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ENGLISH ABSTRACTS

TANNAITIC HALAKHIC AND AGGADIC METHODOLOGY

Assaf and Ishay Rosen-Zvi

This article, and the project of which it is part, examines the relationships between Tannaitic Halakhic and Aggadic methodology. Review of scholarly history reveals that this question has hardly ever been asked. Classical studies discussed Halakha and Aggada together without distinction, while more recent research discusses each field separately. Either way, it is hard to find comparative studies of the two fields. In this article we will present two detailed comparisons of midrashic techniques, and the assumptions behind them, as manifested in two terms used in both Halakha and Aggada. Each of these terms represents a central area of midrashic hermeneutics. The first term (*vehalo kvar ne'emar*) is connected to the way difficulties in and contradictions between verses are presented, while the second term (*magid*) is related to biblical exegesis and the boundaries of midrashic engagement with the biblical text. The terminological discussion will thus allow us to reexamine the relations between exegetical practices and the hermeneutic assumptions of Halakha and Aaggada.

'BINDING CROWNS TO THE LETTERS' – A DIVINE SCRIBAL PRACTICE IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Yakir Paz

In the famous story in b. Men. 29b, when Moses ascends to heaven he sees God binding crowns to the letters of the Torah. To Moses' question 'who holds your hand?' God replies that in the future there will be a man named R. Akiva 'who will expound on every *qots*, mountains of halakhot'. Most scholars assume that the crowns and the *qotsim* are ornaments added to the letters, similar to those found in today's Torah scrolls. According to such a reading, the narrator credits R. Akiva with midrashic virtuosity that included *derashot* on the minutest paratextual elements. Yet in the entire rabbinic literature we do not find even one halakha that was expounded from a *qots* or a crown of a letter, either by R. Akiva or by any other sage. In light of this, Shlomo Naeh has convincingly suggested that one should understand *qots* as *qutsa* – a small textual unit. Such an understanding, however, disconnected the *qotsim* from the crowns, which continued to be interpreted as ornaments. In this paper, I argue that God's scribal actions should be viewed in light of contemporaneous scribal practices. Therefore, the crown should most likely be identified with the *coronis*, a scholarly scribal sign which designated the end of books and textual units, and whose name and form recall a crown. This identification also helps to understand the connection between the *qotsim*, which R. Akiva would expound, and the crowns, which God binds.

ILLUSION VERSUS REALITY IN THE STUDY OF EARLY KABBALAH:
THE *COMMENTARY ON SEFER YEŞIRAH* ATTRIBUTED TO ISAAC THE BLIND
AND ITS HISTORY IN KABBALAH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Avishai Bar-Asher

The present article is a comprehensive treatment of the historical, textual, and conceptual reconstruction made by scholars of the origins, formation, and spread of Kabbalah, which gave rise to the meta-narrative dominating the field to this very day. Modern scholarship has largely accepted the account of Kabbalah's early history found in late kabbalistic historiography, which outlines Kabbalah's transfer from the hands of a small circle of esotericists in Languedoc to the nascent centers of Iberian Kabbalah in the first half of the thirteenth century. This account still reigns supreme, in spite of various suggestions for its improvement. This study focuses on the history of the *Commentary on Sefer Yeşirah* (hereafter: *Commentary*) attributed to Isaac 'the Blind' (as he is called in later sources), the son of R. Abraham b. David (Rabad) of Posquières, which scholarship has relied on not only to delineate Kabbalah's conceptual formation and literary crystallization at the hands of the Provençal esotericists, and to determine their exact role in these processes, but even to reconstruct opinions, conceptions, and 'sources' attributed to those esotericists.

Fielding various critical methodologies, the author marshals many proofs to overturn the foundation underlying the identification and attribution of the *Commentary*. Careful scrutiny of this enigmatic commentary and its provenance reveals its artificial, anachronistic designation as the first composition produced by the earliest kabbalists from which Kabbalah sprung up and developed. The author's thorough treatment of this crucial matter unravels the historical account woven together by scholars and shows each strand to be insufficiently supported by the historical evidence. These include: the erroneous reconstruction of the bibliographical groundwork of the 'origins' of Kabbalah; the adherence to an unproven and controvertible historiographical account that is based on nothing more than a legend that emerged in late kabbalistic circles and over a long period of time; and, Above all, I take issue with the interpretation of the ideas themselves, which was mainly based on a predisposition to find their sources in Neoplatonic concepts and modes of thinking as expressed in medieval Christian thought.

The article provides a step-by-step exposition of how a web of errors became entrenched in the scholarship on the foundational texts of kabbalistic literature. It is a cautionary tale about the severe consequences errors can have on the study of a canon, and, no less importantly, about how errors can become canonized.

The first section critically examines the scholarship on the various traditions attributed to Isaac the Blind, and especially the different attempts to present them as the vital link between Kabbalah's appearance in Provence and its transplantation to Spain. At the center of the discussion stands the *Commentary*, and contrary to the previous efforts of scholars to link this complete *commentary* to the dozens of fragmentary traditions recited and recorded in the name of R. Isaac over a long period, this section offers alternatives for dealing with the texts attributed to him over the centuries.

The second section takes a hard look at the history of the attribution of the *Commentary*

to Isaac the Blind. I subject the handful of surviving manuscript witnesses to renewed scrutiny in order to reassess the assumptions made and conclusions drawn by past scholars concerning its authorship. The reach and reception of the work are measured by the few preserved witnesses, and a new understanding of its provenance is presented. Based on the numerous findings of this examination of the composition's defective and late textual tradition, the author outlines anew the various stages of the *Commentary's* dissemination. The section concludes with the theory that the attribution of the work to R. Isaac the Blind was late and the product of copyists.

The third section presents a complementary analysis by putting under the microscope the various (yet meager) citations from the *Commentary* and the parallels in the writings of other kabbalists, which first appeared at the end of the thirteenth century and continued for several generations. In light of these investigations, I reach new conclusions about the work's appearance and reception history, conclusions which further support reassigning it to a different historical context. They also help uncover fundamental mistakes made not only in the study of the work's origins, but in scholarly attempts to interpret its enigmatic language and ideas.

The fourth section is dedicated to critically examining the conceptual discussion surrounding the cryptic formulations in the *Commentary*, and the resulting farfetched, anachronistic attempts to reconstruct kabbalistic thought in its nascent form. Within the framework of this section, a number of fundamental concepts central to the intellectual history of Kabbalah are discussed, as their meaning was determined by scholars on the basis of, *inter alia*, the unchallenged presumption that the *Commentary* originated with Isaac the Blind and his Provençal circle. The conventional claim that the first kabbalists in Girona (described in scholarship as R. Isaac's 'disciples') drew upon and were influenced by the *Commentary* is utterly rejected here; instead, the author argues for the reverse: the anonymous author (or final editor) of the *Commentary* knew the writings of these kabbalists and even borrowed from them.

In light of the findings of the preceding four sections, the fifth section puts forward a new theory about the context in which the *Commentary* – now shown to be mistakenly attributed to Isaac the Blind – first appeared and was even composed. This is based on the first attempt of its kind to identify late strata in the composition, in which I find signs of the works likely used by the anonymous author, and through which its eclectic nature in its extant format can be better understood. The sixth section then proposes an alternative reconstruction of the realist interpretive tradition of *Sefer Yeşirah* which can be attributed, based on the testimony of the earliest kabbalists, to Isaac the Blind and his Provençal circle. According to this proposal, this interpretive tradition, which has nothing whatsoever to do with the long *Commentary* attributed to R. Isaac, concentrated on theosophical and theogonical conceptions of the Tetragrammaton, which were predicated upon the linguistic and ontological theories in *Sefer Yeşirah*.

All of the foregoing radically recasts major aspects of thirteenth-century Kabbalah and dethrones the accepted narrative about Kabbalah's emergence. In my conclusion, I suggest a reappraisal of the basic assumptions that have become deeply engrained in the historiography, textual analysis, and intellectual history of the origins and beginnings ('Ursprung und Anfänge') of Kabbalah.

THE *SILUQ* IN HEBREW LITURGICAL POETRY FROM AL-ANDALUS: NEW DISCOVERIES

Ariel Zinder

All liturgical poets (*Payytanim*) of medieval Spain wrote large compilations of poems (*Qedushtaot*), to be performed during the service of the Day of Atonement. Over the years these elaborate poetic constructions fell apart, as editors of prayer books chose what to include. Sometimes these editors also shortened poems or changed their liturgical function. Modern scholarship seeks to re-assemble the original compilations and strives for a better understanding of these poems in their original context. The present article contributes to this effort in the form of a full and corrected edition of the long poem which ended the *Qedushta* written by Solomon ibn Gabirol for the morning service of the Day of Atonement. This poem, belonging to the genre of the *Siluq*, is made up of seven sections and more than 160 lines and is presented here based on several sources, with a full commentary. The edition of the poem presented here includes many corrections to previous publications, and a whole section, previously unknown.

A further discovery follows this first one in the form of a part of the *Siluq* for Yom Kippur most probably written by Ibn Gabirol's eminent predecessor, Yosef ibn Avitur. Here we do not possess a full version of the poem, but even the partial version is an important discovery, since this *Siluq* has remained completely unknown and unmentioned in both ancient prayerbooks and modern scholarship. Alongside these textual discoveries, the present article addresses one key poetic feature of these *Silugim*, namely, their highly formal structure. This formal setting seems surprising, given that the *Siluq* has usually been depicted as a free-verse form, verging on prose and dedicated to long narrative and rhetorical addresses. And yet, thanks to Shulamit Elizur's recent discussion of the ancient *Siluq*, we know that there have always been poets who formalized the *Siluq* in various ways. Therefore Ibn Avitur and Ibn Gabirol did not innovate so much as they enhanced an existent, if marginal, poetic tradition.

MAIMON THE KABBALIST

Gideon Freudenthal

The autobiography of Salomon Maimon (1753-1800) recounts his life as a process of self-improvement: beginning as a kabbalist, he develops into a rationalist philosopher. He conceives this as a path from superstition to enlightenment and science. A collection of Maimon's early kabbalistic manuscripts has reached us and enables us to compare this autobiographical report to the actual content of his juvenile manuscripts. The most important of these is *Ma'aseh Livnat ha-Sapir* (מעשה לבנת הספיר), *The Account of the Whiteness of Sapphire*, published here for the first time.

In his autobiography, Maimon ascribes a naive belief in practical Kabbalah and theurgy to his younger self and also a critique of Kabbalah in Maimonides' spirit. A study of *Ma'aseh*

Livnat ha-Sapir shows that the alleged early critique of kabbalistic notions is a projection onto the past. In fact, the rationalistic critique voiced in *Ma'aseh Livnat ha-Sapir* does not go beyond reservations vis-à-vis some daring images of Lurianic Kabbalah and a preference for Cordovero. It certainly does not adopt Maimonides' rationalism. Moreover, the essay also extensively and favorably discusses astral magic, while Maimon does not at all mention this topic in his autobiography.

Maimon's opposing accounts of the place of Kabbalah in his intellectual life satisfy two opposing interests: On the one hand the wish to deepen the gap between his former and his present self, and thus to magnify the development he experienced; and on the other hand the wish to produce a continuous narrative on which his self-identity depends. Maimon explicitly names these two concerns in the introduction to the second volume of his autobiography.

Later in life, Maimon returned to some themes of his early years. However, he now formulates them on the basis of modern science rather than on Kabbalah. Symbols are now understood as conventional signifiers rather than as naturally and causally connected to their referents. The development from Kabbalah to Enlightenment retains some basic kabbalistic (or rather: Neoplatonist) ideas and some of its terms, but the concepts have assimilated scientific and not mythical content and therefore significantly changed. He now understands theory as a hypothesis whose validity depends on whether it successfully unifies and explicates the bodies of knowledge subsumed under it.

GRADATION OF THE DISJUNCTIVE ACCENTS IN THE BIBLE RECITATION OF JEWS OF YEMEN AND IN OTHER JEWISH TRADITIONS: ON THE PROSODIC HIERARCHY IN THE RECITATION

Boris Kleiner

The reading tradition of Jews of Yemen interprets the masoretic accentuation as prosodic marks pertaining primarily to the declamation rhythm. The melody of the recitation chant does not represent the accents; with rare exceptions, it only supports the rhythmic structure. The duration of the prosodic pauses does not express their hierarchic significance directly; its gradation serves only the delimitation of the higher domains in the prosodic hierarchy. The length of a pause is determined by a rhythmic algorithm, which expands or contracts the pause according to its position in the higher domain, regardless of the sense relations. The same rhythmical mechanism operates in other Jewish traditions of Bible recitation. In this prosodic system, a prolonged pause merely indicates that the next pause is not going to mark the end of the higher domain. The hierarchical strength of the accents is a structural distinction of the graphic representation not implemented in the prosody directly. The claim that errors occur in the traditional recitation because of the lack of congruence between the temporal relations and the sense relations stems from misunderstanding the operation of the recitation prosody.

The dissimilarity between the prosodic expressions in Yemenite recitation and the hierarchical distinctions in the accentuation shows that the Yemenite recitation tradition did not originate in the accent signs; it apparently preceded them. However, the comparative

analysis of the accentual hierarchy and the prosodic structure in the recitation shows that both systems express the same prosodic hierarchy; they are merely different in the way the domains are marked. This leads to the conclusion that both Yemenite recitation and the Tiberian prosodic marks (accents) might stem from the same prosodic archetype. The accentuation presumably does not record the melody of the recitation chant; it combines indication of the prosodic domains with the expression of their relations not necessarily reflected in the prosody. The purpose of the chant, besides enhancing the recitation aesthetically, is to establish the time relations in the declamation and to delineate the highest prosodic domains.