejected by the Jews because of their ignorance and unbelief. In a sense, de’ Pomis, while

information in this language of the innumerable quantity of animals that were sanctified in that holy place”).

30 “Questa voce *meshīach*, tanto rilieva quanto *christos* in greco, che significa onto, perciò tutti li re hebrei si ongevano con l’olio santo et essendo nome di gran rispetto, si appresso li Hebrei come parimente nella consideratione delli Christiani, m’è parso cosa degna de citare tutti i luoghi del *Targum*, nelli quali di detta voce s’è fatta mentione, la onde chiunque ciò desidera sapere, legga li sopra scritti numeri e troverà ogni capitolo che vi è ricordato il *meshīach*, Masiak o Christo che dir vogliamo”; de’ Pomis, *Šemaḥ David*, 131v. On the Messiah in anti-Jewish literature, see for example, Jerónimo de Santa Fe, *Contra Iudaeorum perfidiam et Talmuth Tractatus, sive libri duo*, in *Magna Bibliotheca Veterum Patrum et antiquorum scriptorum ecclesiasticorum* (Paris: Apud Ioannem Billaine, Simeonem Piget, Fredericum Leonard, 1654), book 4, part 1, 748: “Idcirco divina gratia mediante verificare intendo praedictas conditiones in vero Messia in Lege promisso haberi debuisse per authoritates et glossas, per magistros Iudaeorum atque magistros talmudistas nihilominus factas, quorum utique verba nemo Iudaeorum ausus esset quoquo modo negare. Item per Caldaicas translationes, quas quidem Onkelos et Ionathas filius Ozielis fecerent, qui fuerunt tempore destructionis Templi secundi, quos ipsi Iudaei authenticos habent in maxima reputatione.” For Jerónimo de Santa Fe, see his work *El Tratado “De Iudaicis erroribus ex Talmut,”* ed. Moises Orfali (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1987).

acknowledging the importance of the term for both religions, challenged his readers to verify the truth of the statements from the anti-Jewish tract on the basis of the texts, especially since in the Hebrew and Latin sections, he limited himself to listing the passages, while the challenge was issued in the vernacular section, which made it accessible to a wider audience. While in his earlier vernacular works, de' Pomis confined himself to acknowledging a common destiny of Judaism and Christianity, in this work, which unites the three languages, he begins to explain to his Christian readers the principles on which the Jewish religion is based, making no concessions, and, on the contrary, strongly affirming his religious identity.

However, the text also confirms some recurring themes of de' Pomis's vernacular works and, in particular, his reflections on the weakness of human knowledge and the absolute centrality of God in man's life. They emerge, for example, in the entry for "certainty" (*wadday*), which belongs only to God and which is contrasted with doubt (*safeq*), or his discussion of the term "disciple" (*talmid*), where he acknowledges the humility and pride of the rabbis, who (like the Greek philosophers) never called themselves "wise" (*hakhamim*), but rather "disciples of wisdom."³¹

The following year, in 1588, de' Pomis's masterpiece, *De medico hebraeo enarratio apologica*, was published.³² His return to apologetic literature—and especially to the defence of the medical profession being practised by Jews—was perhaps triggered by Pope Gregory XIII's bull of 1584, which reaffirmed the prohibition on Jews treating Christian patients already established by Paul IV. In reality, however, the new pope, Sixtus V (1521–1590), who ascended the papal throne in 1585 and to whom the dictionary is dedicated, had already introduced a new policy towards the Jews in 1586 with the bull *Christiana pietas*, which allowed them to settle in certain areas of the Papal States and, above all, to

31 De' Pomis, *Šemaḥ David*, 49r and 233v respectively. For example, he writes in the vernacular section of the entry for *wadda*ʿ: "La presente ditione non significa altro che certo e non si può applicare se non quella cosa che non riceve dubio alcuno, com'è Iddio Benedetto qual è certissimo e l'istessa verità" ("The present word means nothing but 'certain' and can only be applied to that thing that experiences no doubt, such as God the Blessed, who is most certain and the truth itself").

32 David de' Pomis, *De medico hebraeo enarratio apologica, in qua tum quamplurima praeclara alia, notatu digna reperiuntur; tum etiam quod magna inter hebraeum et christianum adsit affinitas, quodque mutua inter eorum utrumque dilectio (iure divino) esse debeat, pervalidis rationibus, passim demonstratur [...]* (Venice: Giovanni Varisco, 1588). For this text, see Harry Friedenwald, "Apologetic Works of Jewish Physicians," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 32 (1942): 228–55; 407–8; Friedenwald, *The Jews and Medicine* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1944), 2:575–76; Winifried Schleiner, *Medical Ethics in the Renaissance* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1995), 68–70.

practise as physicians. Thus, it was not a contingent subject, but a work that aimed to develop in Latin the ideas proposed in de' Pomis's vernacular works in order to broaden the range of sources used and the justifications they offered.

The work, which was dedicated to the Duke of Urbino, Francesco Maria II della Rovere, is divided into twelve sections, but what may surprise the reader is that instead of being dedicated to the defence of Jewish physicians, eight sections out of twelve recount the history of the Jewish religion and its foundations. This discussion, however, is not intended to introduce a simplified, "universal" type of religion that is capable of coexisting with the Christian one. On the contrary, de' Pomis insists on the exceptionality of Judaism. The Jews, in fact, were witnesses, guardians, and transmitters of divine law. According to de' Pomis, they were spectators of divine miracles, and therefore, since human reason often deceives itself where divine things are concerned, they are the only ones who can conclusively prove the validity of its law.³³ The ideas of the weakness of human knowledge and the centrality of God in man's life also returns here. Moreover, de' Pomis adds that it is the observance of the commandments that God gave to Moses that obliges every Jew, precisely because they are worshippers of the law, to possess "omnes divinas praescriptas qualitates," the principal of which is mercy for one's neighbour. De' Pomis demonstrated this obligation to righteous behaviour towards both Jews and Gentiles with a dense network of not only biblical, but also rabbinic quotations. Once again, it seems that he does not refer to a commonality between Jews and Christians, but rather exalts the ethical peculiarities of the Jewish tradition itself. The discourse develops in the subsequent pages, always following the same thread: de' Pomis wants to show that the Jewish religion, which in many fields often proves to be superior to other traditions, cannot be a threat to Christians.

This defence and exaltation of Judaism leads de' Pomis to imagine a relationship with Christian society founded on radically different bases. In the

33 De' Pomis, *De medico*, 54: "Repetamus igitur id quod omisimus, nempe quod Iudaeus sit a Christiano amplectendus, atque favendus. [...] Secundo quod omnium fere mirabilium Dei testis dubio procul Iudaeus existat, ab Abraam nempe ad Iesus Nazareni adventum, qui (ut supra dicebamus) legem totam amplexus fuit et omnia, quae in sacris litteris conscripta sunt, vera esse confirmavit. Caeterae autem Gentes fidem adhibent, viderunt autem minime. Iudaeus vero praesentia fidem in Deo Christianis auget, qui tot mirabilium genera se vidisse patres suos comprobasse pronunciat" ("Let us repeat, then, what we have omitted; namely, that the Jew must be welcomed and favoured by the Christian. [...] Secondly, because the Jew is undoubtedly witness to all God's miracles, from Abraham to the coming of Jesus Christ, who [as we said above] comprehended the whole law and confirmed as true all that is written in the holy scriptures. The other peoples accepted the faith, but they did not see anything. The Jew, on the other hand, who claims that he has seen all the miracles and that his ancestors have confirmed them, strengthens the Christians' faith in God").

last section, he pauses to discuss the policies of conversion promoted by the Church of Rome. De' Pomis responds to this process of forced inclusion in the Christian community by referencing (without explicitly mentioning) Lactantius's *Divinae institutiones*, in which he finds an absolute refusal of the use of violence against those who profess another faith because "nihil est tam voluntarium quam religio" ("nothing is as voluntary as religion").³⁴ In this conception of religion as a voluntary choice, de' Pomis thus recognises his understanding of Judaism, since, as he had recalled several times, especially in his vernacular speeches, it arose from the pact between God and Abraham and all Jews had been bound by the law given to Moses since the time of Sinaitic revelation: there was no better reason to oppose the increasingly repressive conversion policy.³⁵ De' Pomis, therefore, reiterates that coexistence between those who belong to different religions cannot take place through the rejection of each other's religion. The solution he proposes is quite surprising, even if it is not directly explained. In fact, he suggests that his interlocutors follow the policies of the rulers of antiquity, who, in different ways, always granted legal autonomy to the Jews who lived in their kingdoms. If, de' Pomis polemically asks at the end of his treatise, these sovereigns, who were pagans, were so benevolent towards the Jews in the past, why should Christians—and especially Pope Sixtus v—not be so today?³⁶

5 Conclusion

We do not know what reaction de' Pomis's appeal provoked in the Roman Curia, but we do know that he lived between Venice and perhaps Padua until

34 De' Pomis, *De medico*, 80: "At defendenda religio omnis (Christiana presentim) non occidendo, sed moriendo, non sevitiae, sed patientia, non scelere, sed fide; necesseque est bonum in religione versari, non malum, nam si sanguine, si tormentis, si malo religionem defendere velis, iam non defendetur illa, sed polluetur. Nihil profecto est tam voluntarium quam religio, non enim beneficium est quod ingeritur recusanti, sed iis consulendum est qui quod bonum est nesciunt" ("Every religion [especially the Christian one] must be defended not by killing, but by dying; not by cruelty, but by patience; not by malice, but by faith. In religion, you must do good, not evil: if you want to defend religion with blood, torture, and evil, you are not defending it; you are defiling it. Undoubtedly, nothing is as voluntary as religion. It is not good for the one who rejects what is forced upon him, but you must take care of those who do not know what is good"). See Lact. *Inst.* 5.19.

35 De' Pomis, *De medico*, 82: "Contra vero Christianus quotidie Hebraeos (propter conversationem) ad baptismum vertit" ("On the contrary, the Christian daily directs the Jews to baptism [for conversion]").

36 De' Pomis, *De medico*, 83.

1593, after which we have no further news of him.³⁷ His last work, therefore, was his 1588 *De medico hebreo*, which closed a very intense period of activity that lasted less than twenty years that had begun with his arrival in Venice after his expulsion from the State of the Church.

In a recent work, David Ruderman suggested that mobility is one of the elements that characterised the history of the Jews in the early modern era. He added that this movement from one country to another also influenced the cultural productivity of many Jewish intellectuals.³⁸ With regard to kabbalistic literature, Moshe Idel has shown that the expulsion from Spain in 1492 marked a moment of supreme creativity in which many authors increased their literary production and that “their creativity was more than a mere continuation of what they had achieved before their departure.”³⁹ Following this idea, Ruderman proposed to extend the research to other authors and other areas. Of course, the expulsion of 1492—and the Sephardic emigration more generally—was one of the central moments of this process, but other events, other expulsions, such as that from the Papal States in 1569, also shaped the lives of Jews in the early modern period. The life of David de’ Pomis can be seen as a paradigmatic example of this phenomenon. Although he always remained within the Italian peninsula, his move from the provincial towns of central Italy to Venice triggered a creative activity in him that was unknown in the first period of his life (he did not begin writing until he was forty-seven years old). The content of his works and the languages in which he wrote them were also influenced by his experience as an exile: he used Latin, the vernacular, and Hebrew (in combination or alone) as tools in order to construct a representation of Judaism that was a response to what had happened in the first part of his life. All his creative efforts to compare the Jewish and Christian traditions, to explain Judaism, and to search—for example, in his writings on prophecy—for a common destiny for the two peoples stemmed from the trauma he experienced when he was expelled from his home in Spoleto and from the State of the Church. As Vilém Flusser said, in order to inhabit exile, it

37 For the hypothesis that de’ Pomis ended his life in Padua, see Leone Luzzatto, “Risposte,” *Il Vessillo israelitico* 32 (1884): 207.

38 David B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 41–55.

39 Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry*, 42; Moshe Idel, “On Mobility, Individuals and Groups: Prolegomenon for a Sociological Approach to Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah,” *Kabbalah* 3 (1998): 145–73; Moshe Idel, “Italy in Safed, Safed in Italy: A Chapter in the Interactive History of Sixteenth-Century Kabbalah,” in *Cultural Intermediaries: Jewish Intellectuals in Early Modern Italy*, ed. David B. Ruderman and Giuseppe Veltri (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 239–69.

is necessary to collect and process “the information that is whizzing around.” The languages that de’ Pomis used and the works that he decided to compose were precisely daughters of this endeavour: speeches, dictionaries, commentaries, apologies, collected Christian discourses on the Jews, and the stimuli that came to him from the new Venetian environment (which were not exclusively Jewish) gave rise to something completely new. Thus, if the combination of these two experiences (mobility and creativity) underlies the history of European Jewry in the early modern period, then de’ Pomis’s story and work represent a recognisable but as yet unexplored fragment of the broader history of Jews in Italy during the Renaissance.

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The Language of Truth

The Šefat Emet Association (Salonica 1890) and Its Taqqanot (Bylaws)

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Abstract

This article discusses the activities of one of around twenty maskilic associations that flourished in the Ottoman Empire in the latter half of the nineteenth century: *Šefat Emet* (“Language of Truth”), which was founded in Salonica in 1890 by a group of Salonican Maskilim. *Šefat Emet* provided a meeting place for members of a distinct circle among the growing Salonican Jewish bourgeoisie, while promoting a maskilic worldview epitomised by the concept of the “golden mean,” here referring to a combination of religious observance and affinity to the Jewish tradition on the one hand and an openness to Western culture and secular studies on the other. Our discussion of this association will contribute to the study of the Haskalah and the revival of Hebrew in the Ottoman Empire, offer a profile of patterns of change and continuity among the Ottoman maskilic circle, and provide an analysis of the social character of the association as a middle-class circle that effectively excluded those who were unable to pay its membership fees or devote time to the association’s activities.

Keywords

Šefat Emet – Haskalah – Jews in the Ottoman Empire – Salonica – Ottoman Jewish associations – Hebrew culture – bylaws

1 Introduction¹

In this article, I will argue that the establishment of the *Śefat Emet* (“Language of Truth”) association in 1890 was the first organisational expression of Hebrew modernisation in Salonica, a modernisation path that was to be more significant for the Jews of Salonica from the early twentieth century on.

From the mid-nineteenth century, the format of Salonican Jewish associations gradually changed and more “Westernising” associations that promoted a Francophone lifestyle and culture were established. In their activities, these associations reflected the secularisation and loosening of the observance of the *mišwot* (Jewish commandments). In contrast, *Śefat Emet* sought to promote a model of Hebrew modernisation motivated by self-agency and inspired by the “revival” of Hebrew language and culture that had been taking place in the Palestinian *Yishuv* since the early 1880s.

In a world of “multiple modernities” in late Ottoman Salonica,² several Salonican Jews resisted the “Westernising” Francophone pattern of modernisation and perceived the Hebrew cultural option to be more appropriate to their needs as Ottoman citizens living in a “city and mother in Israel” with a Jewish majority; they were interested in being members of a Jewish community where they could keep the commandments while being open to secular studies. The founders of *Śefat Emet* thus regarded the promotion of the Hebrew language, and particularly spoken Hebrew, as more appropriate to their needs than “Westernised” models of modernity.

In what follows, I will present the *Śefat Emet* association through its *taqqanot* (bylaws), which shed light on the association’s aims as perceived by its founders. The bylaws were compiled in December 1890. They were fully preserved and were first printed in 1939. In the appendix, I will attach the bylaws both in their original Hebrew and, for the first time, in an English translation.

1 Preliminary versions of this article were presented at an international workshop entitled “Salonica: A Multicultural City in the Ottoman Empire and the Greek State,” which was hosted by the Ben-Zvi Institute and Van Leer Jerusalem Institute (Jerusalem, May 2017), and at the Colloquium of the Selma Stern Center for Jewish Studies Berlin-Brandenburg (Berlin, February 2018). Many thanks to Dr Susanne Härtel for inviting me to present at the Selma Stern Center. I am also indebted to my students in the “Zionism and the State of Israel” class at Indiana University (Spring 2019), who were exposed to the *Śefat Emet* bylaws without any prior acquaintance with Ottoman Hebrew culture and shared their fresh thoughts with me. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers of this article and Prof. Yaron Ben-Naeh, Prof. Julia Phillips Cohen, Dr Isaac Slater, Katharine Handel, Kedem Golden, and Shaul Vardi for their valuable advice and generous help.

2 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 1–29.

2 Ottoman Salonica: “City and Mother in Israel”

In the 1890s, the Jewish population of Salonica was at least 50,000, accounting for around sixty percent of the total population. This phenomenon of a “Jewish city” had no parallel in Ottoman Jewry (although the situation would gradually change after the Greek occupation of Salonica in 1912). Alongside the Jews, Ottoman Salonica was also home to large Greek Orthodox and Turkish Muslim communities, as well as to thousands of Sabbateans (*Dönme*), Bulgarians, and foreign nationals.³

Salonica was the capital of the Ottoman province of Macedonia and served as an important economic and commercial centre. Most Salonican Jews were artisans or peddlers, and the vast majority of them were either lower-middle class or poor. However, the Salonican community also included an elite who played a significant role in trade on a larger scale and in the cotton, tobacco, and opium industries. A small minority of Jews were white-collar professionals, such as government officials, lawyers, and physicians.⁴

In the late Ottoman period, the port of Salonica was closed on Saturdays and Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), the local Jewish vernacular, was the common language in the city streets. The demographic reality in Salonica facilitated the consolidation of a strong Jewish public sphere, serving as a catalyst for the shaping of Jewish collectivism, which was not separatist, but positioned Sephardi communalism under the umbrella of the Ottoman empire and the citizenship it granted to its *millets* (ethno-religious groups). It was precisely the tolerant Ottoman framework that provided the Salonican Jewish community with the sense of security and belonging that enabled them to develop something approaching a “Jewish republic.”⁵

3 Ottoman Jewish Associations: Changes in Associational Strategies among Ottoman Jews

From at least the sixteenth century, there were two types of associations operating among Ottoman Jewry.⁶ The first type of association, which according

3 Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims, and Jews, 1430–1950* (New York: Knopf, 2005), esp. 173–310.

4 Orly C. Meron, “The Jewish Economy of Salonica (1881–1912),” *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 47 (2005): 22–47.

5 Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 1–35.

6 Yaron Ben-Naeh, “Jewish Confraternities in the Ottoman Empire in the 17th and 18th Centuries” [Hebrew], *Zion* 63 (1998): 277–318; Ben-Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans: Ottoman*

to Yaron Ben-Naeh operated “for the benefit of the entire congregation,”⁷ provided services to the community members (*havrey ha-qahal*) that the communities (*qehalim*) themselves were not capable of or interested in providing: charity (*gemilut hasadim*), burial (*hevrah qadiša*), educating poor boys in the Talmud Torah, visiting the sick (*biqqur ḥolim*), arranging marriages for orphan girls (*hevrat yetomot*), and so on. The second type of association, which according to Ben-Naeh was “founded from the outset for the benefit and immediate advancement of their members,” was focused on mutual aid for members or devoted to basic Torah study and prayer.⁸ Both types provided their members with a meeting place along with the means for leisure activities, self-determination, and group belonging.

As in other communities in the empire, charitable and mutual aid societies of various kinds, which preserved diverse aspects of the traditional associational strategies of Ottoman Jewry, were operating in Salonica during the second half of the nineteenth century. I will mention here only the Salonican *Talmud Torah ha-Gadol* (“The Great Talmud Torah”) society, which set itself the goal of providing basic education to the children of the poorer members the community.⁹

From the mid-nineteenth century on, some “traditional” societies began to undergo transformations. For instance, between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1910s, the leaders of the Salonican *Talmud Torah ha-Gadol* association aspired to modernise the institution’s curriculum, incorporate non-rabbinical subjects into it (including sports and outdoor excursions), and improve the institutional hygiene. To this end, they recruited Jewish directors from France, Italy, and Palestine, and they were aided by “Westernising” local elites.¹⁰

Similarly, Dina Danon has shown that in Izmir’s charitable societies, efforts to rationalise the collection and subsequent distribution of funds ultimately redrew the boundaries around poverty itself and began to classify the poor according to their degree of “deservedness,” according to modern values of “productivity” and “potential.”¹¹ “Traditional” organisations therefore carried out supremely “modern” reforms, which indicates that processes of modernisation

Jewish Society in the Seventeenth Century (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 270–85. On the *qahal* and its organisation, see Ben-Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans*, 164–90.

7 Ben-Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans*, 275.

8 Ben-Naeh, *Jews in the Realm of the Sultans*, 275.

9 Ben-Naeh, “Jewish Confraternities,” 312–14.

10 Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 154–56; Tamir Karkason, “The Ottoman-Jewish *Haskalah* (Enlightenment), 1839–1908: A Transformation in the Jewish Communities of Western Anatolia, the Southern Balkans and Jerusalem” [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2018), 80, 108.

11 Dina Danon, *The Jews of Ottoman Izmir: A Modern History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 41–48, 61–90.

were all-encompassing at the time and crossed diverse divisions between change and continuity as well as between “religiosity” and “secularism.”¹²

3.1 *Associations and Westernisation*

Alongside transformations that took place in seemingly “traditional” organisations, several Salonican associations whose membership was drawn from the local bourgeoisie promoted modernisation in a Western, mainly Francophone style. The Salonican Jewish bourgeoisie consisted mainly of merchants, many of them *francos*: descendants of Iberian *conversos* (*anusim*) who had migrated to port cities in the Eastern Mediterranean basin (such as Aleppo, Izmir, Salonica), particularly from Livorno, from the seventeenth century on.¹³

Since the 1870s at the latest, the Salonican Jewish bourgeois had been taking part in multi-ethnic associations, such as the *Cercle de Salonique*, established in 1873, which brought together the city’s upper class, mainly foreign Europeans, Greeks, Jews, and Turks. According to Mark Mazower, “these were the city’s new Masters—professional men, army officers, diplomats, bankers, land-owners and traders.”¹⁴ Jews and *Dönme* were also prominent in local Freemason clubs.¹⁵

Salonican Jews also had their own “Westernising” organisations for Jews only. The *Cercle des Intimes*, for instance, was founded in 1873 by a group of intellectuals and leaders in order to promote Jewish cultural activities and philanthropy, and it became known for its famous library. In 1890, it merged with the *Grand Cercle Commercial*, which had similar aims, and the organisation continued in this format for another decade.¹⁶

The *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (henceforth AIU) was the main promoter of “Westernising” Francophone trends among Ottoman Jews. For the most part, AIU teachers were Sephardi Jews who had grown up in the Eastern Mediterranean, mainly in Ladino-speaking communities, and were sent to teach in other Middle East and North Africa (MENA) communities; therefore, to a large

12 Avi Rubin, “Ottoman Judicial Change in the Age of Modernity: A Reappraisal,” *History Compass* 7 (2009): 119–40.

13 On the *francos* in the Salonican context, see, for now, Mazower, *Salonica*, 217–24. Aron Rodrigue has suggested that at least in Salonica, local Jews gradually assimilated with the *francos*, thereby acquiring foreign citizenship. See Rodrigue, “Salonica in Jewish Historiography,” *Jewish History* 28 (2014): 446.

14 Mazower, *Salonica*, 218.

15 Marc David Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 95.

16 D. Gershon Lewental, “Club des Intimes, Salonica,” in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. Norman A. Stillman (Brill Online, 2010), last modified 26 September 2021.

extent, the Francophone path of modernisation promoted by the AIU was disseminated by sophisticated Sephardi Jews who wished to demonstrate their agency.¹⁷ AIU alumni associations were set up in various Eastern Mediterranean communities on the initiative of the Sephardi alumni.¹⁸ The Salonican AIU alumni association was founded in 1897, a year after the establishment of a similar association in Izmir.¹⁹

4 Maskilic Associations

Between the 1840s and the 1890s, around one hundred Maskilim were operating in the Ottoman empire. The Ottoman Maskilim primarily wrote in two languages: Hebrew, the lingua franca of the Haskalah, and Ladino, the Ottoman Sephardi vernacular. The three most prominent Maskilim were Judah Nehama of Salonica (1825–1899); Barukh Mitrani (1847–1919), who wandered around Europe and Asia; and Abraham Danon (1857–1925), who was active in Edirne, Istanbul, and Paris. Though committed to the study of secular subjects, the Ottoman Maskilim remained religiously observant and did not adopt an oppositional attitude towards rabbinical authorities; unlike many contemporary nationalists within the empire, they did not pursue a separatist agenda, even when they considered themselves Hebrew nationalists.²⁰

There were around twenty maskilic associations operating in the Ottoman empire between the 1860s and the 1890s. They grouped together Maskilim and men who were interested in maskilic subjects such as history, philosophy, and the state of contemporary Jewry. These associations organised various

17 Aron Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition: The Teachers of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, 1860–1939* (Seattle: Washington University Press, 1993).

18 Esther Benbassa, "Associational Strategies in Ottoman Jewish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Avigdor Levy (Princeton, NJ, and Washington DC: Darwin Press and Institute of Turkish Studies, 1994), 459–62, 470–71.

19 Benbassa, "Associational Strategies," 460. The AIU alumni association in Salonica deserves further research, mainly to be drawn from its periodical. Compare Jessica Marglin, "Modernizing Moroccan Jews: The AIU Alumni Association in Tangier, 1893–1913," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 101 (2011): 574–603.

20 Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th–20th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 106–9; Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, "Sephardic Scholarly Worlds: Toward a Novel Geography of Modern Jewish History," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 100 (2010): 349–84; Karkason, "The Ottoman-Jewish Haskalah."

activities, including the establishment of reading rooms, libraries, and maskilic synagogues; maskilic lectures and sermons; and the live reading of books and journals.²¹ In the second half of the nineteenth century, at least six maskilic associations were active in Edirne. There were also at least two associations in Bulgaria, one Sephardi association in Bucharest (Romania), five in Istanbul, one in Izmir, and four in Salonica.

While various types of associations existed and were active in Salonica during the second half of the nineteenth century, the first maskilic association in the city that is known to us, *Hevrah Sifrutit* (“Literary Society”), was only founded in 1885, and almost nothing is known about it.²² Other associations of this kind appeared in the 1890s, during the transition from the Ottoman *Haskalah* to other ideologies in Ottoman Jewry, such as the promotion of Hebrew culture, and also, from the late 1890s, Zionism.²³ At this stage, no explanation can be offered for the relative paucity of the known maskilic associations in Salonica or for the lateness of their appearance. *Šefat Emet*, which was established in 1890, is therefore the first Salonican maskilic association about which we have considerable knowledge.

5 The Establishment of the *Šefat Emet* Association

One of the correspondents of a significant Salonican Maskil named Judah Nehama left Salonica in 1890. Before the two parted ways, this correspondent asked Nehama to notify him “of the great and wonderful deeds he had performed with respect to our association.” Nehama soon sent his correspondent the “bylaws of the association established after your departure from here [Salonica].” This is how *Šefat Emet’s* bylaws, the main source of information on the association, have survived.²⁴

Nehama, who was born in Salonica into an affluent merchant family and married a daughter of the Modiano family, a wealthy local merchant family of *franco* origin, was introduced to maskilic literature and its stimulating ideas around 1845. He served as an agent for various European commercial

21 On the Ottoman maskilic associations, see, for now Karkason, “The Ottoman-Jewish *Haskalah*”, 225–27, 295–96. Until recently, we only knew of five maskilic associations: see Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*, 107–9; Benbassa, “Associational Strategies,” 458–63.

22 Yom Tov Behmoiras [בכמוהר"ם], “Taṭar-Bazarşıq,” *Ha-Maggid*, 4 June 1885, 183.

23 Karkason, “The Ottoman-Jewish *Haskalah*,” 112–15.

24 Judah ben Jacob Nehama, *Letters More Delightful Than Wine* [Hebrew], vol. 2 (Salonica: Bezes, n.d. [1939]), 116.

companies in his city and also made his living as a book trader, an occupation that allowed him to indulge his passion for books.²⁵

Nehama maintained an extensive correspondence with fellow Maskilim, rabbinic scholars, and Christian clerics and merchants both within the Ottoman Empire and beyond its borders. Many of these correspondences, dated between 1850 and 1895, have been preserved in his printed two-volume letter collection entitled *Mikhtavey Dodim mi-Yayin* (“Letters More Delightful Than Wine”). The first volume was published in Salonica on Nehama’s own initiative in 1893.²⁶ The second volume, which has only been partially edited, was published in 1939, four decades after his death.²⁷ Altogether, the two volumes contain 315 letters exchanged with dozens of correspondents, many of them well known. Among them, for example, are some of the greatest Judaic studies scholars: Leopold Zunz (1794–1886); Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865); Meyer Kayserling (1829–1905), the forefather of the field of “Sephardi studies”; and Abraham Berliner (1833–1915).

Let us return to Nehama’s correspondent who asked him about what had happened to the association that had been established in Salonica and who has probably been jointly involved in the process of its establishment. This correspondent was named as “David Menachem Deitard,” but this was a typing error; he was in fact David Menachem Deinard (1848–1933). It is quite likely that he, like his relative, the well-known bibliographer Ephraim Deinard (1846–1930), was born in Sasmaka in the Russian Empire (today Valdemārpils in Latvia). Deinard migrated to Palestine in 1883 during an early stage of the First *Aliyah* (1881–1903) and lived in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Rehovot, and Haderah.²⁸ His correspondence with Nehama indicates that he visited Salonica and then travelled to Izmir, where he was active in a local maskilic association.²⁹ Later on, in the 1920s, Deinard would publish two rabbinic books in Mandatory Palestine.³⁰

25 For a broader biography of Nehama, including a description of some of his works, see David Benvenisti, “Rabbi Judah Jacob Nehama, Precursor of the Haskalah Period in Salonika” [Hebrew], in *Jewish Thought in the Islamic Countries*, ed. Menahem Zohori (Jerusalem: Brit ‘Ivrit ‘Olamit, 1981), 144–64.

26 Judah ben Jacob Nehama, *Letters More Delightful Than Wine* [Hebrew], vol. 1 (Salonica, 1893).

27 Nehama, *Letters*, vol. 2.

28 For Deinard, see David Tidhar, “Deinard, David Menachem” [Hebrew], *Encyclopaedia of the Founders and Builders of Israel*, vol. 3 (1949), 1432–33.

29 Nehama, *Letters*, 2:116. Presumably, this was the *Doršey Lešon ‘Ezer* (“Friends of the Hebrew Language”) association, which was founded in Izmir in 1890. For this association, see Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*, 108.

30 David Menachem Deinard, *Sefer Ma’ayan Gannim* (Jerusalem: Zuckerman, 1926); Deinard, *Sefer Gan ha-Sanhedrin* (Jerusalem: Zion, 1927).

Deinard was part of a large group of Maskilim, most of whom had been born in Central or Eastern Europe, who travelled around the Ottoman empire in the nineteenth century. Among them were the Hungarian-born Yosef Halevi (1827–1919),³¹ Anshel Asher Perl,³² and R. Chaim Hirschensohn (1857–1935), who was born in Safed.³³ These figures presumably represent a larger undocumented group, and some of them were involved in the establishment of maskilic associations around the Ottoman Empire, alongside Sephardi Jews. Maskilic circles became independently established in Salonica—as in other Ottoman communities—as a result of indigenous self-agency and internal initiative; the dissemination of maskilic ideas in the Ottoman Empire should not be attributed to an Ashkenazi “influence.” However, just as dynamics and interactions between Ashkenazi and Ottoman Maskilim in the global dimension helped to shape the Jewish Enlightenment movement in the second half of the nineteenth century,³⁴ so too might the encounters between Ashkenazi and Ottoman Maskilim on the local level, within the borders of the Ottoman empire, have helped to establish local maskilic associations.

This was probably the case with Nehama and Deinard’s cooperation in establishing *Śefat Emet*, although Deinard, who shared the idea of establishing the association with Nehama and other unknown figures, left Salonica before the association was properly established. The correspondence between Deinard and Nehama indeed indicates that Nehama had played a role in *Śefat Emet*’s foundation. We have no information about the identity of other members of the association; in addition to Nehama, some members of the core circle of Salonican Maskilim probably also joined. Several months before the foundation of *Śefat Emet*, David Fresco, the editor of *El Tiempo* (Istanbul, 1872–1930), had visited Salonica, and he listed Shmuel Alkalai, David De Boton, and David Pifano (1851–1924)—who later served as the chief rabbi of Sofia (1899–1921) and thereafter of all Bulgarian Jewry—among the members of this circle.³⁵ It is also likely that other local Ashkenazi Maskilim such as Deinard were members of *Śefat Emet*.

31 For Halevi, see Alan Verskin, *A Vision of Yemen: The Travels of a European Orientalist and His Native Guide. A Translation of Hayyim Habshush’s Travelogue* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 13–25, 36–37.

32 For Perl, see Michael M. Laskier, *The Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1862–1962* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983), 203–4.

33 Hirschensohn, one of the earliest proponents of Religious Zionism, was the director of a Hebrew school in Istanbul named *Tiferet Ševi* between 1896 and 1903. In 1903, he represented Istanbul Zionists at the Sixth Zionist Congress in Basel. See Yossef Lang, “The Hirschensohn Family of Publishers in Jerusalem, 1882–1908” [Hebrew], *Kesher* 29 (2001): 33.

34 Tamir Karkason, “The Buffer Zone: Ottoman *Maskilim* and their Austro-Hungarian Counterparts—A Case Study,” *Quest* 17 (2020): 146–79.

35 David Fresco, “Notas de viaje,” *El Tiempo*, 21 August 1890, 499.

Until the nineteenth century, Hebrew literacy and knowledge of the fundamentals of Judaism were almost exclusively a masculine privilege. As Tova Cohen and Shmuel Feiner have shown, this led to “the exclusion of women from canonical Jewish culture in general and from the literature of the *Haskalah* in particular.”³⁶ Given that Cohen and Feiner have only located about thirty *Maskilot* in the entire *Haskalah* movement,³⁷ it is no wonder that there were no women in the Ottoman maskilic circle and that until the end of the nineteenth century, there were only a few Jewish women writers in the entire Ottoman empire, where the public space was almost exclusively masculine.³⁸ The Ottoman maskilic circle was thus an exclusively male homosocial space.³⁹

In any case, among all the maskilic associations whose names we know, not a single woman’s name has been found. It is no coincidence that *Śefat Emet*’s bylaws emphasised that it sought to promote the knowledge of Hebrew “as befits any Jewish man” (par. 2); “Jewish man,” without mentioning women. The promotion of Hebrew speech in *Śefat Emet* (see below) certainly did not contribute to the theoretical possibility of integrating women into the association. Eventually, after the 1908 revolution, which brought about transformations in Ottoman associational strategies and following the rise of a new generation of AIU alumni, more women began to join the Ottoman Jewish associations.⁴⁰

We do not know how long *Śefat Emet* operated, but we can cautiously speculate that its immediate effect was not far-reaching. However, *Śefat Emet* was one of only three maskilic associations whose bylaws have reached us, and the only one in Salonica. After the bylaws were delivered to Deinard, they were preserved in Nehama’s collections and were published in the late 1930s in the second volume of *Mikhtavey Dodim mi-Yayin* by Barukh David Bezes, a prominent printer in Salonica at the time, and Ḥanan’el Ḥayyim Ḥassid (d. 1939), a Hebrew teacher and later principal of the *Talmud Torah ha-Gadol* in the city.⁴¹ The bylaws were reprinted in 1966 by a Salonican intellectual named Yitzhak Rafael Molho (1894–1976), who migrated to Palestine in 1919, in his periodical *Oṣar Yehudey Sefarad* (“Treasure of Sephardi Jewry,” Jerusalem, 1959–1970).⁴²

36 Tova Cohen and Shmuel Feiner, eds., *Voice of a Hebrew Maiden: Women’s Writings of the 19th Century Haskalah Movement* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2006), 30.

37 Cohen and Feiner, *Voice of a Hebrew Maiden*, 27–44.

38 Anabella Esperanza, “A Socio-Linguistic Analysis of Early Essays in Judeo-Spanish Written by Women” [Hebrew], *Pe’amim* 166 (2021): 9–49.

39 Karkason, “The Ottoman-Jewish *Haskalah*,” 73–77.

40 Benbassa, “Associational Strategies,” 475–76.

41 Nehama, *Letters*, 2:117–19.

42 Yitzhak Raphael Molho, “The *Śefat Emet* Association, A First Union for Hebrew Speech and Studies in Salonica in the End of the Nineteenth Century” [Hebrew], *Oṣar Yehudey Sefarad* 9 (1966): 106–7. *Oṣar Yehudey Sefarad* was a periodical devoted to the study of Sephardi Jewry and its diasporas.

The historians David Benvenisti (1973) and later Ester Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue (2000) very briefly mentioned the association in their seminal books.⁴³ This article contains the first analysis and English translation of the *Śefat Emet* bylaws (see Appendix 1). I have also included the original Hebrew version of the bylaws (see Appendix 2). The *Śefat Emet* bylaws can be divided into four parts: the purpose of the association; the association's terms of membership and an explanation of its expenses; the association's board committee; and a conclusion.

6 The Promotion of Hebrew Culture, Language, and Speech in Salonica

The first part of the bylaws (preface and pars. 1–2) presents the reason for the association's establishment and its purpose—to promote Hebrew culture, language, and speech in Salonica—as well as the central means it required to implement this activity. The founders indicated that “We, signed below, seeing that our holy language, Hebrew, had been forsaken [...], as it had ceased to be spoken [...]—have been awakened with a renewed spirit, and a great desire to revive and raise it once more.”⁴⁴

This admiration of Hebrew and the desire to promote its use were not unique to *Śefat Emet* among Ottoman maskilic circles. Around a decade earlier, Barukh Mitrani of Edirne had addressed the subject of the Hebrew language as part of his ongoing maskilic sermon in his periodical *Carmi* (1881, Pressburg):

And by adhering to our language, which is sacred to us, we have always been saved by the Lord's will and salvation, as our sages said: “Our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt because they did not change our language.” And we are familiar with the complaint of the prophets in the time of the Babylonian exile that half the ordinary people spoke *Ašddodit* or the language of one of the other peoples (Neh 13:24). But the prophets and the sages in general continued to speak and preserve the Hebrew language, as witnessed by their books, writings, and poems, through each generation and down to the present day.⁴⁵

43 David Benvenisti, *The Jews of Salonica in the Last Generations: Ways of Life, Tradition, and Society* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1973), 37; Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*, 109.

44 Nehama, *Letters*, 2:117.

45 Barukh Mitrani, “Our Nationhood” [Hebrew], *Carmi* 4 (1881): 50–51. See also the earlier perception of Rabbi Judah Alkalai (1798–1878) of Semlin (today Zemun in Serbia), one

In a comment from 1885, Judah Nehama, who maintained ties with Maskilim from across Europe and North Africa, argued that the Hebrew language was the foundation of solidarity among Jews from different regions: “And what is the central bolt (*ha-bariaḥ ha-tikhon*) that links together this people [...] across all corners of the Earth? This is only the Torah, which is written in Hebrew. It encourages them [the Jews] and unites them to this day.”⁴⁶

The founders of the new Salonican association declared that they had decided to establish a Hebrew maskilic association and to call it *Śefat Emet*, “for our holy tongue is true, a plain and clear language; it excels in virtues above all other tongues” (par. 1). I would like to argue that in this sentence, *Śefat Emet*’s founders were clearly referencing the *Śafah Berurah* (“Plain Language”) association, which was established in Jerusalem in September 1889 “to eradicate from the Jewish population in the Land of Israel the use of inferior vernacular dialects, such as the jargons spoken by Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities”; namely, Yiddish and Ladino.⁴⁷ Instead of “these inferior dialects,” the association sought to introduce the use of Hebrew among the Jewish residents of Palestine—Sephardim and Ashkenazim alike.

Maskilim had indeed been operating in the Ottoman empire about four decades before the inception of the “Hebraist” circles of the Palestinian *Yishuv*, promoted by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (1858–1922) and his colleagues in Jerusalem and the *mošavot* (rural Jewish settlements) during the 1880s.⁴⁸ Some Ottoman Maskilim, such as Raphael Ḥayyim Babani and Menachem Farhi (1839–1916) of Istanbul, taught Hebrew using modern methods that promoted Hebrew speech (“Hebrew in Hebrew”; *ivrit be-ivrit*).⁴⁹

of the forerunners of Zionism and Mitrani’s intellectual “father figure,” in his 1843 essay “The Third Redemption”: “It is almost impossible to imagine a true revival of our Hebrew tongue by natural means. But we must have faith that it will come [...]. We must redouble our efforts to maintain Hebrew and to strengthen its position. It must be the basis of our educational work” (Alkalai, “The Third Redemption [1843],” in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1997], 106).

46 Judah ben Jacob Nehama, *Memory of a Pious Man* [Hebrew] (Salonica, 1885), 85.

47 Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, “Plain Language Association (1889),” trans. Marganit Weinberger-Rotman, in *The Origins of Israel, 1882–1948: A Documentary History*, ed. Eran Kaplan and Derek J. Penslar (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 172 (par. B).

48 For Ben-Yehuda and his views, see George Mandel, “Why Did Ben-Yehuda Suggest the Revival of Spoken Hebrew?,” in *Hebrew in Ashkenaz: A Language in Exile*, ed. Lewis Glinert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 193–207.

49 Shlomo Haramati, *Three Who Preceded Ben-Yehuda: Sephardi Oriental Forerunners in the National Revival* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1978), 97–104; Haramati, *Four Who Preceded Ben-Yehuda in the Nineteenth Century* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Va’ad ‘Edat ha-Sefaradim, 1991), 26–32.

However, the revolution in the field of Hebrew speech in Salonica, from a more passive use to a more active one, as expressed in the activities of the *Śefat Emet* association, must be attributed first and foremost to the Hebrew “revival” in the late Ottoman *Yishuv*. The gradual transformation of the use in Hebrew from a “modernised” language used by modest groups of Maskilim (between the mid-eighteenth century and the late nineteenth century) to a language spoken by a broader community of Jews first occurred in Palestine.⁵⁰

In Salonica, as in other centres of modern Hebrew culture throughout the Jewish world between the 1880s and World War II (Eastern Europe, the United States, and North Africa), no one could have asked for Hebrew to be given precedence over the daily language or vernacular in communal and cultural life.⁵¹ Yet even in this more limited framework, *Śefat Emet* was one of the first associations in the Jewish world—and, to the best of our knowledge, also the first among Sephardi and Mizrahi Jewry—to aspire to permit Hebrew a unique status and to cultivate it as a spoken language. It is therefore no wonder that *Śefat Emet* echoes the rhetoric of *Śafah Berurah* and Ben-Yehuda’s circles, motivated by Sephardi self-agency.

The founders of the Jerusalemite *Śafah Berurah* were Ben-Yehuda, R. Chaim Hirschensohn, R. Yaacov Meir (1856–1939),⁵² and the educator Ḥayyim Calmy (1851–1933)⁵³—two Ashkenazi founders and two Sephardi ones.⁵⁴ The *Śafah Berurah* association, whose bylaws were published in the Hebrew press and were therefore known throughout the Hebrew republic of letters, had fathered

50 I will not deal with the question of the boundaries between the Haskalah movement and the Hebrew culture (or revival) movement here. The latter dates from the 1880s, but Maskilim continued to operate in the next decade or two. See Dan Miron, *When Loners Come Together: A Portrait of Hebrew Literature at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: ‘Am ‘Oved, 1987), 56–85.

51 Compare David Guedj, “The Hebrew Network in Morocco during the First Half of the 20th Century” [Hebrew], in *The Long History of Mizrahim: New Directions in the Study of Jews from Muslim Countries*, in *Tribute to Yaron Tsur*, ed. Aviad Moreno, Noah S. Gerber, Esther Meir-Glitzstein, and Ofer Shiff (Sde Boker: Ben-Gurion Institute, 2021), 419–38. Shai Ginsburg is currently completing a book on the history of the Hebrew language in the Jewish Diaspora.

52 Meir would later become the chief rabbi (*Hahambaşı*) of Salonica (1907–1919) and the Sephardi chief rabbi of Palestine (1921–1939). For more about Meir, see David Ashkenazi, *From Hakham Bashi to Chief Rabbi: Rabbi Yaacov Meir 1856–1939* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2021).

53 For Calmy and his relationship with Ben-Yehuda, see Zohar Shavit, “On the Publication of a Bilingual Anthology by Eliezer Ben Yehuda and Haim Calmy” [Hebrew], *Zion* 81 (2016): 448–51.

54 Ashkenazi, *From Hakham Bashi*, 37–46; Yossef Lang, “The Founding and Development of ‘Safa Berura” [Hebrew], *Cathedra* 68 (1993): 67–79.

the Committee for the Hebrew Language (*Wa'ad ha-Lašon ha-Ivrit*), which was founded in 1890.⁵⁵

As for *Šefat Emet*, its purpose was declared as follows: “To revive the Hebrew language by the means at our disposal—that is: to study and read, comprehend, and converse, and correctly write in the language” (par. 2). The association therefore believed that it was important to have an active command of both spoken and written Hebrew. From this, and specifically from the stress placed on Hebrew speech, there is clear evidence of a significant influence from the *Šafah Berurah* association.⁵⁶ However, unlike *Šafah Berurah*, *Šefat Emet*’s core actions touched on the more familiar maskilic curriculum: “The curriculum will consist of studying the Bible and Hebrew grammar, as well as Haskalah periodicals and books” (par. 9). This curriculum is familiar from other maskilic associations both within the Ottoman Empire⁵⁷ and outside of it; for instance, in the Russian Empire.⁵⁸

7 Terms of Membership of the Association

The second part of the *Šefat Emet* bylaws (pars. 3–7) can be divided into three sub-sections: (1) the terms for subscribing to the association, the cost of subscription, and the justification of the association’s expenses (pars. 3–7); (2) the responsibilities of members and curriculum (pars. 8–9); and (3) the limitations imposed on its members (pars. 10–12).

This part clearly reveals the association’s members’ financial status as part of the uprising Salonican bourgeoisie, since the cost of an annual membership of *Šefat Emet*, including the initial subscription, was 0.7 Turkish lira per year for “the founders of the association” and 0.8 lira for new members (par. 3).

By comparison, in the 1870s, a skilled textile factory worker in Istanbul earned four to five *kuruş* (1 *kuruş* = 0.01 lira) a day,⁵⁹ and towards the turn of the century, an artisan was earning from seven to thirteen *kuruş* a day.⁶⁰ A

55 Lang, “Safa Berura,” 67.

56 *Šafah Berurah*’s influence on the *Šefat Emet* is also evident in the resolution of the latter that “should the need arise, they [the collected funds] will be used to finance the salary of tutors and teachers” (par. 7). Compare Ben-Yehuda, “Plain Language,” 172 (par. B).

57 Abraham Danon, *Bolıtino de la Soseyadad Dorşey ha-Haskalah* (Edirne, 1888), 5, 9, 35.

58 Mordechai Zalkin, *A New Dawn: The Jewish Enlightenment in the Russian Empire: Social Aspects* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2000), 92–107, esp. 99–100, 105.

59 Alan Duben and Cam Behar, *Istanbul Households: Marriage, Families and Fertility, 1880–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 36.

60 Donald Quataert, *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire: The Zonguldak Coalfield, 1822–1920* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 63–64.

working-class member was therefore required to work for between a week and almost a full month in order to join such an association for a year, a situation which was, of course, unthinkable. The *Śefat Emet* association was therefore explicitly targeting an upper-middle class audience and made its membership more like that of contemporary elite clubs such as the above-mentioned *Cercle de Salonique* than that of *Śefah Berurah*, which was open to “a person donating much time and effort to the association [...], according to his work,” even if they did not actually donate money to the association.⁶¹

Some upper-middle class Salonican Jews independently progressed up the social ladder, but many others were born into a high social class and often strengthened their status through marital ties. Marriage in Ottoman Jewish society functioned as a connection between two families; the bride’s father and brothers used the marital bond to maintain and strengthen the status and wealth of the families involved. At least until the second half of the nineteenth century, marriage was almost entirely confined to members of the same social class.⁶² Marriage could also improve one’s financial status, as in Nehama’s case, in which a member of a respectable and well-to-do family married a woman from an even more affluent family.

As it was a bourgeois association, references to financial issues are prevalent throughout *Śefat Emet*’s bylaws: fines were imposed on those making payments in arrears (par. 6) and on those absent from its activities (par. 7). The members of *Śefat Emet* were good bourgeois; they were unable to abstain from financially regulating their business, especially given the tradition of Ottoman Jewish associations being an essentially financial entity.⁶³

8 The “House of Study” and Library

The second part of the bylaws also briefly describes *Śefat Emet*’s “house of study” (*bet ha-limmud*) and library. The term “house of study,” which is extensively used in the bylaws (pars. 5, 7, 18),⁶⁴ echoes the term *meldado*, the term for a group devoted to religious Jewish learning in the Ottoman Sephardi

61 Ben-Yehuda, “Plain Language,” 173 (par. C). I have revised Marganit Weinberger-Rotman’s translation of the bylaws.

62 Yaron Ben-Naeh, “The Ottoman-Jewish Family: General Characteristics,” *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 5 (2017): 30.

63 Ben-Naeh, “Jewish Confraternities,” 287–89.

64 See also the contexts in which the term “house” appears in pars. 7, 10, and 11.

world.⁶⁵ In both the traditional and the maskilic contexts, the “house of study” was not intended solely for the elite class of scholars of various types, but had a more popular character and made knowledge and learning accessible to relatively diverse circles. The importance that *Śefat Emet* placed on learning is highlighted by the provision that special meetings of the association’s board committee were “to be held outside the hours of study” (par. 16).

We do not know whether *Śefat Emet* managed to rent a permanent house and establish a “house of study” during its short lifespan. If it did not rent such a place, then the meetings may have taken place in the private home of one of the members or in one of the rooms of the *Talmud Torah ha-Gadol* which, as Dina Danon has noted, “served not only as an educational institution, but also as a vibrant center of Jewish communal life.”⁶⁶ This was the case for the *Qadimah* association, *Śefat Emet*’s successor (see below), which for about three years after its founding “had resided in the garret of the *Talmud Torah ha-Gadol* House.”⁶⁷

The *Śefat Emet* association’s library was to have been located in the association’s house, probably as part of the “house of study” or next to it:

No member will be permitted to remove or take any of the books or other belongings found in the house of the association without the permission of the board committee. The board committee will not be permitted to allow any man outside of the association to borrow any book (pars. 10–11).

We do not know what books the library contained, but the collection of Nehama’s letters from between 1850 and 1895 includes various works of the *Wisenschaft des Judentums* movement and the Haskalah, mainly in Hebrew, such as those of Zunz, Luzzatto, and Meir Halevi (Max) Letteris (1800–1871). Nehama’s library reflects a profound familiarity with the Jewish bookshelf: the Bible, Talmud, biblical commentaries, medieval Jewish philosophy, and more.⁶⁸

A maskilic association’s library may have contained maskilic books as well as earlier Jewish and non-Jewish philosophical literature. It might also have included works by French authors such as those extensively quoted in the writings of another Maskil, Barukh Mitrani: François de La Rochefoucauld

65 Matthias B. Lehmann, *Ladino Rabbinic Literature and Ottoman Sephardic Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 78–84.

66 Dina Danon, “Charity and Social Services in the Ottoman Empire,” in Stillman, *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, last modified 26 September 2021.

67 Barukh Yohanan Alalouf, “Salonik,” *Ha-Maggid*, 19 December 1901, 509–10.

68 Nehama, *Letters*, vols. 1–2.

(1613–1680), Jean de La Fontaine (1621–1695), and Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Count of Mirabeau (1749–1791).⁶⁹ Such a library would probably also have included Hebrew and Ladino periodicals, which were extremely popular among Ottoman Maskilim.⁷⁰

Although one must beware of anachronisms, the possible inventory of *Šefat Emet's* library may be gleaned, at least partially, from a brief description of the library of the *Qadimah* association from December 1901:

Its [the library's] spiritual condition has been improving day by day, and it has already purchased about three hundred books from the new literature that the *Tušyyah* and *Ahī'asaf* companies have published, [which are] precious and useful books. All the members of *Qadimah* have drunk them thirstily. It has also bought the aforesaid number of books [300] for children and young people, to spread the knowledge and sweetness of our language among the youth. It has subscribed to *Ha-Maggid* and *Ha-Šfirah*.⁷¹

Whatever the *Šefat Emet* library contained, it was perceived as a central and consolidating body whose services were only available to the association's members. The library granted them the privilege of knowledge and education while distinguishing them from the general public on the one hand and from members of other associations on the other. The same was true in relation to other contemporary Ottoman maskilic associations and their libraries.⁷²

9 The Association's Board Committee

The third part of the bylaws (pars. 13–17) describes the association's board committee, including the election of its five members and their duties. The bylaws concerning the board committee are similar to those found in other Jewish Ottoman societies and confraternities.⁷³ This is hardly surprising, since many Maskilim were involved in more than one association, and this will certainly

69 For now, see Karkason, "The Ottoman-Jewish *Haskalah*," 72.

70 Karkason, "The Ottoman-Jewish *Haskalah*," 63–5.

71 Alalouf, "Salonik," 509. The *Ahī'asaf* and *Tušyyah* publishing houses were founded in the Russian Empire in the 1890s, after *Šefat Emet* had ceased to exist. Therefore, their books could not have been included in its library.

72 Tamir Karkason, "Printing and Modernity: The Activities of the *Dorshei Ha-Haskalah* Association ('Seekers of the Enlightenment,' 1879–1889) to Revive Hebrew-Alphabet Printing in Edirne" [Hebrew], *Ladinar* 11 (2020): 135–36.

73 Ben-Naeh, "Jewish Confraternities," 284–86.

also have been the case in *Śefat Emet*.⁷⁴ The requirement that “those members elected must accept the appointment without any refusal” (par. 14) may suggest that some individuals were persuaded or coerced to serve as members of the board committees of various associations due to their prestigious status in the community even when they did not wish to assume the position, perhaps due to the burden of their activities in other associations to which they belonged.⁷⁵

The bylaws mention the annual gatherings “every Passover and Sukkot,” when “the board committee will then be required to present them with a clear account of the association’s revenues and expenses. The members will also be permitted to elect a new board committee by a majority vote” (par. 17).⁷⁶ A notable trend of politicisation, and even democratisation, indeed echoes in these bylaws;⁷⁷ however, this was a limited democratisation that was reserved at this stage for members of a specific circle within the upper-middle class of Salonican Jewry.⁷⁸

10 Only Hebrew?

The fourth part of the bylaws (pars. 18–19) is a conclusion. It begins with the determination that “within three months of the founding of the association, members will not be permitted to converse in any other language in the house of study but for the holy tongue; any member found violating this shall be fined” (par. 18). This paragraph presents the importance—or at least the declared importance—that *Śefat Emet* placed on Hebrew speech. However, the association’s founders knew that it was unrealistic to speak only Hebrew during the association’s meetings, and it is no wonder that contrary to two other sections in the bylaws indicating monetary sanctions (pars. 6, 8), this paragraph does not mention any specific fines in such a case. Later evidence from the *Qadimah* association points out that several years before the 1908 revolution, “even they [*Qadimah*’s members] did not exactly keep their decision

74 Judah Nehama, for example, participated in many Salonican associations. See [David Fresco], “Nekrolojia: El rabenu Yehudah Nehama de Salonica,” *El Tiempo*, 2 February 1899, 392–93. See also Nehama, *Letters*, 2:128.

75 Compare Ben-Naeh, “Jewish Confraternities,” 280–82.

76 Compare Ben-Naeh, “Jewish Confraternities,” 286.

77 Molho also had noted this point: see Molho, “*Śefat Emet*,” 106.

78 On the processes of politicisation and democratisation expressed in various societies in Izmir from the mid-nineteenth century on, see Danon, *Izmir*, *passim*.

to only speak to one another in Hebrew”;⁷⁹ if this had been the case for about a decade and a half after *Śefat Emet*’s activity, it is even less likely that it was true in the early 1890s.

The bylaws conclude with the protocol for shutting down the association and dividing its remaining capital among its members (par. 19).

11 *Qadimah: The Successor to Śefat Emet*

Śefat Emet probably ceased to exist in the early 1890s. However, Jews continued to promote Hebrew cultural ideas in the coming years, and a maskilic association named *Qadimah* (“Forward” or “Eastward”; that is to say, towards Palestine) was established in 1898 or 1899.⁸⁰ Among the first members of this association were Moshe Kofinas (1871–1924), who would later become a member of the Greek parliament, and David Isaac Florentin (1874–1941), who would later become a prominent Zionist activist.⁸¹ According to the above-mentioned article published by Barukh Yohanan Alalouf in December 1901, “at first its members were few, [but] it has managed to gather about forty members or more during the last three months [late 1901].”⁸² Alalouf noted that the “*Qadimah* association has determined that each member will deliver a speech (*yidroš drašah*) in Hebrew (*śefat ‘ever*) once every three months, so that the members will practise writing in pure language in our Hebrew tongue.”⁸³

In 1913, Abraham Elmaleh (1885–1967), a Jerusalemite Sephardi intellectual, stated that the association was founded in affinity with Ben-Yehuda’s activities in Jerusalem: “one of the Salonican youngsters” had travelled to Jerusalem “and was surprised to see that even the Arab maidservant speaks clean Hebrew in a pleasant style,” which motivated several Salonican Jews to establish the association.⁸⁴ Elmaleh did not mention the *Śefat Emet* association and its impact on *Qadimah*. While the Palestinian *Yishuv*’s influence on Salonican Hebrew culture is undeniable, Elmaleh ignored the possibility that

79 Abraham Elmaleh, “The Jews of Salonica” [Hebrew], *Ha-Po’el ha-Ša’ir*, 24 June 1913, 9.

80 For *Qadimah*, see Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*, 109; Naar, *Jewish Salonica*, 151, 189, and 334 n. 4. Both studies give 1899 as the year the association was founded, while Alalouf, “Salonik,” 509–10, alludes to 1898 as its founding year.

81 Rena Molho, “Education in Jewish Communities” [Hebrew], in *Jewish Communities in the East in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Greece*, ed. Eyal Ginio (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2014), 172.

82 Alalouf, “Salonik,” 509.

83 Alalouf, “Salonik,” 509–10.

84 Elmaleh, “The Jews of Salonica,” 9.

the local *Śefat Emet* association had also influenced *Qadimah*, perhaps due to his long-standing admiration of Ben-Yehuda.

Elmaleh added that *Qadimah*'s members "tried to penetrate schools and influence them as well" and that this effort was successful "because they did not touch on religious matters in the Talmud Torah at all."⁸⁵ Therefore, the *Talmud Torah ha-Gadol* directors did not interfere with the association's work "and permission to teach Hebrew [in the *Talmud Torah ha-Gadol*] in modern methods was given."⁸⁶ Around 1908 or 1909, *Qadimah* decided to unite with two other local associations in order to appeal to wider audiences and not "be limited only to their narrow circle."⁸⁷

There is no identification between "Hebrew culture" and "Zionism." To escape anachronism, one must avoid using the term "Zionism" to refer to the period that preceded the emergence of Herzlian political Zionism in the late 1890s.⁸⁸ Zionist activity was illegal in the Ottoman Empire before the 1908 revolution, and so distinctive "Zionism" can only be identified in the Empire after this point.⁸⁹ Therefore, even if *Śefat Emet* promoted Hebrew culture in its own way, the term "Zionism" should not be anachronistically used in relation to the early 1890s. Regarding the *Qadimah* association, Benbassa and Rodrigue have pointed out that "it was not long [after the late 1890s] before it came to be regarded as a clandestine Zionist association";⁹⁰ it is possible that there was some justification for this image.

The *Śefat Emet* and *Qadimah* associations laid the foundations for extensive Hebrew cultural activity in Salonica during the following decades, an activity that grew in parallel with the widespread Zionist activity that arose in the city in the three decades after Salonica transitioned to Greek rule in 1912.⁹¹ And yet, while *Qadimah* is often mentioned in historical narratives of the history of the Jews of Salonica, *Śefat Emet* has been almost forgotten.⁹² This article seeks

85 Elmaleh, "The Jews of Salonica," 9.

86 Elmaleh, "The Jews of Salonica," 9.

87 Elmaleh, "The Jews of Salonica," 9.

88 For a short but comprehensive discussion of Herzlian political Zionism, see Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 93–105.

89 Benbassa, "Associational Strategies," 467–77.

90 Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*, 109.

91 Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*, 134–43; Paris Papamichos Chronakis, "A National Home in the Diaspora? Salonican Zionism and the Making of a Greco-Jewish City," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 8, no. 2 (2018): 59–84. I would also like to mention here the activities of Yitzhak Epstein (1862–1943), a Hebrew educator in Salonica, between 1909 and 1915.

92 There was also an association of Salonican migrants to Palestine named *Qadimah* that operated in Tel Aviv in the 1930s and 1940s, which was undoubtedly named after the

to return the *Śefat Emet* association to the historical and collective memory regarding the Jews of Salonica from this moment on.

12 Conclusion

The *Śefat Emet* association provided a meeting place for members of a certain circle among the growing Jewish bourgeoisie while promoting Hebrew culture and speech. Like many Ottomans before them who were active in associations for the benefit of their members, the founders of *Śefat Emet* aspired to establish a framework in which to participate in share leisure activities and maintain ongoing social contact. The association's members were devoted to acquiring knowledge and education, but did so in frameworks that were limited to members of one class, excluding those who were not able to purchase books or join a maskilic association. In Salonica, bourgeois from all *millets* maintained trade connections and adopted similar leisure culture norms, including various study and reading clubs; members of the lower classes, who had no spare pennies in their pockets, were excluded from these circles. While other Ottoman Jewish bourgeoisie in Izmir or Edirne sought to “educate” Jews of lower classes about values such as productivisation or proper “deservedness” of charity in a modern spirit, the members of *Śefat Emet* sought to stay within their comfort zone and did not try to “educate” others to adopt their ideology.

Śefat Emet resisted the dominant trend of modernisation in Ottoman Jewry during the second half of the nineteenth century, which aspired to promote modernisation in a Western, usually Francophone style. This “Westernising” trend of modernisation generated transformations in lifestyle and material culture and often reflected or brought about secularisation processes, distancing people from Jewish observance. Even if this path of modernisation promoted intra-Jewish solidarity in its own way, it often emphasised an affinity to Francophone culture and the promotion of integration into the surrounding society rather than preserving Jewish communal living frameworks or promoting Jewish “proto-national” patterns of solidarity.

Salonican association. The Salonican *Qadimah* was also mentioned in Israeli memorial books about the Salonican community that appeared between the 1960s and 1980s, and there are also three references to it in the *Greece* volume of the prestigious series about Jewish communities in the East in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries published by the Ben-Zvi Institute.

An alternative, maskilic path of modernisation developed from the 1840s on and promoted Jewish observance and the preservation of “traditional” communal frameworks, along with the assimilation of “secular” studies and affinity to the maskilic bookshelf of Central and Eastern Europe. The Maskilim supported inter-Jewish solidarity, which was often greater than identification with Francophone culture or the surrounding societies. However, the *Śefat Emet* association represents a branching out of these Ottoman maskilic perceptions towards a more distinguished affinity with modern Hebrew culture, in correspondence with the “revival” of Hebrew culture in the Palestinian *Yishuv* from the 1880s. *Śefat Emet*’s promotion of Hebrew speech was particularly innovative in Salonica since this practice had not been recognised in Ottoman maskilic associations. In my view, *Śefat Emet*’s members perceived Hebrew culture as an alternative modernisation route that was more suited to their needs than Francophone modernisation, which threatened their Jewish identity in a changing world. Despite the difficulty of promoting Hebrew speech in the local climate, *Śefat Emet* praised the Hebraism that would become more significant for Salonican Jewry in the following decades.

It is better not to read the beginnings of the Hebrew “revival” in Salonica as an inception of “Salonican Zionism,” but rather to locate *Śefat Emet* in the context of its time and place: a distinctive bourgeois association that preferred local modernisation in a Hebrew spirit over the modernisation trends in the spirit of the Francophone world and the AIU. For many of those who sought to strengthen their Jewish identity in an era of transition in Salonica, even if they had no aspiration to national separatism, the Hebrew language indeed served as a “language of truth.”

Appendix 1: *Śefat Emet's* Bylaws⁹³

Translated from Hebrew into English by Kedem Golden

The *Śefat Emet* Association

*May it be established in righteousness*⁹⁴

Founded in the month of Kislev 5651 [December 1890]

We, signed below, seeing that our holy language, Hebrew, had been forsaken, and slumbering like a bereaved mother, as it has ceased to be spoken by its children the men of Israel and was no longer prevalent neither at home nor outside⁹⁵—have been awakened with a renewed spirit and a great desire to revive and raise it once more. After much inquiry, we have made up our minds to establish an association and found it on these conditions, which—God willing—we shall elaborate in the following:

1. The association shall be called *Śefat Emet* ["The Language of Truth"],⁹⁶ for our holy tongue is true, a plain and clear language; it excels in virtues above all other tongues,⁹⁷ and strength and kingship were bestowed upon it to govern all others. For it was in Hebrew that the Lord chose to give us his commandments and laws—the true *Torah* passed on to us by Moses on Mount Sinai.
2. The purpose of the association shall be to revive the Hebrew language by the means at our disposal—that is: to study and read, comprehend, and converse, and correctly write in the language, as befits any Jewish man.
3. We, the founders of the association, have taken it upon ourselves to furnish the treasury of the association with the preliminary sum of half a silver *Medjid* [*mecidiye*],⁹⁸ and to pay a monthly fee of five golden *Gruš* [*kuruš*].⁹⁹
4. Any member who wishes to join our association must pay the initial fee as determined by the board committee, which will consist of no less than one *Medjid*, as well as a monthly sum of five golden *Gruš*.

93 Nehama, *Letters*, 2:117–19.

94 After Prov 25:5.

95 After Gen 39:5.

96 After Prov 12:19.

97 Literally: "A maiden in its virtues, the mother of all languages."

98 One silver *mecidiye* = 1/5 Turkish lira.

99 One golden *kuruš* = 1/100 Turkish lira.

5. All members will be required to bring the fee to the house of study and to pass it to the treasurer or one of the other members of the board committee.
6. The monthly fee will be collected in the first week of each month. A member who falls behind said date will be fined by the sum of one golden *Gruš*; any member who intentionally misses the payment for two consecutive months shall be removed from our association and have no claim to it.
7. The collected funds will be allocated to cover the expenses of the association—that is: to pay for the lease of the house and for the purchase of books and periodicals required for our purposes. Should the need arise, they will be used to finance the salary of tutors and teachers.
8. All members will be required to come to the house of study at those dates and hours set by the board committee. Any member who intentionally misses three consecutive meetings will be fined by the sum of two golden *Gruš*.
9. The curriculum will consist of studying the Bible and Hebrew grammar, as well as periodicals and Haskalah books. The orders and methods of study will be determined by the board committee.
10. Any member who wishes to dedicate a book to the house of the association will be listed and recognised in the contributors' scroll.
11. No member will be permitted to remove or take any of the books or other belongings found in the house of the association without the permission of the board committee. The board committee will not be permitted to allow any man outside of the association to borrow any book—only to members who must deposit a collateral greater than its worth.
12. Any member who leaves the association shall have no claim to the sums, books or donations he had given.
13. The members of the association will elect five men among them to serve as the board committee and manage all the association's affairs: a president, a vice-president, a treasurer, a secretary, and an advisor.
14. The election of the board committee will be made by a majority vote of the members, and those members elected must accept the appointment without any refusal.
15. The board committee will be required to oversee all the affairs and needs of the association, and they will be given a mandate to conduct the affairs of the association as they see fit.
16. When the board committee is required to conduct any business for the association, the treasurer must call an assembly and notify the board committee on the date and time of the meeting, to be held outside the hours of study.

17. A general gathering of all the members shall be held every Passover and Sukkot, during the weekdays of the holiday. The board committee will then be required to present them with a clear account of the association's revenues and expenses. The members will also be permitted to elect a new board committee by a majority vote.
18. Within three months of the founding of the association, members will not be permitted to converse in any other language in the house of study but for the holy tongue; any member found violating this shall be fined.
19. The association will only be dissolved by a decision of the majority of the members. Any funds or valuables found then in the treasury of the association will be distributed equally among current members. Any members who had left the association prior shall have no claim over them, as noted in section 12 [above].

Appendix 2: The Original Hebrew Bylaws¹⁰⁰

חברת שפת¹⁰¹ אמת יכב"ץ [יכון בצדק]
 נתיסדה בחדש כסלו שנת שפת¹⁰² אמת תכון לעד
 חמשת¹⁰³ אלפים תרנ"א לב"ע [לבריאית העולם]

ואנחנו הבאים על החתום, בראותינו כי שפת קדשנו היא השפה העבריה, נעזבה ונרדמה, כאם שכולה, אשר זה אלפי שנים חדלה מהיות מדוברת בפי בניה בני ישראל, ואינה נוהגת לא בבית ולא בשדה, אשר על זה התעורר בקרבנו רוח חדשה, ומאד נכספה נפשנו להחיות אותה ולהקימה, ואחר החיפוש זאת¹⁰⁴ מצאנו ליסד חברה אחת ולכונן אשיותיה ע"פ [על פי] התנאים אשר נבאר בע"ה [בעזרת השם].

א החברה הזאת תקרא בשם שפת אמת יען שפתנו הקדושה היא האמיתית, שפה ברורה ונקיה, גברת היא במעליותיה [!] אַם כל הלשוונות, ולה נְתָנָה העז והמלוכה להיות שְׁלֻטָת על כְּלָנָה, בה בחר ה' ליתן לנו מצות וחוקים היא תורת אמת הנתנה לנו ע[י] משה בהר סיני.

ב מטרת החברה היא, להחיות ולהקיץ את השפה העבריה ע[י] אמצעים¹⁰⁵ כפי אשר תשיג ידנו לעשות, היינו: ללמוד ולקרא, להבין ולדבר, ולכתוב את השפה על נכונה, כאשר כן יאות לכל איש אשר בשם ישראל יכונה.

ג אנחנו מיסדי החברה קבלנו עלינו לתת לאוצר החברה כסף קדימה סך חצי מיג'יד כסף ולשלם בכל חדש סך חמשה גרוש זהב[.].

ד כל חבר אשר יבא להסתפח אל חברתנו, יתן כסף קדימה כאשר ישית עליו הועד, אך לא פחות מא' [חד] מיג'יד, ומידי [!] חדש בחדשו חמשה גרוש זהב[.].

ה כל חבר מחוייב להביא את הכסף המגיע ממנו, אל בית הלימוד. ולמוסרם להסוכן או לאחד מבני הועד.

ו זמן פריעת הכסף החדשי יהיה מי[ו]ם ר"ח [ראש חודש] עד שבעת ימים אחריו, ואם יעבר מזמן המוגבל יתן כסף ענושים סך א' [חד] גרוש זהב, ואשר בְּמָרְד וּבְמַעַל לֹא ישלם שני חדשים רצופים נְדָחָה הוא מאת חברתינו ואין לו שום תביעה על החברה.

100 Nehama, *Letters*, 2:117–9. All punctuation marks are mine unless otherwise stated; all comments in square brackets are also mine. In the printed version from 1939, the printers used one apostrophe rather than two to mark acronyms; I have corrected this marking here.

101 Original punctuation mark.

102 Original punctuation marks.

103 Original punctuation mark.

104 Here, I have deleted a dot that was mistakenly added by the printers.

105 Originally, there was an unnecessary space towards the end of the word, between the letter Yod and the letter Mem.

- 106 ז' הכסף הנקבץ יהיה עבור הוצאות החברה, היינו: לשלם שכירות בית (בית הלימוד)¹⁰⁷ ולקנות ספרים ומ"ע [מכתבי עתים] הדרושים לחפצנו. ואם יצטרכו גם לשלם שכר מורים ומלמדים.
- ח' כל חבר מחויב לבא אל בית הלימוד, בכל הזמנים והשעות אשר יקבעו אנשי הועד, והחבר אשר בזדון ובלי אונס יאחר מלבא שלש פעמים רצופים [!], ישלם כסף ענושים סך שני גרוש זהב.
- ט' הלימוד יהיה, תנ["] ודקדוק שפת עבר, גם מכ"ע וספרי השכלה. סדרי ודרכי הלימוד יהיה לפי דעת ורצון הועד[.].
- י' כל חבר אשר ידבנו לבו להקדיש ספר לבית החברה שמו יורשם [צ"ל יירשם] לברכה בלוח רשימת הספרים[.].
- יא" הספרים ושאר חפצי הבית אשר ימצאו בבית החברה, אין רשות לשום אחד להוציא מהם החוצה או ליקח לביתו אם לא ברשות הועד, והועד אין להם רשות להשאיל שום ספר לאיש¹⁰⁸ זר אשר לא מחברתנו, רק לחבר, עם משכון יתר משויו[.].
- יב" אם אחד מהחברים יפרד מהחברה, אין לו שום תביעה לא על הכסף, לא על הספרים, ולא על הנדבות שנתן.
- יג" החברים יבחרו מתוכם חמשה אנשים אשר בשם ועד יקראו. ואשר על פיהם יצאו ויבאו כל ענייני החברה, היינו: אחד לראש ולמנהיג, ואחד למשנה לו, אחד גבאי וסוכן, אחד סופר ומזכיר החברה, ואחד ליועץ[.].
- יד" בחירת אנשי הועד תהיה עפ"י רוב דעות החברים, והחברים אשר יבחרו [צ"ל ייבחרו] מחוייבים לקבל עליהם המשרה בלי שום סרוב והתנצלות[.].
- טו" הועד מחוייב לעיין ולפקח על כל ענייני וצרכי החברה, ולהם ניתן הרשות לישא וליתן בכל ענייני החברה כפי רצונם.
- טז" כאשר יצטרך הועד לישא וליתן באחד מעסקי החברה, אזי על הגבאי לקרא אסיפה, ולהודיע להועד כי יתאספו באיזה זמן ובאיזה שעה, אך לא בשעה משעות הלימוד.
- יז" בכל חה"מ [חול המועד] פסח וסוכות, יתאספו אסיפה כללית כל החברים. ועל הועד להראות להם חשבון גלוי מהכנסות ויציאות [צ"ל הוצאות] החברה, וכ"כ [וכמו כן] על החברים הרשות לבחור ועד חדש עפ"י רוב דעות.
- יח" אחר עבור שלשה חדשים מיום התיסדות החברה, אין רשות לשום חבר לדבר בבית הלימוד בלשון אחר, כי אם דוקא בלה"ק [בלשון הקודש], ואשר יעבור ע"ז [על זה] כסף ענושים יושט עליו.
- יט" החברה לא תתבטל כי אם עפ"י רוב דעת החברים, וכל כסף וְשֵׁנָה כסף אשר ימצא באוצר החברה תהיה נחלקת [!] בשוה לכל אחד מהחברים אשר ימצאו בזמן ההוא, ועל החברים אשר מכבר נפרדו אין להם שום תות"ב [תביעה ותובענה], כאמור בסעיף י"ב.

106 From the seventh paragraph, the printers added an apostrophe after the number.

107 In original.

108 The line beginning with the word *le-is* was originally printed without a tab.

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