

# Notes on the Study of *Merkabah* Mysticism and *Hekhalot* Literature in English *with an appendix on Jewish Magic*

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*Merkabah* (= CHARIOT) mysticism developed out of speculation on and expansion of the visions of Ezekiel<sup>1</sup> and, to a lesser extent, Isaiah and Daniel.<sup>2</sup> This strain of mysticism meanders through the intertestamental pseudepigrapha<sup>3</sup> and even touches corners of gnostic and Qumran texts.<sup>4</sup>

1. chapters 1, 8, and 10.
2. Isaiah, chapter 6; Daniel, chapter 2.
3. 1 Enoch 14; The Life of Adam and Eve (including The Apocalypse of Moses); The Apocalypse of Abraham. For translations of these, see James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Volume 1 (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1983). 1 Enoch 14 is particularly important; Gruenwald (AMM, p. 36) says, "...it is the oldest Merkavah vision we know of from outside the canonical Scriptures. ... Indeed, one can consider this particular vision a model-vision of Merkavah mysticism."
4. On *merkabah* in gnostic works: (texts) "The Hypostasis of the Archons" and "On the Origin of the World," in James M. Robinson (ed), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden and San Francisco: E.J. Brill/Harper and Row, 1977; revised edition, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); Ithamar Gruenwald's article, "Jewish Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism," in *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, edited by J. Dan and F. Talmage (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 1982). On *merkabah* in Qumran works (= Dead Sea Scrolls): David Halperin, *FACES* (see below, p. 7); Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin Books, 1987): Section 12; > >

*Merkabah* material and references can be found in shreds, often more provocative than telling, in the Talmud and other rabbinic writings.<sup>5</sup> However, the major concentrated expression of *merkabah* mysticism is that cluster of writings which has come to be called the *hekhalot* (= HEAVENLY HALLS) literature, which is the focus of this paper.

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

Since the 'seventies, scholarly work on the *hekhalot* texts has increased dramatically, as the publication dates on a clear majority of the books and articles discussed below attest. Before this spate of academic activity, there were in English little more than Gershom Scholem's works<sup>6</sup> and Hugo Odeberg's attempt at a critical edition of one of the *hekhalot* texts<sup>7</sup> to shed light on this oblique collection of writings. Even as this lament is being recalled, no time should be lost in acknowledging Scholem's inescapable influence on this and all other aspects of the study of Jewish mysticism. Some of Scholem's conclusions regarding the *hekhalot* have been challenged, and some of his observations on and characterizations of the

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4. cont. > Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994): pp. 419-431; M. Wise, M. Abegg, and E. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996): 365-377 (includes the "Masada Fragment"); Carol A. Newsom, "Merkabah Exegesis in the Qumran *Sabbath Shirot*," in *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38:1 (1987) and *idem*, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (HARVARD SEMETIC STUDIES 27, Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1985), which is a revised version of 4Q *SEREK SIROT 'OLAT HASSABBAT* (THE QUMRAN ANGELIC LITURGY): EDITION, TRANSLATION, AND COMMENTARY (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge: Harvard University, 1982; see especially Chapter VII. "4Q Sir and the Tradition of the Hekhalot Hymns"); Lawrence Schiffman, "Merkavah Speculation at Qumran," in *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians*, edited by J. Reinartz and D. Swetschinski (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982); and *idem*, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994): Chapter 22, "Mysticism and Magic."
  5. Mishna: *Megillah* 4:10, *Hagigah* 2:7, *Tosefta Hagigah* 2:1-7, Palestinian Talmud 77 a-d; Babylonian Talmud 11b-16a. See the books listed below by Halperin (p. 7) and Chernus (p. 5).
  6. A list of Scholem's works is given below. Morton Smith's "Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati," in *Biblical and Other Studies*, edited by Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963) was another early notice. In the 'forties, Smith translated *Hekhalot Rabbati* into English (the complete text—not just the second half). This translation was circulated among scholars in the field but never published. The typescript was corrected by Scholem, whose occasional notes appear in the margins. Scholem mentions Smith's translation in *Jewish Gnosticism...*, page 11, note 4.
  7. *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch* (1928, Cambridge University Press; rpt New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973; with a prolegomenon by Jonas C. Greenfield).

*hekhlot* texts have come to seem convenient, imposing order on that which is, in fact, near chaos. Yet, Scholem's writings on this subject remain some of the clearest and best supported. They are also among the most accessible, not only in their style but in their actual availability. As for Odeberg, his lone work is more problematic. As significant as it *was*, Odeberg's treatment of *Sefer ha-Hekhalot* (BOOK OF THE HEKHALOT, dubbed by Odeberg "3 Enoch") is now considered unreliable and misleading on many points. But, as contemporary scholar David Halperin has pointed out,<sup>8</sup> Odeberg's work has "proved easier to criticize than to emulate," for critical editions of *hekhlot* texts—with English translations or not—are few indeed.

Today, however, we are in pretty fair shape to study *merkabah* mysticism and *hekhlot* texts, though some of the leading scholars in this field publish in German<sup>9</sup> and, of course, Hebrew. Nevertheless, from the texts and studies now available in English, the persistent reader can certainly gain firm impressions of (i) the contents of the *hekhlot* texts, (ii) the issues captivating contemporary scholarship regarding the *hekhlot* texts, and (iii) the place of the *hekhlot* texts in the history and development of Judaism, early Christianity, and their mysticism.

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

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8. FACES, p. 364. (See below: Halperin).

9. In German there is Peter Schaefer and his team. Certainly, the most significant work which Schaefer has overseen is *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1981), which presents in the original Hebrew and Aramaic an array of manuscript readings side by side. *Synopse* was followed by *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* by the same team (1984, same publisher). Soon after, German translations of *Synopse* appeared (1987 onward, same publisher). Schaefer has also published a collection of his articles—ten in German, three in English—as *Hekhalot-Studien* (1988, same publisher).

## Studies

The best general introduction to *hekhlot* and *merkabah* mysticism is Joseph Dan's *Ancient Jewish Mysticism* (Tel Aviv: MOD [= Ministry of Defense] Books, 1993). Dan reviews all of the major topics, issues, and texts in a manner which does not exclude the non-specialist. Any reader can appreciate this well-grounded overview.<sup>10</sup> Further elaborating on the topics covered in *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism* is the collection of articles which comprises Dan's *Jewish Mysticism, Volume One: LATE ANTIQUITY* (Northvale/Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998). Many of Dan's articles listed below have been reprinted in this book (hereafter JM1).

The works of Gershom Scholem form the basis of contemporary scholarship on Jewish mysticism, and, hence, they provide the foundation of subsequent work on *merkabah* mysticism and *hekhlot* texts. Those works by Scholem which address this subject at length are the following:

- *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960; 2<sup>nd</sup> improved edition, 1965.
- *Kabbalah* [articles collected from ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA]. Jerusalem and New York: Keter Publishing House and Times Books, 1974; rpt. New York, Meridian, 1978; rpt. New York, Dorset Press, 1987.  
Pages 8-21; pages 373-6 (“Merkabah Mysticism”); and pp. 377-81 (“Metatron”)
- *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. Jerusalem: Schocken Publishing House, 1941; London: Thames and Hudson, 1955; reprinted frequently New York: Schocken Books.  
Lecture 2: “Merkabah Mysticism and Jewish Gnosticism”

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10. *Ancient Jewish Mysticism* expands Dan's earlier chap book, *Three Types of Ancient Jewish Mysticism* (University of Cincinnati, 1984), which discusses

- a. ascent to the divine world
- b. the mysticism of Hebrew letters
- c. *Sar Torah* (Prince of the Torah) revelations

(*Three Types of Ancient Jewish Mysticism* = JM1: Chapter 2.)

Besides Dan's works on ancient Jewish mysticism and Scholem's *Jewish Gnosticism...*, there are a number of studies which focus on the topic of *merkabah/hekhalot* mysticism:

- Arbel, Vita Daphna. *Beholders of Divine Secrets: Mysticism and Myth in the Hekhalot and Merkavah Literature*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.

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

FROM THE SUNY PRESS CATALOGUE (Spring 2003): "While previous scholarship has demonstrated the connection between Hekhalot and Merkavah mysticism and parallel traditions in Rabbinical writings, the Dead Sea Scrolls, apocalyptic, early Christian, and Gnostic sources, this work points out additional mythological traditions that resonate in this literature. Arbel suggests that mythological patterns of expression, as well as themes and models rooted in Near Eastern mythological traditions are employed, in spiritualized fashion, to communicate mystical content."

- Chernus, Ira. *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism: Studies in the History of Midrash* [STUDIA JUDAICA, Band XI]. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1982.

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

- Davila, James R. *Descenders to the Chariot: The People behind the Hekhalot Literature* [SUPPLEMENT TO THE JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF JUDAISM, Volume 70]. Leiden/Boston/Koln: Brill, 2001.

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

- Deutsch, Nathaniel. *The Gnostic Imagination. Gnosticism, Mandaeism, and Merkabah Mysticism* [BRILL'S SERIES ON JEWISH STUDIES, 13]. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995.

Deutsch gives an account of the relationship between Gnosticism and *merkabah* mysticism using Scholem's written statements on these as a starting point. He surveys a range of scholarly opinion on issues surrounding these topics, drawing on many of the writers mentioned in this bibliography. Deutsch summarizes his view of Scholem on page 36: "Even though his [Scholem's] comparative analysis of Gnosticism and Merkavah mysticism is problematic from a number of methodological perspectives, its role as an intellectual catalyst cannot be overstated."

- Deutsch, Nathaniel. *Guardians of the Gate. Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity* [BRILL'S SERIES IN JEWISH STUDIES, 22]. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

“Within Merkabah mysticism, God is frequently depicted as an exalted and highly remote figure. Thus, Scholem was partly right when he described the gulf between humans and the God in Merkabah mysticism. Yet, Scholem erred when he emphasized the impossibility of closing this gulf—that is, when he defined the God of Merkabah mysticism as absolutely inaccessible or transcendent. How was the distance between human beings and God breached in Merkabah mysticism? The answer to this question requires an appreciation of the paradoxical nature of the angelic vice regent” (*Guardians*, p. 9). Deutsch discusses Metatron in this role, with comments on Akatriel; he then examines similar figures in Gnosticism (Sabaoth) and Mandaeism (Abathur).

- Elior, Rachel. *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism*, translated by David Louvish [= MIKDASH U-MERKAVAH, KOHANIM U-MAL'AKHIM, HEKHAL BA-MISTIKAH HA YEHIDIT HA-KEDUMAH, 2002]. Oxford / Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004.

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

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

- Eskola, Timo. *Messiah and the Throne: Jewish Merkabah Mysticism and Early Christian Exaltation Discourse* [WISSENSCHAFTLICHE UNTER-SUCHUNGEN ZUM NEUEN TESTAMENT 2. Reihe 142]. Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001.

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

- Fossum, Jarl E. *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christology* [NOVUM TESTAMENTUM ET ORBIS ANTIQUUS 30] Freiburg, Schweiz: Universitätsverlag / Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1995.

“Many statements about Jesus in the Gospel according to John can be paralleled by what is said about Metatron in *3 Enoch* and the Son in Valentinian Gnosticism. Perhaps the most striking similarity is that they all are represented as the possessor of the Name of God, the concept of which plays an enormous role in Judaism. As the figure of Metatron appears to be some sort of systemization of and elaboration upon

everything that was said about the principal angel in older sources, works outdating even John, it would seem that both Johannine and Gnostic Christology owe to mystical Judaism.” (INTRODUCTION, pages 3-4)

- Green, Arthur. *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.  
In chapters 4 through 7, passages from *Shi'ur Qomah*, 3 Enoch, *Razo shel Sandalphon* (Secret of Sandalphon, a *hekhlot*-related text), and *Hekhalot Rabbati* are translated and analyzed.
- Gruenwald, Ithamar. *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* [ARBEITEN ZUR GESCHICHTE DES ANTIKEN JUDENTUMS UND DES URCHRISTENTUMS, Band XIV]. Leiden/Koln: E.J. Brill, 1980. (hereafter AMM)  
The first half of the book analyzes the major features of the *merkavah* tradition; the second half describes the *hekhlot* texts one by one.
- Gruenwald, Ithamar. *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism. Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Gnosticism* [BEITRÄGE ZUR ERFORSCHUNG DES ALTEN TESTAMENTS UND DES ANTIKEN JUDENTUMS, Band 14]. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988.  
*From Apocalypticism...* is a collection of articles, most previously published. Four of the articles are new, and one appears in English for the first time.
- Halperin, David J. *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision*. [TEXTE UND STUDIEN ZUM ANTIKEN JUDENTUM, Volume 16]. Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1988. (hereafter FACES)  
FACES is a thorough study which challenges many conclusions and assumptions of previous scholars, tracing *merkavah* material from the Bible, through the apocalypses and rabbinic literature, concluding with the *hekhlot* texts. Translations of the text *Re'iyot Yezkiel* (VISIONS OF EZEKIEL) and other important segments of *hekhlot* material are included.  
FACES is valuable in a way that few books of this ilk are in that Halperin invites the reader to engage in his entire scholarly process, which he lays out in great detail in his 450-page text, two-tiered notes (footnotes *and* endnotes), seven informative appendices (Appendix I: “Orientation to Rabbinic Sources” is especially helpful), and full reference list (which is divided into sixteen sections according to topic).
- Halperin, David J. *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature* [AMERICAN ORIENTAL SERIES, #62]. New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980.  
This study investigates the references to the *merkavah* tradition in the Mishna and the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds. (See note 5 on page 2.)
- Janowitz, Naomi. *Icons of Power: Ritual Practices in Late Antiquity* [MAGIC IN HISTORY]. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.  
Chapter 5, “Using Names, Letters, and Praise: The Language of Ascent,” focuses on *Hekhalot Rabbati*; Chapter 6, “Combining Words and Deeds: Angelic Imprecations in The *Book of Secrets*,” discusses *Sefer ha-Razim*. The *hekhlot* practitioners are considered within the broader setting of the prevailing assumptions—Jewish, Christian, and pagan—of the culture in Late Antiquity concerning religion and ritual.

- Janowitz, Naomi. *The Poetics of Ascent. Theories of Language in a Rabbinic Ascent Text* [SUNY SERIES IN JUDAICA: HERMENEUTICS, MYSTICISM, AND CULTURE]. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.  
*Poetics* offers a translation of *Ma'aseh Merkabah* with a speculative analysis regarding the functions of this text's "ritual language."
- Kanagaraj, Jey J. *Mysticism in the Gospel of John: An Inquiry into Its Background* [JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, Sup. 158]. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.  
 The first half of the book (Parts 1 and 2) provides an excellent survey of *merkabah* material and the literature (apocalyptic, non-apocalyptic—including Qumran material—and Christian) clustered around it from Hellenistic times through the first century. Part 2 examines *merkabah* mysticism in some detail to set up an analysis of its connections with Johannine mysticism.
- Kanarfogel, Ephraim. *"Peering through the Lattices": Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000.  
 Kanarfogel tracks the influence and use of *hekhalot* and other mystical and magical material to 12<sup>th</sup>- and 13<sup>th</sup>-century Germany and France. His argument is that esoteric teachings and practices spread beyond the *Hasidei Ashkenaz* to the *tosafists*, rabbinic descendants of Rashi, conventionally considered to have been inclined exclusively toward study of the Talmud.
- Kuyt, Annalies. *The 'Descent' to the Chariot. Towards a Description of the Terminology, Place, Function and Nature of the YERIDAH in Hekhalot Literature* [TEXTE UND STUDIEN ZUM ANTIKEN JUDENTUM, Volume 45]. Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995. (hereafter DESCENT)  
 DESCENT offers a discussion of the heavenly journey, *yeridah*, literally "descent," to the *merkabah* in various passages of the *hekhalot* literature. Kuyt outlines the contents of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, *Hekhalot Zutreti*, *Ma'aseh Merkabah*, *Merkabah Rabbah*, 3 Enoch, and one of the Genizah fragments. Translated excerpts from all these are included.
- Lesses, Rebecca Macy. *Ritual Practices to Gain Power. Angels, Incantations, and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* [HARVARD THEOLOGICAL STUDIES 44]. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998. (hereafter POWER)  
 Lesses concentrates on the adjuration sections of the *hekhalot* material. Along with an analysis of these "ritual performances," Lesses presents a survey of current scholarship (covering many of the authors mentioned in the present paper). Further, she attempts to set the adjurations of the *hekhalot* into the milieu of the Greco-Egyptian ritual literature of late antiquity.
- Morray-Jones, C.R.A. *A Transparent Illusion. The Dangerous Vision of Water in Hekhalot Mysticism: A Source-Critical and Tradition-Historical Inquiry* [Supplements to the JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF JUDAISM, volume 59]. Leiden/Boston/Koeln: Brill, 2002.  
 In the first section of *A Transparent Illusion*, Morray-Jones builds upon (and occasionally corrects) comments regarding the "water test" passages in his own earlier two-part article, "Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1-12): The Jewish Mystical



background of Paul's Apostolate, Part 1: The Jewish Sources" and "Part 2: Paul's Heavenly Ascent and Its Significance (both in *Harvard Theological Review* 86, Cambridge: 1993). Thereafter, Morray-Jones offers an in-depth analysis of the "water vision episode" within the context of the *hekhalot* literature: *Hekhalot Rabbati* and, especially, *Hekhalot Zutarti*. An extensive appendix discusses "Solomon and the Queen of Sheba," a story which "appears to derive from the same traditional background and to be related in some manner to the water vision episode itself" (page 230).

- Orlov, Andrei A. *The Enoch Metatron Tradition* [TEXTS AND STUDIES IN ANCIENT JUDAISM 107]. Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005.
  - PART ONE, "Evolution of the Roles and Titles of the Seventh Antediluvian Hero in Mesopotamian, Enochic, and Merkabah Tradition"
  - PART TWO, "Polemical (Adamic, Mosaic, and Noachic) Developments and Their Role in the Evolution of Enoch's Roles and Titles in the Slavonic Apocalypse (= 2 Enoch)"
  - Chapter Three (in PART ONE) deals primarily with *Sefer Hekhalot* (3 Enoch).
  
- Schaefer, Peter. *The Hidden and Manifest God. Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* [SUNY SERIES IN JUDAICA: HERMENEUTICS, MYSTICISM, AND RELIGIONS]. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992. (hereafter HMG)
  - HMG is a detailed look at a selection of *hekhalot* texts. Instead of summarizing each text in turn, Schaefer organizes his analysis thematically, considering each text's notion of God, angels, and man. He clarifies the roles of two distinct motifs: (i) ascent through the *hekhalot* to the throne of glory, and (ii) the adjuration—either to God or to one of his angels.
  
- Swartz, Michael D. *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism. An Analysis of MA'ASEH MERKABAH* [TEXTE UND STUDIEN ZUM ANTIKEN JUDENTUM, Volume 28]. Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1991.
  - Mystical Prayer*...gives a full treatment and translation of *Ma'aseh Merkabah* (WORK OF THE CHARIOT).
  
- Swartz, Michael D. *Scholastic Magic. Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
  - Scholastic Magic* analyzes and translates the *Sar Torah* (PRINCE OF THE TORAH) texts with an eye toward the cultural environment which produced them.

## Translations and References

### The Hekhalot Corpus

The number of *hekhalot* texts in translation has grown slowly over the years. Alas, here we enter directly into the question of what *is* and what *is not* a member of the *hekhalot* family; the canons offered by various scholars differ. For instance, Schaefer's *Synopse* includes some items which some commentators find dubious, namely, THE SWORD OF MOSES and *Seder Rabba di Bereshit*. One well-known text, THE VISIONS OF EZEKIEL, while almost always included on lists of *hekhalot* texts, is clearly of a character different from the so-called "core group."

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

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

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

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

## The “Core Group” of *Hekhalot* Texts

### A. *Hekhalot Rabbati* [THE GREATER HEKHALOT] (HR)

Translations:

1. HR chapters 15-29, prepared by Lauren Grodner, in David R. Blumenthal’s *Understanding Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1978), where it is referred to as “Pirkei Heikalot.”
2. HR chapters 1, 2, and 16-26, in Aryeh Kaplan’s *Meditation and Kabbalah* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1982).
3. HR chapters 15:1-22:2 (with omissions), in Philip S. Alexander’s *Textual Sources for the Study of Judaism* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble, 1984; rpt., University of Chicago Press, 1990).
4. HR Chapter 5 and 6 (up to the *First Apocalypse*), “annotated translation” = APPENDIX C of Ra‘anan Abusch’s dissertation, FROM MARTYR TO MYSTIC...; see immediately below under “See also.”

References to HR throughout the following:

- Gruenwald. AMM.
- Schaefer. HMG.
- Kuyt. DESCENT.
- Lesses. POWER.

See also

- Abusch, Ra‘anan S. FROM MARTYR TO MYSTIC: THE STORY OF THE TEN MARTYRS, HEKHALOT RABBATI, AND THE MAKING OF “MERKAVAH MYSTICISM.” Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton: Princeton University, 2004.
- Dan, Joseph. *The Revelation of the Secret World: The Beginning of Jewish Mysticism*. Providence: Brown University Press, 1992; = JM1: Chapter 3.
- Davila, James R. “Prolegomena to a Critical Edition of the *Hekhalot Rabbati*,” in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2 (The Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies. 1994).
- Halperin, David. “A Sexual Image in *Hekhalot Rabbati* and Its Implications,” in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, vol. 6, nos. 1-2, edited by Joseph Dan (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1987).
- Janowitz, Naomi. “Using Names, Letters, and Praise: The Language of Ascent” (= Chapter 5), in *Icons of Power: Ritual Practices in Late Antiquity* [MAGIC IN HISTORY] University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.

- Schiffman, Lawrence. “The Recall of Rabbi Nehuniah ha-Qanah from Ecstasy in the Hekhalot Rabbati,” in *AJS Review*, vol. 1 (Association for Jewish Studies, 1976).
- Smith, Morton. “Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati,” in *Biblical and Other Studies*, edited by Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

Often appended to HR in manuscripts is “The Book of the Great Name.” For an introduction and translation, see Michael D. Swartz, “The Book of the Great Name,” in *Judaism in Practice from the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period* [PRINCETON READINGS IN RELIGIONS], edited by Lawrence Fine (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

B. *Hekhalot Zutreti*, OR *Zutarti* [THE LESSER PALACES] (HZ)

Translations: Two editions of HZ in the original Hebrew and Aramaic have appeared (i) Schaefer’s *Synopse*, and (ii) a problematic “critical edition” by Rachel Elijor (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1982). For a review of these two editions, see David Halperin’s “A New Edition of the Hekhalot Literature,” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 104, no. 3 (1984). There is no complete version of HZ in English; many important passages are given in Halperin’s *FACES*.

References: *FACES*, *AMM*, *HMG*, *DESCENT*, *POWER*, Scholem’s *Jewish Gnosticism*, and Morray-Jones’ *Transparent Illusion*.

C. *Sefer Hekhalot* [BOOK OF PALACES] = Hebrew Book of Enoch = 3 Enoch (3E)

Translations:

1. Odeberg, Hugo. *3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928; rpt. New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973.
2. Alexander, P. “3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James Charlesworth (see note 3 on page 1).

References: *AMM*, *HMG*, *POWER*, and the following articles by P.S. Alexander:

- “Appendix: 3 Enoch,” in Emil Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, A New English Version, revised and edited by G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Goodman. Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1986: vol. 3, part 1.
- “The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch,” in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2 (The Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, 1977).

- “3 Enoch and the Talmud,” in *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986).

D. *Merkabah Rabba* [THE GREAT CHARIOT] (MR)

There are a few paragraphs of MR translated in Appendix One of Janowitz’ *Poetics of Ascent* (noted above) and Cohen’s *Shi’ur Qomah* (see below: F. *Shi’ur Qomah*).

With MR, we come to the first of many texts on which there is very little in English. We must turn to HMG, Kuyt’s outline in DESCENT, and Lesses’ references in POWER. Gruenwald’s chapter on MR in AMM begins with a description of material which probably does not belong to it, namely, a portion of the *Sar ha-Panim* (ShP, PRINCE OF THE PRESENCE, or COUNTENANCE). Peter Schaefer treats ShP as an independent text in “Die Beschworung des Sar ha-Panim: Kritische Edition und Übersetzung” (THE ADJURATION OF THE PRINCE OF THE COUNTENANCE: CRITICAL EDITION AND TRANSLATION), originally in *Frankfurter Judaische Beitrage*, vol. 6 (1978); reprinted in Schaefer’s *Hekhalot-Studien*. Of course, Schaefer’s translation is in German, but all is not lost. The same text has been put into English twice.

- by Moses Gaster in *The Sword of Moses* (London: D. Nutt, 1896; rpt. New York: Samuel Weiser, 1970): Appendix I, section III, pp. 47-51; also in *Studies and Texts...* (see below): vol. 1, pp. 288-337; vol. 3, pp. 69-103. Schaefer does not think Gaster’s rendering is terribly accurate, commenting, “The translation, while fluid and easy to read, is rather fanciful.”
- by Michael Swartz in *Scholastic Magic* (described above, page 9) on pp. 136-142.

Further, Lesses discusses ShP in numerous places and outlines its contents in POWER, pp. 415-17.

E. *Ma’aseh Merkabah* [WORK OF THE CHARIOT] (MM)

Translations:

- Janowitz, Naomi. *The Poetics of Ascent*.
- Swartz, Michael. *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism*.

References: Along with the two books listed under “Translations” which both offer an analysis of the text, see AMM, HMG, POWER, and Daniel Abrams, “Ma’aseh Merkabah as a Literary Work: The Reception of the Hekhalot Traditions by German Pietist and Kabbalistic Reinterpretation,” in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, Volume 5, No. 4 (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1998).

- F. *Shi'ur Qomah* [MEASURE OF THE HEIGHT {of the Divine Body}] (SQ)  
 David Halperin suggests (FACES, p. 364) that SQ “probably ought to be considered a generic term for materials describing God’s organs rather than a single texts.” Martin S. Cohen (in his book listed below) holds out for SQ’s having been an independent, freestanding work, complete with a lost *urtext* looming in back of the extant versions. SQ has been included here in the “Core Group” because nearly all of the texts already discussed contain SQ material: HR, HZ, 3E, and MR.

Translations:

- Cohen, Martin Samuel. *The Shi'ur Qomah. Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1983.
- Work of the Chariot. #3 *Book of Enoch*. Los Angeles: Work of the Chariot, 1970. This work contains 1 and 2 Enoch from R.H. Charles’ *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 3E from Odeberg, along with the translation of SQ. The same SQ translation appears in *The Secret Garden*, edited by David Meltzer (New York: Seabury Press, 1976: pp. 23-37).

References: Scholem’s *Jewish Gnosticism* and *The Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991). Further, see

- Abrams, Daniel. “The Dimensions of the Creator—Contradiction or Paradox? Corruptions and Accretions of the Manuscript Witness,” in *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts*, Volume 5, edited by Daniel Abrams and Avraham Elqayam (Los Angeles [Culver City]: Cherub Press, 2000).
- Dan, Joseph. “The Concept of Knowledge in the Shi’ur Qomah,” in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History* [Presented to Alexander Altmann on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday], edited by Siegfried Stein and Raphael Loewe (University of Alabama Press/Institute of Jewish Studies: 1979); also, JM1: Chapter 8.
- Janowitz, Naomi. “God’s Body: Theological and Ritual Roles of *Shi’ur Komah*,” in *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*, edited by Howard Eilberg-Schwartz [SUNY SERIES: THE BODY IN CULTURE, HISTORY AND RELIGION]. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.
- Loewe, Raphael. “The Divine Garment and Shi’ur Qomah,” in *Harvard Theological Review*, volume 58 (Cambridge: Harvard College, 1965); includes translated excerpts of *Targum Song of Songs*.

## Texts Associated with the *Hekhalot* Corpus

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

### G. *Re'uyot Yehezkiel* [VISIONS OF EZEKIEL] (RY)

Translations:

- Jacobs, Louis. *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*. New York: Schocken Books, 1976: Chapter 3.
- Marmorstein, A. "A Fragment of the Visions of Ezekiel," in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series #8 (1917-18).
- Halperin, David. *FACES*: Chapter VIII, Section A.

References: The best source for information on RY is *FACES*.

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

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

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

In 1968-9, Gruenwald published (in Hebrew) "New Passages from *Hekhalot* Literature," in *Tarbiz*, vol. 38, no. 4; these were the newly-discovered Geniza fragments. They have been published subsequently in Peter Schaefer's *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (see note 9). Beyond Gruenwald's remarks in AMM, see *FACES*, *DESCENT*, *POWER*, Swartz' *Scholastic Magic*, and Jonathan Seidel's article, "Possession and Exorcism in the Magical Texts of the Cairo Geniza," in *Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present*, edited by Matt Goldish (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003).

### J. Fragments on Physiognomy, Chiromancy, and Metoposcopy

A number of these fragments have been published by Gruenwald (in *Tarbiz*, vol. 40, 1970) and Scholem (in *Sefer Assaf*, Jerusalem: 1953), in Hebrew. One fragment is discussed and translated into German by Schaefer

in “Ein neues Fragment zur Metopskopie und Chiromantik” (in *Hekhalot-Studien*). Not only is there nothing of these texts in English translation, but Gruenwald (in AMM) never really gets around to detailing their contents. See Scholem’s article, “Chiromancy,” in *Kabbalah*.

The list of *hekhalot* texts up to this point contains all items listed by Scholem in *Jewish Gnosticism* (pp. 5-7), plus the Genizah fragments which Gruenwald included in his account in AMM. Gruenwald also added

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

Translation:

- Morgan, Michael. *Sefer ha-Razim. The Book of the Mysteries*. [TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS 25; PSEUDEPIGRAPHA SERIES 11]. Chico: Society of Biblical Literature/Scholars Press, 1983.

References:

- AMM and Naomi Janowitz’ *Icons of Power: Ritual Practices in Late Antiquity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), Chapter 6: “Combining Words and Deeds: Angelic Imprecations in *The Book of Secrets*.”
- Alexander, Philip S., “*Sefer ha-Razim* and the Problem of Black Magic in Early Judaism,” in *Magic in the Biblical World: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, edited by Todd E. Klutz (London: T&T Clark International, 2003) which offers a full analysis and translated excerpts.

The following items are frequently mentioned with the *hekhalot* cluster:

L. *Baraita de Ma’aseh Bereshit*, OR *Seder Rabbah di Bereshit* [TEACHING ON THE WORK OF CREATION, or GREAT ORDER OF CREATION] (BMB)

Translation:

- In Meltzer’s *Secret Garden*, pp. 3-20. This translation appears to have been done from the French of N. Sed in *Revue des Etudes juives*, vol. 124 (1965).

Reference:

- Gottstein, Alon Goshen. “Is *Ma’aseh Bereshit* Part of Ancient Jewish Mysticism?” in *the Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, volume 4 (Harwood Academic Publishers GmbH, 1995).

M. *Harba de Moshe* [SWORD OF MOSES] (HdM)

Translation:

- Gaster, Moses. *The Sword of Moses*. (see above: Section D.)



N. *Ottiyot* [ALPHABET] of Rabbi Akiba (ORA)

Translations (excerpts):

- Alexander, P. “3 (Hebrew Book of) Enoch” in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (see above: Section C). Chapter 48C:1-9 contains material taken from the Akiba text.
- Bokser, Ben Zion. *The Jewish Mystical Tradition*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1981: Chapter 3 contains excerpts of ORA and HR.

O. *Sar ha-Panim* [PRINCE OF THE PRESENCE, or COUNTENANCE] (ShP)

Refer to Section D above (MR); further, see

- Swartz. *Scholastic Magic*, pp. 135-147.
- POWER, pp. 190-203 and numerous other references.
- Lesses, Rebecca. “The Adjuration of the Prince of the Presence: Performative Utterance in a Jewish Ritual,” in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, edited by Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki [RELIGIONS IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD, 129]. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995.

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

See FACES, pp. 278-283.

## A Selection of Articles and Books

- Abelson, J[oshua]. *Jewish Mysticism: An Introduction to the Kabbalah*. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1913; rpt. New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1969 & 1981; and Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001: Chapter II. "The Merkabah (Chariot) Mysticism"
- Abrams, Daniel. "The Boundaries of Divine Ontology: The Inclusion of Metatron in the Godhead," in *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 87, no. 3 (Cambridge: 1994)
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Ma'aseh Merkabah as a Literary Work: The Reception of the Hekhalot Traditions by the German Pietists and Kabbalistic Interpretation," in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, vol. 5, no. 4 (1998), Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr.
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- Altmann, Alexander. "The Gnostic Background of the Rabbinic Adam Legends"
- Version 1. *Jewish Quarterly Review* 35 (Philadelphia/New York: Dropsie College and Macmillan, April 1945)
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- \_\_\_\_\_. "Gnostic Motifs in Rabbinic Literature," in (idem) *The Meaning of Jewish Existence: Theological Essays 1030-1939*, edited by Alfred L. Ivry (Hanover/London: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England, 1991).
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- \_\_\_\_\_. "Visions of God in Merkabah Mysticism," in *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, vol. 13, nos. 1-2 (1982)
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## Appendix: Hekhalot Literature and Magic\*

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

To begin an approach to antique Jewish magic, there are some fine summary articles:

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\* A bibliography of Jewish magic prepared by Alex Jassen and Scott Noegel at University of Washington, which is far more extensive than mine here (and not limited to English sources), is on-line at <http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/jmbtoc.htm>. Works are divided according to period and topic.

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