

# THE ZOHAR AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE CABALA.

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## NAME AND CONTENTS OF THE ZOHAR.

THE titles of the Zohar vary. It is called "Midrash of Rabbi Simon ben Jochai," from its reputed author; "Midrash, Let there be light," from the words in Gen. i. 4; more commonly "*Sepher ha-Zohar*," from Dan. xii. 3, where the word *Zohar* is used for "the brightness of the firmament." The title in full is: *Sepher ha-Zohar al ha-Torah, me-ish Elohim Kodesh, hu more meod ha-tana R. Simon ben Jochai*, etc., i. e., "The Book of Splendor on the Law, by the very holy and venerable man of God, the Tanaite rabbi Simon ben-Jochai, of blessed memory."

The *editio princeps* is the one of Mantua (3 vols., 1558-1560) and has often been reprinted. The best edition of the book of Zohar is that by Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, with Jewish commentaries (Sulzbach, 1684, fol.) to which his rare *Kabbala Denudata* (1677-1684) forms an ample introduction. This edition was reprinted with an additional index (Amsterdam, 1714, 1728, 1772, 1805, 3 vols.). Recent editions of the Zohar were published at Breslau (1866, 3 vols.), Livorno (1877-78, in 7 parts), and Wilna (1882, 3 vols.; 1882-83 in 10 parts, containing many commentaries and additions).

The body of the work takes the form of a commentary of a highly mystic and allegorical character extending over the entire Pentateuch; but the Zohar is not considered complete without the addition of certain appendices attributed to the same author or to some of his personal or successional disciples.

These supplementary portions are:

1. *Siphra di Tseniutha*, i. e., "The Book of Secrets" or "Mysteries," contained in Vol. II, 176-178. It contains five chapters and

is chiefly occupied with discussing the questions involved in the creation. In the second and third chapters the prophet Elijah communicates the secret which he learned in the heavenly school, that before the creation of the world God was unknown to man, but made known his essence after the creation of the world. The history of the creation is represented under the figure of a scale, which adjusts the opposite aspects of God before and after the creation. This portion has been translated into Latin by Rosenroth in the second volume of his *Kabbala Denudata* (Frankfort-on-the-Main, 1684; Englished by Mathers, *loc. cit.*, pp. 43-108).

2. *Iddera Rabba*, i. e., "The Great Assembly," referring to the community or college of Simon's disciples in their conferences for cabalistic discussion. These discussions are chiefly occupied with a description of the form and various members of the Deity; a disquisition on the revelation of the Deity, in his two aspects of the "Aged" and the "Young," to the creation and the universe; as well as on the diverse gigantic members of the Deity, such as the head, the beard, the eyes, the nose, etc., etc.; a dissertation on pneumatology, demonology, etc., etc. This part is generally found in Vol. III, pp. 127b-145a, and has been translated into Latin by Rosenroth, *loc. cit.*, and Englished by Mathers, pp. 109-257.

3. *Iddera Zuta*, i. e., "The Small Assembly," referring to the few disciples who still assembled for cabalistic discussion towards the end of their master's life or after his decease. It is to a great extent a recapitulation of the *Iddera Rabba*, and concludes with recording the death of Simon ben Jochai, the Sacred Light and the medium through whom God revealed the contents of the Zohar. This part is found in Vol. III, 287b-296b, and from the Latin of Rosenroth (Vol. II of the *Kabbala Denudata*) it has been Englished by Mathers, pp. 259-341.

To these three larger appendices are added fifteen other minor fragments, viz.:

4. *Saba*, i. e., "The Aged Man," also called "*Saba demishpatim*," or "The Discourse of the Aged in Mishpatim," given in II, 94a-114a. "The Aged" is the prophet Elijah who holds converse with Rabbi Simon about the doctrine of metempsychosis, and the discussion is attached to the Sabbatic section called "Mishpatim," i. e., Exod. xxi. 1-xxiv. 18.

5. Midrash Ruth, a fragment.

6. *Sepher hab-bahir*, i. e., "The Book of Clear Light."

7 and 8. *Tosephta* and *Mattanitan*, i. e., "Small Additional Pieces," which are found in the three volumes.

9. *Raia mehemna*, i. e., "The Faithful Shepherd," found in the second and third volumes. The faithful shepherd is Moses who holds a dialogue with Rabbi Simon, at which not only the prophet Elijah is present, but Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Aaron, David, Solomon, and even God himself make their appearance.

10. *Hekaloth*, i. e., "The palaces," found in the first and second volumes, treats of the topographical structure of paradise and hell.

11. *Sithre Torah*, i. e., "The Secrets of the Law."

12. *Midrash han-ueclam*, i. e., "The Concealed Treatise," in which passages of Scripture are explained mystically. Thus Lot's two daughters are the two proclivities in man, good and evil (I, 110). It also discourses on the properties and destiny of the soul.

13. *Raze de Razin*, i. e., "Mysteries of Mysteries," contained in II, 70a-75a, is especially devoted to the physiognomy of the Cabala, and the connection of the soul with the body.

14. *Midrash Chazith*, on the Song of Songs.

15. *Maamar to Chazi*, a discourse, so entitled from the first words, "Come and see."

16. *Yanuka*, i. e., "The Youth," given in III, 186a-192a, records the discourses delivered by a young man who according to R. Simon was of superhuman origin.

17. *Pekuda*, i. e., "Illustrations of the Law."

18. *Chibbura Kadmaah*, i. e., "The Early Work."

The body of the work is sometimes called *Zohar Gadol*, "The Great Zohar."

#### QUESTION OF AUTHORSHIP.

Who is the author of this remarkable book, which has continued to be a text-book up to the present day, for all those who have espoused the doctrines of the Cabala? We have anticipated the answer, but let us see which reasons were adduced by modern scholarship to prove that the Zohar is a forgery of the thirteenth century.

Now the Zohar pretends to be a revelation from God communicated through Rabbi Simon ben Joehai to his select disciples, according to the Iddera Zuta (*Zohar* III, 287b). This declaration and the repeated representation of Rabbi Simon ben Joehai, as speaking and teaching throughout the production, fixed the authorship upon Rabbi Simon, an opinion maintained not only by Jews for centuries, but even by distinguished Christian scholars. On the other hand it has been clearly demonstrated by such Jewish scholars as Zunz, Geiger, Jellinek, Graetz, Steinschneider, and a

host of others, that the Zohar is not the production of Rabbi Simon, but of the thirteenth century, by Moses de Leon (1250-1305).<sup>1</sup> Simon ben Jochai was a pupil of Rabbi Akiba; but the earliest mention of the book's existence occurs in the year 1290, and the anachronisms of its style and in the facts referred to, together with the circumstance that it speaks of the vowel-points and other Masoretic inventions which are clearly posterior to the Talmud, justify J. Morinus (although too often extravagant in his wilful attempts to depreciate the antiquity of the later Jewish writings) in asserting that the author could not have lived much before the year 1000 of the Christian era (*Exercitationes Biblicae*, pp. 358-369). This later view of the authorship is sustained by the following reasons:

1. The Zohar most fulsomely praises its own author, calls him the Sacred Light, and exalts him above Moses, "the faithful Shepherd" (Zohar III, 132*b*; 144 *a*), while the disciples deify Rabbi Simon, before whom all men must appear (II, 38*a*).

2. The Zohar quotes and mystically explains the Hebrew vowel-points (I, 16*b*, 24*b*; II, 116*a*; III, 65*a*), which were introduced later.<sup>2</sup>

3. The Zohar (II, 32*a*) mentions the Crusades, the temporary taking of Jerusalem by the Crusaders from the Infidels, and the re-taking of it by the Saracens.

4. The Zohar (III, 212*b*) records events which transpired A. D. 1264.

5. The doctrine of *En-Soph* and the *Sephiroth*, as well as the metempsychosian retribution, were not known before the thirteenth century.

6. The very existence of the Zohar, according to the staunch Cabalist Jehudah Chayoth (about 1500), was unknown to such distinguished Cabalists as Nachmanides and Ben-Adereth (1235-1310); the first who mentions it is Todros Abulafia (1234-1306).

7. Isaac of Akko (about 1290) affirms that "The Zohar was put into the world from the head of a Spaniard."

8. The Zohar contains passages which Moses de Leon translated into Aramaic from his works, e. g., the *Sepher ha-Rimmon*, as

<sup>1</sup> See my article *s. v.* in McClintock and Strong. Professor Strack, who is entitled to a hearing in matters of Rabbinic literature, says: "He [Rabbi Simon] has long been regarded as the author of the Zohar; but this main work of the Cabala was in reality composed in Spain by Moses ben Shem Tob de Leon in the second half of the thirteenth century, as has been proved especially by Jacob Emden, in *Mitpahath Sepharim*, Altona, 1768."—*Einleitung in den Talmud*, 4th ed., Leipsic, 1908, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> See my article "Vowel-Points" in McClintock and Strong.

Jellinek has demonstrated in his *Moses de Leon und sein Verhältniss zum Sohar,*” Leipzig, 1851, p. 21-36; (see also Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden*, VII, 498; 2d ed., 1873, p. 477 et seq.).

These are some of the reasons why the Zohar is now regarded as a pseudograph of the thirteenth century, and that Moses de Leon should have palmed the Zohar upon Simon ben Jochnāi was nothing remarkable, since this rabbi is regarded by tradition as the embodiment of mysticism. There was also a financial reason, for from the Book *Juchasin* (pp. 88, 89, 95, ed. Filipowski, London, 1857) we learn that when his wife asked him why he published the production of his own intellect under another man’s name, Moses de Leon replied “that if he were to publish it under his own name nobody would buy it, whereas under the name of Rabbi Simon ben Jochnāi it yielded him a large revenue.”

With the appearance of the Zohar we find also a Zohar School, which is a combination and absorption of the different features and doctrines of all the former methods, without any plan or method; and we must not be surprised at the wild speculations which we so often find in the writings of the post-Zohar period. In Spain especially the study of the Zohar took deep root, and found its way to Italy, Palestine and Poland.

#### HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CABALA IN THE POST-ZOHAR PERIOD.

The new text-book of religion which was introduced into Judaism by stealth, “placed the Kabbala, which a century before had been unknown, on the same level as the Bible and the Talmud, and to a certain extent on a still higher level. The Zohar undoubtedly produced good, in so far as it opposed enthusiasm to the legal dry-as-dust manner of the study of the Talmud, stimulated the imagination and the feelings, and cultivated a disposition that restrained the reasoning faculty. But the ills which it has brought on Judaism outweigh the good by far. The Zohar confirmed and propagated a gloomy superstition, and strengthened in people’s minds the belief in the Kingdom of Satan, in evil spirits and ghosts. Through its constant use of coarse expressions, often verging on the sensual, in contradistinction to the chaste, pure spirit pervading Jewish literature, the Zohar sowed the seeds of unclean desires, and later on produced a sect that laid aside all regard for decency. Finally, the Zohar blunted the sense for the simple and the true, and created a visionary world in which the souls of those who

zealously occupied themselves with it were lulled into a sort of half-sleep and lost the faculty of distinguishing between right and wrong. Its quibbling interpretations of Holy Writ, adopted by the Kabbalists and others infected with this mannerism, perverted the verses and words of the Holy Book, and made the Bible the wrestling-ground of the most curious insane notions."

During the thirteenth century the Cabala was represented in Italy by Menahem di Recanati who wrote a commentary on the Pentateuch which is little else than a commentary on the Zohar. This work was translated into Latin by Pico della Mirandola.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century Joseph ben Abraham ibn Wakkar (1290-1340) endeavored to reconcile the Cabala with philosophy, and to this end wrote a treatise on the cardinal doctrines of the Cabala. An analysis of this treatise, which is still in manuscript in the Bodleian library (cod. Laud. 119; described by Uri No. 384) is given by Steinschneider in Ersch und Gruber's *Allgemeine Encyclopädie*, Part II, Vol. XXXI, p. 100 f.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Cabala was especially cultivated in Spain. In unmeasured terms the Zoharites denounced their co-religionists who could not see the advantages of the Cabala. Prominent among the Zoharites was Abraham of Granada, who composed (between 1391 and 1409) a cabalistic work *Berith menuchat*, "The Covenant of Peace," (Amsterdam, 1648), a farrago of strange names of the Deity and the angels, of transposed letters, and jugglery with vowels and accents. "He had the hardihood," says Gractz, "to teach that those who could not apprehend God by Cabalistic methods belonged to the weak in faith, were ignorant sinners, and like the depraved and the apostate were overlooked by God, and not found worthy of His special providence. He thought that the relinquishment of their religion by cultured Jews was explained by their fatal application to scientific study, and their contempt for the Cabala. On the other hand he professed to see in the persecutions of 1391, and in the conversion of so many prominent Jews to Christianity, the tokens of the Messianic age, the suffering that must precede it, and the approach of the redemption." Another such writer was Shem Tob ben Joseph ibn Shem Tob (died 1430), author of *Emunoth*, i. e., "Faithfulness" (Ferrara, 1557), in which he attacks Jewish thinkers and philosophers as heretics, and maintains that the salvation of Israel depends upon the Cabala. The third writer was Moses Botarel (or Botarelo), also a Spaniard, who claimed to be a thaumaturge and prophet, and even announced himself as the Messiah. He prophesied that in the spring of 1393 the

Messianic age would be ushered in. As the Cabala penetrated all branches of life and literature, voices were also raised against the Zohar. The first among the Jews who opposed its authority was Elias del Medigo, who in his *Bechinath ha-duath* (i. e., "Examination of the Law," written in December 1491) openly expressed his opinion that the Zohar was the production of a forger, and that the Cabala was made up of the rags and tatters of the neo-Platonic school. But his voice and that of others had no power to check the rapid progress of the Cabala, which had now found its way from Spain and Italy into Palestine and Poland.

Passing over some minor advocates and teachers of the Cabala, we must mention two scholars in Palestine, who distinguished themselves as masters of the Cabala, Moses Cordovero<sup>3</sup> and Isaac Luria. The former (1522-1570) was a pupil of Solomon Alkabez<sup>4</sup> and wrote many works on the Cabala. His principal work is the *Pardes Rim-monim*, i. e., "The Garden of Pomegranates." (Cracow, 1591), excerpts of which have been translated into Latin by Bartolucci in *Bibliotheca Magna Rabbinnica*, Vol. IV, p. 231 f., and by Knorr von Rosenroth, "*Tractatus de Anima ex libro Pardes Rimmonim*" in his *Kabbala Denudata*, Sulzbach, 1677. Cordovero is chiefly occupied with the scientific speculations of the Cabala, or the speculative Cabala, in contradistinction to the wonder-working Cabala, which was represented by Isaac Luria (born in Jerusalem in 1534, and died 1572). He claimed to have constant interviews with the prophet Elijah, who communicated to him sublime doctrines. He visited the sepulchers of ancient teachers, and there, by prostrations and prayers, obtained from their spirits all manner of revelations. He was convinced that he was the Messiah, the son of Joseph, and that he was able to perform all sorts of miracles. He imagined a complete system of transmigration and combination of souls. He saw spirits everywhere; he saw how the souls were set free from the body at death, how they hovered in the air, or rose out of their graves. On the Sabbath he dressed in white, and wore a fourfold garment to symbolize the four letters of the name of God. His sentiments he delivered orally and his disciples treasured up his marvelous sayings, whereby they performed miracles and converted thousands to the doctrines of this theosophy.

His disciples were divided into two classes, the "initiated" and

<sup>3</sup> See my article *s. v.* "Moses Cordovero," *loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> He is the author of a hymn "*Lecha dodi*," i. e., "Come my beloved," which is found in all Jewish prayer-books, and used in the service for Sabbath eve.

the "novices," and boastfully called themselves "*guré ari*," i. e., "the lion's whelps." They systematically circulated the most absurd stories about Luria's miracles, and thus it came about that his cabalistic doctrines caused inexpressible harm in Jewish circles. Through Luria's influence a Judaism of the Zohar and the Cabala was formed side by side with the Judaism of the Talmud and the rabbis; for it was due to him that the spurious Zohar was placed upon a level with, indeed higher than, the Holy Scriptures and the Talmud.

The real exponent of Luria's cabalistic system was Chayim Vital Calabrese<sup>5</sup> (1543-1620). After his master's death he diligently collected all the manuscript notes of the lectures delivered by Luria, which together with his own jottings Vital published under the title of *Es chayim*, i. e., "The Tree of Life,"<sup>6</sup> having spent over thirty years upon their preparation. The work consists of six parts; that portion which treats of the doctrine of metempsychosis (*Hagilgulim*), is found in a Latin translation in Knorr von Rosenroth's work.

The Luria-Vital system found many adherents everywhere. Abraham de Herera (died 1639) wrote in Spanish two cabalistic works, the "House of God" (*beth Elohim*) and the "Gate of Heaven" (*shaar ha-shemayim*), which the Amsterdam preacher Isaac Aboab translated into Hebrew. Both are given in a Latin translation in Knorr von Rosenroth's work, together with a translation of "The Valley of the King" (*emek ha-melech*) by Naphtali Frankfurter. Besides these we may mention Isaiah Horwitz (died at Tiberias in 1629), author of *Sh'ne luchos habcrith* (abbreviated *Shela*), i. e., "The Two Tables of the Covenant," a kind of Real-Encyclopedia of Judaism on a cabalistic basis. This work has been often reprinted and enjoys a great reputation among the Jews. Abridgments of it were frequently published (Amsterdam, 1683; Venice, 1705; Warsaw, 1879).

There were not wanting those who opposed the Cabala. Of the numerous opponents which the Zohar and Luria-Vital's works called forth, none was so daring, so outspoken and powerful as Leon de Modena of Venice (1571-1648). He is best known as the author of *Historia dei Riti Hebraici ed osservanza degli Hebrei di questi tempi*, or the "History of the Rites, Customs and Manner of Life of the Jews" (Padua, 1640), and translated into Latin,

<sup>5</sup> See my article *s. v.* "Vital" in McClintock and Strong.

<sup>6</sup> For a description of the component parts of this work, see Fürst, *Bibliotheca Judaica*, III, pp. 479-481.

French, Dutch, English.<sup>7</sup> But besides this and other works, he also wrote a polemical treatise against the Cabalists, whom he despised and derided, entitled *Ari'noham*, i. e., "Roaring Lion," published by Julius Fürst, Leipsic, 1840. In this treatise he shows that the cabalistic works, "which are palmed upon ancient authorities, are pseudonymous; that the doctrines themselves are mischievous; and that the followers of this system are inflated with proud notions, pretending to know the nature of God better than any one else, and to possess the nearest and best way of approaching the Deity." He even went so far as to question whether God will ever forgive those who printed the cabalistic works (comp. Fürst, p. 7), and this no doubt, because so many Cabalists joined the Church.

But no opposition could stem the tide of the Cabala. Its wonder-working branch had now largely laid hold on the minds and fancies of the Jews, and was producing among them the most mournful and calamitous effects. The chief actor in this tragedy was the cabalist Sabbatai Zebi,<sup>8</sup> born at Smyrna, July, 1641. When fifteen years of age he rapidly mastered the mysteries of the Cabala, which he expounded before crowded audiences at the age of eighteen. When twenty-four years of age, he revealed to his disciples that he was the Messiah, the son of David, the true Redeemer, and that he was to redeem and deliver Israel from their captivity. At the same time he publicly pronounced the Tetragrammaton,<sup>9</sup> which the high priest was only permitted to do on the day of atonement. As he would not desist, he was excommunicated by the Jewish sages at Smyrna. He went to Salonica, Athens, Morea and Jerusalem, teaching his doctrines, proclaiming himself the Messiah, anointing prophets and converting thousands upon thousands. As his followers prepared to be led back by him to Jerusalem, they wound up their affairs, and in many places trade was entirely stopped. By the order of the Sultan, Mohammed IV., Sabbathai Zevi was arrested and taken before him at Adrianople. The Sultan said to him: "I am going to test thy Messiahship. Three poisoned arrows shall be shot into thee, and if they do not kill thee, I too will believe that thou art the Messiah." He saved himself by em-

<sup>7</sup> The English translation is found in Picard's *Ceremonics and Religious Customs of the Various Nations of the Known World*, Vol. I. London, 1733.

<sup>8</sup> See my article *s. v.* "Sabbatai Zebi" in McClintock and Strong; see also *Geschichte des Sabbatai-Zebi, sein Leben und Treiben*, Warsaw, 1883; and *Der Erzbetrüger Sabbatai Sevi, der letzte falsche Messias der Juden*, etc., Halle, 1760; Berlin, 1908.

<sup>9</sup> Called by the Jews *shem-hammephorash*, on which see my article *s. v.* in McClintock and Strong.

bracing Islamism in the presence of the Sultan, who gave him the name Effendi, and appointed him Kapidji-Bashi. Sabbathai died Sept. 10, 1676, after having ruined thousands upon thousands of Jewish families. In spite of this fiasco the number of Sabbathai's followers was not diminished.

Famous as a champion of orthodoxy was Jacob Israel Emden (1696-1776) rabbi of Altona. During his rabbinate there, the famous Jonathan Eybenschütz<sup>10</sup> (born in Cracow in 1690) was called to Altona in 1750, since the German and Polish Jews were divided in that place. As every rabbi was regarded as a sort of magician, the new-comer was expected to stop the epidemic raging at that time in the city. Eybenschütz prepared amulets, which he distributed among the people. For curiosity's sake one was opened, and lo! in it was written: "O thou God of Israel, who dwellest in the beauty of thy power, send down salvation to this person through the merit of thy servant Sabbathai Zevi, in order that thy name, and the name of the Messiah Sabbathai Zevi, may be hallowed in the world." This amulet came into the hands of Emden. Eybenschütz denied all connection with the adherents of Sabbathai, and as he had already gained a great influence, he was believed; at least, almost everybody kept quiet. But Emden was not quiet, and finally the ban was pronounced against Eybenschütz. Even the King Frederic V of Denmark sided with Emden, and Eybenschütz lost his position. Being forsaken by his friends, Eybenschütz went to his former pupil, Moses Gerson Kohen, who after baptism took the name of Karl Anton. Anton wrote an apology in behalf of his teacher, which he dedicated to the King of Denmark. This and other influences had the effect that the whole affair was dropped and Eybenschütz was elected anew as rabbi of the congregation. Eybenschütz died in 1764 and was followed twelve years later by his opponent Emden. Both are buried in the Jewish cemetery of Altona.

Another Zoharite was Jacob Frank<sup>11</sup> (Jankiew Lebowicz), the founder of the Jewish sect of the Frankists, born in Poland in 1712. He acquired a great reputation as a Cabalist, and settled in Podolia, where he preached a new doctrine, the fundamental principles of which he had borrowed from the teachings of Sabbathai Zevi. He was arrested through the influence of the rabbis, but was liberated through the intervention of the Roman Catholic clergy, and authorized by the King to profess freely his tenets. His followers then,

<sup>10</sup> See my article *s. v.* "Eybenschütz" in *loc. cit.*, Vol. XII, p. 367.

<sup>11</sup> Comp. Graetz, *Frank und die Frankisten*, Berlin, 1868.

under the name of Zoharites and Anti-Talmudists oppressed their former adversaries in turn. As the papal nuncio at Warsaw declared against them, Frank and most of his adherents embraced Christianity. Frank continued to make proselytes and his sect increased in Poland and Bohemia. He lived in princely style on means furnished him by his followers, and died at Offenbach, in Hesse, December 10, 1791.

The Cabalists of the eighteenth century, with the exception of Moses Chayim Luzzatto (born 1707, died 1747), are of little importance. Modern influences gradually put a stop to the authority of the Cabala, and modern Judaism sees in the Cabala in general only a historical curiosity or an object of literary historical disquisitions.