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Collection of Five Kabbalistic Commentaries on the Ten *Sefirot* [Stages of Divine Emanation], copied by Shabbetai ha-Kohen

In Hebrew, manuscript on paper

Italy (northern?), c. 1400-1450

ii + 106 folios on paper (some similarities with Briquet 14726, "tête de boeuf," Brescia, 1454), early foliation in pen in Arabic numerals in upper-right corner of verso throughout (ff. 373-386, 389-480; current manuscript must have once belonged to a larger codex or group of volumes), early foliation in pen in Arabic numerals in upper-left corner of recto on ff. 19-60 (numbered 1-42), modern foliation in pencil in Arabic numerals in upper-left corner of recto throughout (cited), complete but now bound out of order, quires i-iii were originally in the final position in the codex following the present f. 106 (collation: i⁶ [including two unnumbered flyleaves, now added to the quire] ii⁶ iii⁸ iv⁸ [beginning f. 19], v-xii¹⁰), abbreviation for the Hebrew words be-ezrat ha-shem (with God's help) at the start of most new quires, horizontal catchwords in lower margin of verso throughout, ruled in blind (justification 90 x 77 mm.), written in calligraphic Italian square (incipits) and semi-cursive (text body) scripts in brown ink in 14 long lines throughout, enlarged incipits, partial vocalization by a later hand (ff. 2v-5v, 92v), justification via abbreviation, use of anticipatory letters, and dilation of final letters, occasional strikethroughs and marginalia in Hebrew in hand of primary scribe, extensive marginalia in Latin throughout, often partially cropped at outer edges, some Latin headers, diagrams on ff. 4rv, 9, decorated final word on f. 7v, marginal manicule on f. 52, charts on ff. 53, 69v-70v, 106v, permutations of divine names on ff. 54-61v. Slight scattered staining, dampstaining throughout sometimes causing ink to run (see especially ff. 47v-53), darkened edges, some dog-earing, several folios strengthened along gutter, front flyleaves (ff. i-ii) mounted on strong paper, place name of scribe scratched out on f. 13 and filled in ("Casale Monferrato") by a later hand, small holes in outer edge of f. 15 and in inner margin of f. 106, catchword on f. 106v indicates that what is now f. 1 originally followed here. Bound in dark blue library buckram, Montefiore name lettered in gilt above Halberstam shelf mark (122) on spine, spine slightly split along joints, light damage to headcap and tailcap, modern paper pastedowns and flyleaves. Dimensions 135 x 104 mm.

Commentaries on the ten *sefirot* played an important role in the emergence, dissemination, and study of symbolism in kabbalistic circles in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The present elegantly-executed and relatively early collection of five such texts is also significant because of its provenance in the library of Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo (1472-1532), one of the leading Christian Hebraists of the Renaissance. Preserving extensive marginalia by the Cardinal, this is quite possibly the only Hebrew manuscript from the Cardinal's library (dispersed in 1527) still in private hands.

PROVENANCE

1. The scribe of our manuscript signed his name in the colophon (f. 13): "Completed by the most junior of the students, Shabbetai ha-Kohen – may his Rock and Redeemer keep him – a resident of [filled in: Casale Monferrato]. May the scribe be strong, and may he who reads this [book] and all of his books be strong and resolute, amen." Though undated, the work can be assigned to the first half of the fifteenth century, based on the script. Rebound and now out of order; the present ff. 1-18, once at the end

of the codex, were placed at the beginning before f. 19. It is for this reason that the catchword on f. 106v matches the first word on f. 1, and the colophon is inscribed on what is currently f. 13 (with five blank leaves following the colophon). The book was originally much longer, or perhaps part of a series of volumes, since the earliest foliation begins with f. 373. Presumably, one of the later owners recognized that f. 19 originally came earlier in the codex than ff. 1-18 and therefore began foliating from there (though he stopped at f. 60 = f. 42 in his count).

2. In 2006, Adolfo Tura identified the hand in which the Latin marginalia are written as that of Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo (1472-1532), one of the leading Christian Hebraists of the Renaissance. Da Viterbo must have acquired the manuscript not long after it was copied and then incorporated it into his library in Rome, which eventually housed the most extensive Christian collection of kabbalistic works in its time. However, the library was almost entirely dispersed during the Sack of Rome in May 1527.
3. At various points over the following centuries, the book was owned by Menahem Jedidiah ha-Kohen (f. ii), Rafael Namias (f. ii), and "Doctore Moise Hess" (f. 1). The dates inscribed on f. ii are from 1628, 16 Aprile 1861, and 30 Maggio 1866. Interestingly, a volume now housed at the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome (MS 2901), copied in July 1551 in Santa Vittoria, Italy, and containing the text of Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla's *Sefer sha'arei orah*, was also owned by a certain Menahem Jedidiah ha-Kohen.
4. Eventually, Solomon Joachim Halberstam (1832-1900), a wealthy Polish Jewish scholar and bibliophile who had acquired hundreds of valuable manuscripts from the libraries of Leopold Zunz (1794-1886) and Samuel David Luzzatto (1800-1865), came into possession of this manuscript and included it when cataloging his personal collection. The spine, pastedown of the upper board, and front flyleaves (ff. i-ii) feature the book's shelf mark (MS 122) in his library.
5. The Judith Lady Montefiore College in Ramsgate, England, purchased 412 manuscripts from Halberstam's collection, including ours. The transaction was carried out by Rabbi Moses Gaster (1856-1939), principal of the College between 1891 and 1896. The manuscript contains the library stamp of the institution, known in Hebrew as Yeshivat Ohel Mosheh vi-Yehudit, on ff. 1 and 106v, as well as the book's shelf mark (MS 319) on the pastedown of the upper board.
6. Between 1898 and 2001, most of the Montefiore manuscripts, including ours, were placed on permanent loan at Jews' College in London. In 2001, they were returned to the Montefiore Endowment Committee.
7. In 2004, part of the Montefiore Collection, including our manuscript, was sold at auction by Sotheby's in New York (lot 392).

8. In 2008, the booksellers Philobiblon published a catalog of "a thousand years of bibliophilia from the tenth to the twentieth century," in which our manuscript is included (no. 54).

TEXT

f. i, Notes on the manuscript's contents and authorities cited, with corresponding folio numbers;

f. ii, Ownership marks and dates in various hands, as well as notes in Italian and Hebrew ascribing authorship of one or more of the treatises included to Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla (Chiquatilla; 1248-c. 1325), an important Spanish kabbalist (see further below). "V. De Rofsi Codici MSS N^o 1235" refers to a manuscript currently housed at the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma (Cod. 2431), which, like ours, contains the *Sba'ar ha-shamayim* treatise attributed to Gikatilla (De Rossi, 1803);

ff. 1-3, [*Habbitu anashim be-ein ha-bokhmah be-[eser] sefirot belimah*, a short, poetic, anonymous commentary on the ten *sefirot*], incipit, "ha-sefirah ha-rishonah keter elyon mukhteret mi-kol tshedadeha ... ve-ha-sod ve-nahar yotse me-eden le-hashkot ha-gan [sic!] u-mi-sham yippered ve-hayah le-arba'ah rashim";

In Gershom Scholem's listing of medieval commentaries on the ten *sefirot* (1933-1934), this is no. 93. Scholem notes that the scribes of at least two manuscripts (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale MS héb. 859 and Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, MS ebr. 428) appear to have believed that the work was composed by Moses ben Solomon of Burgos (1230/1235-c. 1300), a prominent Castilian communal rabbi and kabbalist, though Scholem himself rejects this attribution (1932). In the present manuscript, a note at the top of f. 1 in a later hand assigned authorship to Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla, though this ascription, too, appears to be incorrect.

Some of the material in this commentary was incorporated into Rabbi Isaac ben Samuel of Acre's (late thirteenth-mid-fourteenth century) *Sefer me'irat einayim* (1975), but the remainder remains unpublished. The work survives in about twenty-seven other manuscripts from across the Jewish world, though the earliest are Ashkenazic and date from the fourteenth or fifteenth century;

ff. 3v-7v, [*Kabbalah mefo'eret yafah*, another commentary on the ten *sefirot*], incipit, "yitbarekh shem ha-bore she-hu hai ve-kayyam la-adei ad ... ve-ama[r] ki a[l] ke[n] nikra mal'akh al ki hanhagat ha-olam ha-zeh al yado ka-asher bei'arnu";

In Scholem's listing (1933-1934), this is no. 45; he characterizes it as a later, more expansive version of the commentary that begins *reshit kol davar* (no. 123 in his listing). The text was first published as the work of an otherwise-unknown kabbalist, Rabbi Joseph bar Hayyim, in *Likkutei shikhbab u-pe'ah* (1556) and was later printed from manuscript by Michael Grajwer in his doctoral dissertation on the kabbalistic elements of Rabbi Moses Nahmanides's (1194-1270) Pentateuch commentary (1933). (Like many other short, anonymous works copied in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this text was often attributed in manuscripts to the great kabbalist from Girona.) Scholem himself believed, based on Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, MS 3087, that *reshit*

kol davar was authored by Rabbi Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen (d. c. 1270-1280), a Spanish kabbalist with strong pietist and Gnostic tendencies, and posited that R. Joseph bar Hayyim may have been responsible for expanding it into the present text.

The commentary is extant in approximately forty other manuscripts from all over the Jewish world, the earliest of which, Parma, Biblioteca Palatina Cod. 2784, dates from 1286. In 1927, it was reprinted by Scholem, side-by-side with *reshit kol davar*, using Frankfurt am Main, Universitätsbibliothek, MS Oct. 123 as the base text.

ff. 8-13, [*Kelal aber* [sic!] *me-inyan ba-kabbalah*, an anonymous, early-thirteenth-century Catalanian commentary on the ten *sefirot*], incipit, “odi’akha kelal ha-devari[m] she-hayu mitnahagi[m] bo [sic!] ba’alei ha-merkava[h] ... ki hu memalle kol olamim ve-huts le-olamim ve-od ne’emar u-le-hoshevei shemo”;

In Scholem’s listing (1933-1934), this is no. 2. Like the previous commentary, this work, too, has been attributed (without basis) to Nahmanides. The text describes the configuration of the *sefirot* using wedding imagery and, as pointed out by Elliot R. Wolfson, constitutes “one of the earliest attempts on the part of thirteenth-century kabbalists to depict the divine anthropos in terms of its correspondence to human limbs” (1994).

According to Scholem, this commentary can be found in “hundreds” of manuscripts, though Daniel Abrams, in his edition of the work (2013), lists only fifty-two. As before, the earliest surviving copy is Parma, Biblioteca Palatina Cod. 2784, dated 1286. Abrams prints the text of our manuscript, which he characterizes as similar to that of the Parma exemplar, side-by-side with five others that he believes are representative of the main textual traditions of this work.

f. 13, colophon, written in a lighter ink; [ff. 13v-18v, blank];

ff. 19-98v, [*Sba’ar ha-shamayim*, a lengthy, anonymous exposition on the ten *sefirot*], incipit: “sha’alta mi-menni yedid nafshi le-hadrikhekha be-orah misho[r] be-inyan eser sefirot ... yehi [ha-shem] e-loheinu immanu ve-yashpia aleinu me-hokhmato le-einei ha-ammim ve-yatsilennu mi-shegi’ot le-ma’an rahamav va-hasadav ha-rabbim ve-yihyeh le-kavod kol ma’aseinu”;

In Scholem’s listing (1933-1934), this is no. 127. The text is preceded and followed by short poems and, according to Gershom Scholem and Issachar Joel (1930), is one of the first works to cite material from the *Tikkunei zohar*.

In the present manuscript, a later hand added an attribution on f. 19 (see also f. ii) to Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla. This is not surprising, as Gikatilla was a highly influential Spanish kabbalist to whom many works were ascribed erroneously (see above, f. 1). Adding to the confusion, he genuinely did author an important book entitled *Sefer sha’arei orah* (*editio princeps*: Mantua, 1561) treating the kabbalistic symbolism of the ten *sefirot* using very similar terms as does our text, and he even began his treatise with the same words: *sha’alta mi-menni yedid nafshi*. Moreover, in his *Sefer ha-emunot* (1556), Rabbi Shem Tov Ibn Shem Tov (c. 1380-c. 1441) refers the reader to two separate books by Gikatilla entitled *Sefer ha-orah* (= *Sefer sha’arei orah*) and *Sefer sha’ar ha-shamayim*. In fact, the confusion regarding the present text appears to have begun relatively early in the life of the work. The earliest-dated manuscript to have come down to us is Moscow, Russian State

Library, MS Guenzburg 96, copied in 1443, and yet already about a century later three separate Italian manuscripts (Parma, Biblioteca Palatina Cod. 3483; Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS & 103 Sup.; and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS héb. 857) all call this treatise *Sba'arei orah*, like the title of Gikatilla's famous book.

However, as demonstrated by Scholem and Joel, the two tracts are distinct in both content and style, and *Sba'ar ba-shamayim* must have been written one or two generations after Gikatilla's lifetime. Those facts apparently were not clear to the early owner of the present codex who claimed that *Sba'ar ba-shamayim*, too, was authored by Gikatilla. In this context, it is interesting to note that, as mentioned above (see Provenance), someone also named Menahem Jedidiah ha-Kohen possessed a different manuscript, now in Rome, containing Gikatilla's *Sefer sha'arei orah*.

Sba'ar ba-shamayim, only snippets of which have ever been published, can be found in around eighteen other manuscripts, only three or four of which date from the fifteenth century, making the present copy a relatively early exemplar;

ff. 99-106v, [*Kevodékha [ha-shem]*], a commentary on the ten *sefirot* attributed in some manuscripts (though not ours) to Rabbi Menahem (Ashkenazi), a student of Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah of Worms (c. 1165-c. 1230), incipit, "ketiv ki be-y-ah [ha-shem] tsur olamim ... tam ve-nishlam kevodekha [ha-shem]";

In Scholem's listing (1933-1934), this combines nos. 35, 50, and 55. At the bottom of f. 102v and top of f. 103, a new section of the commentary begins with the words *keter binah bokbmah ketiv [ha-shem] be-bokbmah yasad arets*. It is clear that our scribe considered this section to be part of the larger treatise *Kevodékha [ha-shem]*, but in other manuscripts, this text appears independently of the rest.

Much of the material here (ff. 99-105v) was included in the *Sefer keter shem tov* of Rabbi Abraham ben Alexander (Axelrad) of Cologne (thirteenth century), a German kabbalist and student of R. Eleazar of Worms who immigrated to Spain (first independent edition: Amsterdam, 1810). It is unclear who borrowed from whom. In fact, Rabbi Samson ben Eliezer (b. c. 1330), in his *Sefer barukh she-amar* (1878), attributes *Sefer keter shem tov* to the aforementioned R. Menahem, not R. Abraham of Cologne! Thus, here, too, bibliographic confusion abounds.

The various parts of this treatise have been preserved in about twenty-eight copies (excluding manuscripts of *Sefer keter shem tov*) from across the Jewish world, the earliest of which would appear to be London, British Library, MS Or. 1055 (Italy, thirteenth-fourteenth centuries);

f. 106v, the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet (excluding final forms) written in square script, with a later hand assigning each of them one or two of the *sefirot*.

The concept of the ten *sefirot* is mentioned for the first time in *Sefer yetsirah*, an ancient Jewish work of speculative mysticism treating the topics of cosmology and cosmogony. While in its original context it referred to the ten primordial or ideal numbers that contained the forces of creation (*sefirah* deriving from the root *s-f-r*, to count), it would later be understood to denote the ten stages of divine emanation through which God's activity is manifest in the world.

As explored by Moshe Idel, in the last two decades of the thirteenth century, with the arrival to Castile of kabbalists from different schools and traditions, a new literary genre flourished: the symbolic commentary on the ten *sefirot*. Works of this type, composed by some of the leading scholars of the generation, sought to catalogue the biblical and rabbinic terms and symbols used to refer to the various *sefirot*. Idel calls this new approach to the symbol in kabbalistic thought the “innovative Kabbalah” and compares the appearance of its accompanying literature to the advent after the twelfth century of bestiaries, lapidaries, and horaries compiled by Christians with the similar goal of decoding nature and the biblical text (1988).

In 1933-1934, Gershom Scholem, the doyen of academic kabbalistic scholarship, drew up a list of one hundred thirty-four commentaries on the *sefirot*, providing citations of some of the manuscripts in which they could be found. Moshe Idel subsequently put the number of such works at “almost 150” and noted their prominent role in the emergence, dissemination, and study of symbolism in kabbalistic circles (2002). More recently, Daniel Abrams has called attention to the need to systematically organize, analyze, and publish these texts in order to gain a more profound understanding of their history and of their influence on kabbalistic thought (2013).

Many of these thirteenth- and fourteenth-century works are preserved in kabbalistic miscellanies like ours. The specific texts represented in the present volume can be found grouped together or copied separately in manuscripts from all over the Jewish world, especially Italy. Two, New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, MS 1896 (Italy, fifteenth century) and Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cod. hebr. 112 (Gradoli, August 18, 1538) (the latter copied by a Christian), contain all five of the commentaries in our volume, plus additional material. If the present manuscript originally included other texts as well (see Provenance), we can perhaps use these two other miscellanies to theorize about the original contents of ours.

Aside from its relatively early date, the present codex is also distinguished by its ecclesiastical provenance. In part through the agency of the philologist, grammarian, lexicographer, and translator Elijah Levita (1469-1549), Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo (1472-1532), one of the leading Christian Hebraists of the Renaissance, acquired numerous Hebrew manuscripts of scriptural, rabbinical, and especially kabbalistic works, sometimes (as here) annotating them extensively. Following his library’s dispersion in 1527, many of these volumes made their way into public collections like the Biblioteca Angelica in Rome, the British Library in London, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, and the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. (According to a manuscript held in the last-named institution, da Viterbo owned at least three Latin translations of Gikatilla’s *Sefer sha’arei orah*; see Astruc and Monfrin, 1961.) It is possible that our codex is the only surviving Hebrew manuscript of his in private hands. Future scholarly examination of his marginalia may help to shed light on da Viterbo’s own kabbalistic oeuvre which, according to François Secret, “est sans doute l’effort le plus remarquable d’assimilation de la kabbale dans le monde des humanistes chrétiens” (1985).

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Our MS (accessible from within the National Library of Israel)

http://rosetta.nli.org.il/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE10518948&_ga=2.26404922.66678780.1533101532-1988024230.1468801374

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