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

Collectanea

Collectanea of Kabbalistic works date back at least to the 1280s (1). Anonymous editors excerpted passages from lengthy works apparently for convenience sake. Other known works contain lengthy quotations in their works include the various works of Isaac of Acre, Menahem Recanati, Meir Ibn Gabai and Abraham Ardutiel. Other collectanea were assembled around a set structure such as the prayers or the Torah: Nafatali Herz's Siddur (Thiengen 1560), Menahem Zioni's Commentary to the Torah and portions of the Book Bahir in the first printing of the Zohar (2). The most famous collection of texts to be organized around the Torah is certainly the Zohar, at least certain manuscripts dating from the 16th and 17th centuries and through the two different printings of the Zohar in sixteenth-century Italy. Some collections of Kabbalistic works display no apparent organizing principle and were in fact personal notebooks such as that of Yohanan Alemano (Ms. Oxford, Neubauer 2234) (3). In Prague 1660 the first thematic collection was published in Yalqut Reuveni which organized the various passages topically in alphabetic listings. This edition would later be expanded into an edition organized around the pericopes of the Torah (Wilhermsdorf 1681), perhaps demonstrating the tendency of Jewish literature and study to return to the formal structure of its canonical works. Important questions need to be asked about the intended purpose of these collections and their assumed role in the later history of Kabbalistic thought. Were these volumes seen as replacements for the originals or as tools to supplement the original forms of the work? Were they intended for the elite or the vulgus?

In recent years a number of volumes have been edited which join this list of works. One such book is Shulhan Aruch ha-Zohar (16 volumes to date, Jerusalem 1993-1996), which “annotates” the halakhot of the Tur and Shulhan Aruch with Zoharic texts. The purpose of these volumes is clear. From the traditional standpoint, one can compare the late legal compendiums with the mystical comments of the ‘Tanaitic’ work. Regardless of intent, the
volume is a helpful tool for understanding the relationship between Halakha and Kabbalah, at least as demonstrated in these works. Similar method's have now been applied to Moses Cordovero's works. Shmuel Yudaiqin has edited two volumes of passages from the works of Cordovero. These volumes, which focus on the study of Kabbalah, are thematically organized by chapter and offer no additional commentary (4). In a separate two-volume work entitled Oh Le-Yesharim, Yudaiqin provides a commentary to Cordovero's Introduction to Shi'ur Qomah by referring the reader to passages from Cordovero's corpus. Here each passage is very briefly introduced. In a similar four-volume set entitled Shomer ha-Pardes, Yudaiqin provides an equally extensive commentary from Cordovero's corpus to [1] Cordovero's Or Ne'erav (Benei Beraq 1995); [2] Cordovero's Or Yaqar: Commentary to Raya Mehemna 3:9 (Benei Beraq 1995); [3] Yesodei ha-Torah ve-Iqarei ha-Dat of R. Dov Baer Gottlieb (Benei Beraq 1996); [4] Eleazar Azikri's Sefer Haredim (Benei Beraq 1996). As with the above volumes, the source of each passage presented in the commentary is identified in brackets at the end of the citation.

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

In the last few years a number of new editions of classic texts - some with commentaries - have been published which include Hebrew translations inserted into the body of the text in brackets and/or in a smaller font. These include Sefer Idra Rabba (Petah Tiqvah 1996) and Maggid Mesharim (Petah Tiqvah 1990), each edited by Yihiel Barlev. In a five volume work Shalom Batzri culled from the Zohar and Zohar Hadash the narrative units and presented them with a Hebrew translation at the bottom of the page (Ma'asiyot ha-Zohar, 3 volumes, 1992-1993; Ma'asiyot ha-Zohar he-Hadash, Jerusalem 1993). Might this be compared in some way to the Ein Ya'akov (7)?

More pioneering in opening up Kabbalistic texts to a wider audience is the paraphrase of Nahmanides' Commentary to the Torah. In this five volume set published between 1985 and 1995 (8), Pinchas Lieberman provides a running translation in modern Hebrew of the complete text. These two texts are accompanied on the page by a modern commentary which explains terms and their sources. The presentation of all these sources synoptically on the page is intended to train the reader to read Nahmanides' original text (9). The editor states that he has refrained from explaining Nahmanides' Kabbalah in his edition. He then cites Nahmanides' celebrated introduction in which he states that the written text alone [i.e. Nahmanides' Commentary] does not provide the key to understanding his Kabbalah (10). This apparent
contradiction is followed by the additional claim, supported by recent scholarship, that Nahmanides Kabbalistic exegesis of scripture (can at times) converge with the simple meaning of the text. (11)

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

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

Diagrams of later Kabbalistic literature were printed in such classic works as Gikatilla's Sha'are Orah (19), Moses Cordovero's Pardes Rimmonim (20) and Shabbetai Sheftel Horowitz's Shefa Tal (21), to name but a few (22). With the appearance of Lurianic Kabbalah and Sabbateanism, numerous drawings were prepared, primarily in manuscript form. The most significant diagrams to be published were those of Meir Popper in his Sod Ilan ha-Gadol (23). All of these diagrams have yet to be studied in any serious way. An index or basic catalog does not even exist. Hopefully a history of Jewish magical and Kabbalistic diagrams (including amulets) will be written in the foreseeable future.
Outside of the walls of the university, in the yeshivot and other learning-centers where the works of Lurianic Kabbalah are the main focus of study, new tools have been developed to grapple with the complexities of the graphic element which is embedded in the written text. In a recently published book, *Derekh le-Ez Hayyim* (24), numerous multi-color diagrams of incredible complexity outline the major patterns of the divine world as described in *Ez Hayyim*. The anonymous author, who out of modesty hides behind a numerical equivalent of his name, has invested years of learning and planning in this folio-size volume.

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

Notes


2. See the chapter on the first printing of the *Zohar* in my edition of the *Book Bahir*, Los Angeles 1994. For further analysis of the reception history of the *Bahir* and its relationship to the *Zohar* see Boaz Huss “*Sefer ha-Bahir*”, *Tarbiz* 65 (1996), pp. 333-340 [Hebrew].


6. For other examples such as the role of al-Naqawa's Menorat ha-Meor, see the introduction, I. Tishby's Wisdom of the Zohar, first printed in Hebrew, Mishnat ha-Zohar, Jerusalem 1949; translated into English: The Wisdom of the Zohar, Oxford 1989.


13. Sodei Razaya, ed. S. Weiss, Benei Braq 1986, pp. 136, 186. Most of the drawings could not be inserted in this volume as with the edition of the other section of this compendium, Sodei Razaya, ed. I. Kamelhar, Bilgoraj 1936. The dragon-like figure was printed in a full folio page in Eleazar's Commentary to Sefer Yezira, Przemysl 1883 [facs. Brooklyn 1978], fol. 125 and see also the following pages.


17. See the Ilan ha-Hokhma in Ms. Paris BN 763, fol. 34b.


19. Chapter 5, see for example Warsaw 1883 edition, fol. 64a.
20. Sha'ar ha-Aziluth; Sha'ar Seder Amidatan; Sha'ar ha-Zinorot. See also the various diagrams reproduced in Bracha Sack, *The Kabbalah of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero*, Be'er Sheva 1995, pp. 51, 115, 183 [Hebrew].


23. *Sod Ilan ha-Gadol*, Warsaw 1864 and 1893. The first edition was not bound, rather the folio pages were pasted together to form a scroll. The second edition (bound) was reprinted in facsimile (Jerusalem n.d.). While this *Ilan* may be the most important diagram of its type to be printed one of the more striking figures to appear in print is certainly found in Moses ben Menahem Graf's, *Vayaqel Moshe*, Dessau 1699, (facsimile edition Jerusalem 1963), fol. 33b-34a. See also Jacob Spielmann, *Tal ‘Orot*, Lvov 1876-1883 (Jerusalem 1976); Eliahu David Sal’atqi, *Yad ‘Eliahu, Mafteah le-Qabbalat ha-‘ Ari Z”al*, Jerusalem 1987.


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