

PHILOSOPHY AND KABBALAH IN WISSENSCHAFT DES JUDENTUMS: RETHINKING THE NARRATIVE OF NEGLECT

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The history of western cultural and intellectual life is, at one level, built upon recurring sets of cultural antinomies: pagan/Christian, Athens/Jerusalem, scholasticism/humanism, the "querelles des anciens et modernes." Occident and Orient, or a most recent variant, the West and Islam. One could go on for a long time in compiling this list. It would capture a certain truth about the diversity of cultural, religious, and intellectual traditions, but at the same time it would suffer from exaggerated, imprecise, and even dangerously stereotypical characterizations.

Within the smaller, but still quite diverse Jewish world, such antinomies have also had their place. For the purposes of this volume, our attention necessarily falls on one of them, the long-standing "querelles des philosophes et kabbalistes." Did not medieval Jewish philosophers and kabbalists regard one another as pernicious deviants, who genuflected before alien idols and deserved little more than strict bans on engaging in their respective practices? Did not the first modern Jewish scholars revel in the triumph of rational philosophy over irrational mysticism, seeing the two as irreconcilable cultural opposites? Even those adepts of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* who deigned to engage in the study of Kabbalah seemed to inherit the disdain for Kabbalah of their medieval rationalist precursors. The *locus classicus* of this modern scholarly disdain may be Gershom Scholem's well-known account of his encounter with Philipp Bloch (1841-1923), the German-Jewish scholar and author of numerous volumes on the history of Kabbalah. Scholem describes his

excitement at encountering another scholar of Kabbalah, the octogenarian Bloch, whom he went to see in Berlin in 1922. He reports that Bloch happily showed him his substantial collection of Kabbalistic, prompting Scholem, in his youthful enthusiasm, to blurt out: "How wonderful, Herr Professor, that you have studied all this!" "Whereupon the old gentleman replied," Scholem relates, "What, am I supposed to read this rubbish, too?"¹

It is a fair measure of the extraordinary impact that Scholem had on the field of Jewish studies that this kind of dismissive attitude toward Kabbalah, imputed by Scholem to his German forebears, is a relic of the past. Indeed, in our times, it appears as if the tables have been turned. If the study of philosophy once consumed the attention of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, shunting the study of Kabbalah to the margins, the opposite might well be true today. The academic study of Jewish mysticism is, by all accounts, a legitimate and even privileged enterprise in Jewish studies, attracting some of the finest and most creative minds in the field. Not only is there a steady stream of scholarship on Kabbalah, with learned journals dedicated exclusively to it, but courses are offered in the field at universities and even rabbinical seminaries (the significance of which will become clearer later). By contrast, the study of Jewish philosophy, especially in its medieval guise, has fallen from its erstwhile dominance to a position of relative scarcity (at least as I read the scholarly map).

This story of this inversion is a fascinating and important topic, one that would seem to owe to Scholem's vast impact on the field of Jewish studies, as well as a host of other factors (including the growing appetite for mysticism in our New Age *Zeitgeist*). While I cannot undertake a full history of that inversion here, I would like to revisit an important chapter in the modern relationship between philosophy and Kabbalah—that which extends from the first circles of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* up to the turn of the twentieth century. The account in this paper is hardly exhaustive - and in fact, is somewhat episodic. Yet there is a point to be made. It is that a certain narrative of neglect settled in during the twentieth century, leading to the oft-repeated claim that nineteenth-century "*Wissenschaft* scholars (were) deaf to the mystic chords of *Kabbalah*."² This claim was, first and most significantly, made by Scholem himself, who often pointed out that Jewish mysticism was anathema to

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1. See Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1980), 150.
 2. Ismar Schorsch, "Wissenschaft and Values," in idem, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1994), 154.

"the Enlightenment-minded, purified, rational Judaism of the nineteenth century" - and hence ignored by its avatars in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement.³

Of late, scholars have increasingly called attention to this narrative of neglect. Pride of place belongs to Moshe Idel, who devotes a number of instructive pages in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* to detailing the interest of earlier German-Jewish researchers with Jewish mysticism. Idel concludes that "(f)ar from being negatively biased against Kabbalah, some of the pioneers of Jewish studies in the nineteenth and early twentieth century not only were interested in this lore but also made several original contributions that were to lay the foundation for the later study of the Kabbalah."⁴

One cannot deny that there were those in *Wissenschaft des Judentums* who ignored and/or were embarrassed by manifestations of mysticism in ancient or medieval Jewish culture. But this paper argues that it would be more accurate to place that disregard at one end of a spectrum of 19th-century *Wissenschaft* attitudes - at the opposite end of which were various degrees of engagement in the study of Jewish mysticism. In related fashion, it may make sense to see Kabbalah and philosophy not as polar extremes, but, in a number of illuminating cases, as familiarly related, by which I mean that the former was a subset or progeny of the later, quite in contrast to common perception.

I

In proposing this renewed consideration of the relationship between philosophy and Kabbalah in *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, it is important to add that we are not talking, for the most part, about the study of texts for the express purpose of spiritual fulfillment or elevation, but rather about critical scholarly analysis of these two literary domains. Indeed, as we move into the nineteenth century, we enter the golden age of *Wissenschaft*, that magically resonant term that conveys at once scholarly exactitude and intellectual validation. It is *Wissenschaft* that stood at the foundation of the new research university whose prototype, Berlin, took rise in Germany in 1810. We would do well to recall that in the period of intense tumult around the turn of the 18th century, the fate of universities in Europe was much in doubt. Their numbers were in precipitous decline, dropping from 143 in 1789 to

3. Scholem, "The Science of Judaism—Then and Now," in idem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 309.

4. Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 10.

83 in 1815.⁵ A wide range of Enlightenment (and *Aufklärung*) critics had come to see the university as a last preserve of the *ancien régime*, beholden to privilege, rigid hierarchy, and ecclesiastical control. Armed with a powerful reformist agenda, those who agitated on behalf of a new university model, from Humboldt and Schleiermacher onward, sought to sweep away the old and replace it with a new regime anchored by the exacting standards of *Wissenschaft*. One consequence of this shift was that theology was no longer regarded as the "queen of the sciences" in the German university. Philosophy, the key agent of change in Enlightenment intellectual culture, readily assumed its place, and laid claim in the post-Kantian era to the title of queen of the *Geisteswissenschaften*.⁶

The power of *Wissenschaft*, and the central role of its ally, philosophy, in the *Geisteswissenschaften*, can be seen in the Jewish subculture that developed in Germany adjacent to (and often within) the broader society. The first generation of university trained Jewish scholars repeatedly invoked *Wissenschaft* not only as an arbiter of scholarly truth but also as an instrument of social advancement and integration. To wit, Immanuel Wolf, writing in the opening essay of the *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* in 1822, declared that *Wissenschaftlichkeit* "is the characteristic attitude of our time," that is, the embodiment of the guiding spirit of the day. At the same time, he fervently believed that it was through "the bond of *Wissenschaft*, the bond of pure rationality, the bond of truth" that Jews could forge a link with humanity at large.⁷ Wolf's language points to the sacred reverence for *Wissenschaft*, its authority, and therapeutic capacity that pervaded German intellectual culture, with particular intensity among the Jews.

Wolf's contemporary, Leopold Zunz, was introduced to the new religion of science, as some have called it, in 1815 at the fledgling University of Berlin. A few years later, in 1818, he wrote what is widely considered the opening manifesto of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, "Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur." At this critical juncture in Jewish history, at the tension-filled crossroad between tradition and modernity, Zunz asserts, "science (*Wissenschaft*) steps in demanding an account." Zunz unfolds his plans for an encyclopedic inventory of Jewish literary creativity. As he moves from field to field, mentioning manifold branches of Jewish literature that require careful scholarly attention, he arrives at a more specific judgment:

5. Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1, n. 2.

6. Ibid, 3.

7. Immanuel Wolf, "Ueber den Begriff einer Wissenschaft des Judentums," *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* 1 (1822), 24.

Above all these realms of science, above all this tumult of human activity, ruling in exclusive majesty, is philosophy, omnipresent but invisible, devoted with unassailable independence to all human cognition.⁸

Zunz's subsequent commentary on the term "philosophy" makes clear that he viewed it as Wolf did *Wissenschaft* - not only as the guiding ethos of the day, but as the organizing principle of all Jewish, even human, knowledge. Indeed, among the salutary benefits of this expansive philosophic spirit was that it could lead to "a true history of Jewish philosophy in which mental processes can be presented and understood while pursuing with all historical rigor the parallel learning embracing the world."⁹

This passage by Zunz provides us with a valuable key to understanding the world-view and priorities of the emerging enterprise of critical Jewish studies in 19th-century Germany - its faith in a higher-order philosophy or *Wissenschaft* (to which all human knowledge is submitted for categorization) followed by an attempt to historicize, to generate a "true history" alive to context and a healthy comparative perspective. Even though Zunz did not spend a great deal of time in "Etwas" outlining the contours of "a true history of Jewish philosophy," he nonetheless draws our attention to a realm of research and instruction that would become central to *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in its first century.

One literary genre whose significance Zunz did *not* herald in this essay was Kabbalah. He "remain(ed) indifferent," we are told, "to Judaism's mercurial tradition of mysticism."¹⁰ And so too, it was often said, did his colleagues and followers toiling in the fields of Jewish scholarship. But did they?

The case of Zunz casts this claim in some doubt. In his voluminous and wide-ranging explorations of Jewish literature, Zunz happened onto mystical texts not infrequently, and he most surely did not discard them into the dustbin. On the contrary, he revealed both interest and competence in Kabbalistic material.¹¹ We will discuss Zunz's colleagues in *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in more detail a bit later. For now, I'd like to ponder another question. Given that the era of which we're speaking, the one in which *Wissenschaftlichkeit* was "the characteristic attitude

of our time," was also known for its Romanticist flourishes, might it not be reasonable to expect some appetite for, or proclivity, toward mysticism? Should not the study of mysticism find a respectable place in the new research university in this era?

To be sure, these questions raise a host of larger ones, each of which could be carefully examined in an entire paper, if not volume. To take but one example, the question of the relationship between Enlightenment and Romanticism, which Ernst Cassirer (and many others since) warned us to treat as less distinct and antagonistic than we might be inclined to think. Nonetheless, we can say that the post-Napoleonic reaction in the German states gave impetus to a new nationalist particularism open to and nurtured by Romanticist symbols and ideals, including the notion of a vibrant and organic *Volksgeist*. To push even further, we return to our iconic 20th-century personality, Gershom Scholem, who averred that he "wanted to enter the world of Kabbalah through my thinking about and believing in Zionism as something alive."¹² Indeed, the shared vitalism of nationalism and mysticism at which Scholem hints prompts us to inquire whether the latter found its place in the new research university which came of age in a manifestly nationalist age.

Where in fact should we look? Of the four faculties typically found in the German university - philosophy, law, medicine, and theology - one would think that the study of mysticism could be housed in either the first or the last. The philosophical faculty, Friedrich Paulsen notes in his classic study of the German university, was conventionally divided between "the mathematical-physical sciences" (and) the "philological-historical sciences."¹³ Of course, we should add to the more humanistic side of that divide the growing presence of philosophy itself, as well as of literary and folklore studies, especially those inflected by the new romanticist currents.

Within this intellectual universe, we notice that the famous German collectors of folklore, von Arnim and Brentano and the brothers Grimm at Göttingen, sought to identify Jewish and even kabbalistic sources in their work, as Gunnar Och demonstrated in a volume devoted to Kabbalah and Romanticist literature.¹⁴ Other essays in that volume deal with Jewish mystical traces in Novalis, Hoffmann,

8. "On Rabbinic Literature," excerpted in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds. *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary Reader* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 227.

9. *Ibid.*, 228.

10. Leon Wieseltier, "Etwas über die Jüdische Historik: Leopold Zunz and the Inception of Modern Jewish Historiography," *History and Theory* 20:2 (May 1981), 138.

11. See Moshe Idel. "'Al Aharon (Adolf) Jellinek ve-ha-Kabbalah," *Pe'amim* 100 (2004), 15.

12. Scholem, *Devarim be-go* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975), 81-82.

13. Friedrich Paulsen, *The German Universities and University Study*, translated by Frank Thilly and William W. Elwang (New York and Bombay: Longmans, 1906), 408ff.

14. Gunnar Och, "'Gewisse Zaubilder der jüdischen Kabbala': Zur Aneignung kabbalistischer Stoffe bei Achim von Arnim und Clemens Brentano," in Eveline Goodman-Thau, Gert Mattenklort, and Christoph Schulte, eds. *Kabbala und die Literatur der Romantik* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1999), 179-196.

and Hölderlin among others. The investigative work by Och and others is illuminating, but it does not add up to a robust or pervasive engagement by the German academic world with the study of Jewish mysticism, or even less to a significant institutional commitment to its study.

On a distinct though related note, we should acknowledge the considerable interest by nineteenth-century philosophers and literary scholars in Germany in Meister Eckhart, the medieval Christian theologian and mystic. As Yossef Schwarz has observed, the romanticist and idealist backdrops to German academic culture encouraged thinkers such as Schelling, Hegel, Fichte, and Schopenhauer to study Eckhart, whose mystical tendencies (and vernacular German style) seemed to embody the true German national spirit.¹⁵ And yet, in an interesting adumbration of a theme that will concern us later, part of what interested these modern scholars was the recognition that mysticism and philosophy, at least in their medieval guise, were, in some important ways, linked. For example, both pursuits, argued one leading scholar of Eckhart, were "unkirchliche."¹⁶

This last point reminds us that the German academy in this period did not decisively choose Romanticism over Enlightenment, mysticism over philosophy, or, for that matter, particularism over universalism. These apparent opposites, in fact, often overlapped with one another, lending credence to Gail Finney's suggestion that "(p)arochialism and cosmopolitanism tend to exist side by side or alternate throughout much of German history"—just as she shows that early nineteenth-century literary scholars took an avid interest both in German folk expressions and *Weltliteratur*.¹⁷

To return to our question above, we can say that mysticism, at least of the Christian variety (e.g., Eckhart), attracted the attention of some notable German philosophers and literature scholars in the period under review. But did it find its way into the discipline of theology (and theological faculties) in Germany? We should remember that theology was a field in decline in the early nineteenth century; its very existence in the university was repeatedly called into question by reformers. Paulsen, writing in the early twentieth century, still felt compelled to justify its presence in the face of those "numerous representatives of a scientific

radicalism (who) are inclined to exclude it altogether, or to relegate it to the past."¹⁸ To the extent that theology was able to re-invent and justify itself, it was chiefly, perhaps exclusively, through the magical salve of *Wissenschaft*. As Thomas Albert Howard recently observed in his superb study, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University*, "(t)he charge that one's outlook was *unwissenschaftlich* (a term of derision increasingly applied to reactionary theologians by their critics) amounted to an accusation of having no credible stake in the modern university."¹⁹ The scientific makeover of the theological discipline into *wissenschaftliche Theologie* allowed for new subfields such as biblical criticism alongside the traditional ones - exegetical, historical, systematic, and practical theology.²⁰ What it did *not* provide for was the study of mysticism.

It may well be that this query of whether and where mysticism was to be found in the German university is the wrong question to ask, either because Christian mysticism was not the same as Jewish mysticism, or because mysticism simply was *not* a major topic of concern in the period under review. Nonetheless, we should take note, by way of concluding this section, of the example of Franz Joseph Molitor (1779-1860), the university-trained Christian theologian for whom mysticism, and Jewish mysticism, in particular was of the keenest interest. Christoph Schulte describes him as "the great unknown among philosophers of German romanticism."²¹ Of course, Molitor was not unknown to Gershom Scholem, who as a young man read Molitor's four-volume work that dealt extensively with Kabbalah, and who wrote a complimentary entry on him in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.²² Nor was Molitor unknown in his day as a discerning and appreciative student of Kabbalah who, despite his unwavering Catholic faith, supported the founding of and taught at a new Jewish school in Frankfurt. Molitor was one of the few and most interesting heirs of that intriguing Renaissance type, the Christian devotee of Kabbalah. But he created no school, left behind few direct disciples, and was largely forgotten. His embrace of Kabbalah was, it seems fair to conclude, idiosyncratic and unrepresentative.

18. Paulsen, *The German Universities*, 384.

19. Howard, *Protestant Theology*, 137.

20. Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6, 11.

21. Christoph Schulte, "Le philosophie du judaïsme de Franz Joseph Molitor," in Gérard Bensussan, *La philosophie allemande dans la pensée juive* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 83.

22. Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 113, and *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v. "Franz Joseph Molitor." See also Bram Meertens, "'This Still Remarkable Book': Franz Joseph Molitor's Judaeo-Christian Synthesis," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 1:2 (2002), 167-181.

15. See Yossef Schwarz, "Meister Eckhart: Vernacular Theology and Religious Anarchy," unpublished paper.

16. Adolf Lasson, *Meister Eckhart der Mystiker: Zur Geschichte der religiösen Spekulation in Deutschland* (Berlin, 1868), 17, quoted in Schwarz, 5.

17. See Finney, "Of Walls and Windows: What German Studies and Comparative Literature Can Offer Each Other," *Comparative Literature* 49:3 (Summer 1997), 262.

Where does that leave us in our pursuit of an understanding of the relationship between philosophy and Kabbalah? So far we've noticed the twin and interlocking ascents of philosophy and *Wissenschaft* in 19th-century German academic culture. We've also notice some scattered interest in mysticism, especially in the form of Meister Eckhart. Insofar as Jews were eager consumers of that academic culture, we might reasonably expect them to constitute a perfect microcosm of the larger world. And indeed it was the case that Jews' veneration for the curative powers of *Wissenschaft* was enormous, surpassing that of their Christian contemporaries. For *Wissenschaft*, as we saw earlier, was not merely a source of scholarly validation for Jews, but an essential tool of social advancement.

Similarly, philosophy assumed a position of prominence in the setting where modern Jewish scholars first made their institutional home, namely, rabbinical seminaries. We must recall that while Jews were able to study history, philosophy, Semitics, and related fields in European universities in the 19th century, they were almost never permitted to teach them there. It was this predicament that led Eduard Gans, the founding president of the first society of critical Jewish scholars in Germany, to convert in 1825. And it was this predicament that led a leading young scholar, Abraham Geiger, to propose in 1836 (and on a number of subsequent occasions) the creation of a Jewish theological faculty at a German university.

Unsuccessful in this effort, Geiger was able to find a permanent home only in a rabbinical seminary. It was there that *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was to be based, in five modern rabbinical seminaries in Breslau, Berlin, Budapest, and Vienna.²³ A perusal of the course listings for the five seminaries reveals, notwithstanding their denominational diversity, a great deal of curricular overlap. Liberal, Positive-Historical, and Orthodox seminaries all taught basically the same courses to their students: Talmud and codes, Mishna, and Bible and commentaries, as well as a group of subjects that indicated the long distance traveled from the old-style yeshiva—Jewish history, *Religionsphilosophie*, and homiletics. A good summary of the pedagogical priorities of the seminaries was given on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Vienna Lehranstalt: "We hold to the view that the modern rabbi must be a proficient preacher, but above all a teacher intimately familiar with the

23. The five seminaries were the Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminary in Breslau (1854), the Hochschule (or Lehranstalt) für die Wissenschaft des Judentums (1872) and the Hildesheimer Seminary in Berlin (1873), the Budapest Rabbinical Seminary (1877), and the Israelitisch-Theologische Lehranstalt in Vienna (1892).

Talmud and the ritual codes, Jewish history and Jewish *Religionsphilosophie*."²⁴

The obvious question to address at this point is what was meant by the term *Religionsphilosophie*? A review of the yearly reports of the seminaries suggests that the most frequently taught courses in this field, by far, were those devoted to three giants of medieval Jewish thought: Maimonides and his *Guide for the Perplexed*, his philosophical precursor, Saadya Gaon and his *Sefer emunot ve-de'ot*, and Yehuda Ha-Levi and the *Kuzari*. Also taught on a more occasional basis within the framework of *Religionsphilosophie* were courses on Aristotle, Philo, Josephus, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Bahya ibn Pakuda, Yosef ibn Zaddik, and Hasdai Crescas by scholars such as Bernays and Freudenthal in Breslau, Steinthal and Barth in the Berlin seminaries, Kaufmann in Budapest, and Müller in Vienna.

So then *Religionsphilosophie* focused, not surprisingly, on texts of philosophical import. Moreover, most of the authors and texts studied fitted under the rubric of "Hellenistica," or more commonly, the Islamic-Jewish encounter in Spain and beyond. These emphases strike us as perfectly logical, given the strong sense of identification that Central European Jews exhibited toward Hellenistic and Spanish Jewish cultures. Indeed, scholars have long noted the hold of the "Sephardic mystique" on German-Jewish culture in the 19th century, as reflected in fields as diverse as literature, scholarship, and architecture.

We might reasonably ask at this point whether Jewish mysticism, with its deep Spanish roots, was also part of this German-Jewish cultural agenda. In the case of the new-style rabbinical seminaries, the answer, in a formal institutional sense, is no; I uncovered no courses in Jewish mysticism or Kabbalah as such offered in the seminaries. And yet, that is only part of the answer. In fact, scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were engaged in the study of kabbalistic sources.

I propose that we briefly consider at three pools of scholarly writing about the subject. The effect of this review will be to pose an alternative to the long-regnant narrative of neglect regarding the place of Kabbalah in nineteenth-century scholarship - and in so doing, rethink the nature of the relationship between Kabbalah and philosophy in that era.

First, already in the second number of the founding journal of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the *Zeitschrift*. Lazarus Ben David, the iconoclastic Jewish Enlightenment figure, offers an extensive analysis of Kabbalistic texts in a broader discussion

24. *X. Jahresbericht der israelitisch-Theologischen Lehranstalt in Wien für das Schuljahr 1902/1903* (Vienna: Verlag der Israel. Theol. Lehranstalt, 1903), 255.

of Jewish messianic beliefs.²⁵ This reminds us of the point, affirmed by Schulte in a recent book on the Jewish Enlightenment, that well before the *Zeitschrift* appeared in 1822, the Kabbalah was a topic of interest to late eighteenth-century Haskalah writers such as Isaac Satanow and Ephraim Joseph Hirschfeld, among others.²⁶

A second source of interest are those university-trained Jewish scholars in the 19th century from outside of Germany who devoted serious attention to the Kabbalah. Here one immediately thinks of the French philosopher and legal scholar, Adolphe Franck (and to a lesser extent, the transplanted French bibliophile and scholar, Salomon Munk).²⁷ Franck, who later became a professor at the Collège de France, published in 1843 perhaps the first systematic account of the Kabbalah in modern times, *La kabbale, ou, La philosophie religieuse des Hébreux*. It is interesting and instructive that Franck does not oppose, but in fact conflates, Kabbalah and religious philosophy (*Religionsphilosophie*) in his title. He explains on the first page of the introduction that Kabbalah "can not be considered either as a philosophy or as a religion." Rather, "it is the fruit of the union of these intellectual powers."²⁸ From this point on, Franck undertakes a rather exhaustive analysis of the origins of the tradition, unhesitatingly rooting it, and the *Zohar*, in antiquity. While dubious that Shimon bar Yohai could have been the author, Franck was far more incredulous that "an obscure rabbi of the thirteenth century, an unfortunate charlatan" (referring to Moshe de Leon) could have written the *Zohar*.²⁹ Franck certainly sided with "les anciens" over "les modernes"—on one hand, asserting a long process of oral transmission originating in the teachings of Shimon bar Yohai, and on the other, describing later Kabbalists such as Moses Cordovero and Luria as "commentators who lacked the gift of originality."³⁰

On the basis of Franck's sympathetic treatment of an ancient Kabbalah, we might hasten to conclude that its modern study could only have developed beyond the cultural sphere of the hyper-rationalist *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. But that would not be accurate. We know, after all, that the renowned scholar, rabbi, and

25. Lazarus Bendavid, "Ueber den Glauben der Juden an einen künftigen Messias (nach Maimonides und den Kabbalisten)," *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* 1:3 (1822), 197-230.

26. See Christoph Schulte, *Die jüdische Aufklärung* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2002), especially 119-137.

27. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 8-9.

28. Adolphe Franck, *La kabbale, ou, La philosophie religieuse des Hébreux* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1843). Citations in this paper come from the translation by I. Sosnitz, *The Kabbalah or the Religious Philosophy of the Hebrew* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), lii.

29. *Ibid.*, 95.

30. *Ibid.*, xxix, 107.

preacher, Adolph Jellinek, found Franck's book important enough to translate a year after it appeared in French, in 1844. Although Jellinek died shortly after the new rabbinical seminary opened in Vienna (and thus did not have a chance to teach there), he was undeniably a major figure of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in that city.

More to the point, his translation of Franck reflected Jellinek's decades-long interest in Kabbalah. He opened his translation by describing Kabbalah as a peculiar variant of philosophy - as "Oriental Philosophy," a term that reveals his conception of a rather exotic body of literature that was distinct from western philosophy.³¹ Yet he was not intent merely on demonstrating the primacy of West over East. Rather, he believed that it was an essential scholarly task to bring clarity to the thicket of competing views about the origins and development of the Kabbalah. Already in his translation of Adolphe Franck, he promised to address that key issue hovering over Kabbalah scholarship then and now: when, where, and by whom was the *Zohar* composed. In 1851, he fulfilled this promise, writing a small pamphlet that identified Moshe de Leon as the central figure in the *Zohar's* composition.³² In the following year, he wrote another small booklet that confirmed his conclusion and went on to discuss pre-Zoharic sources of the Kabbalah.³³

It turns out that there was, in the time of Franck and Jellinek, a spirited scholarly debate over Zoharic composition - that is, some three-quarters of a century before Gershom Scholem mounted the podium at the Hebrew University on November 1, 1925 to ask: "Ha-im hiber R. Moshe de Leon et Sefer ha-Zohar?" (Did R. Moses de Leon write the *Zohar*?).³⁴ Scholem largely ignored earlier figures engaged in debate over the *Zohar*, referring only *en passant* to Jellinek and reserving most of his attention (and scorn) for Heinrich Graetz, the famous German-Jewish historian who came to represent for him the deep enmity of *Wissenschaft des Juden-*

31. Jellinek's designation, which borrows from the 19th-century German historian and theologian Mosheim, comes in the translator's forward to A. Franck, *Die Kabbala oder die Religions-Philosophie der Hebräer*, trans. A. Jellinek (Leipzig: Heinrich Hunger, 1844), v. In fact, the roots of this designation extend back further. For a discussion of Moses Mendelssohn's use of the term "orientalischen Philosophen," see Moshe Idel, *Hasidim Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 40-41.

32. A. Jellinek, *Moses ben Schem-Tob de Leon und sein Verhältnis zum Sohar* (Leipzig: Heinrich Hunger, 1851).

33. A. Jellinek, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kabbala* (Leipzig: G. L. Frische, 1852). See also Idel, "Al Aharon Jellinek vcha-Kabbalah," *passim*.

34. Scholem, "Ha-im hiber R. Moshe de Leon et Sefer ha-Zohar?," *Mada' e ha-Yahadut* 1 (1925-26), 16-29.

tions toward Kabbalah.³⁵ As an aside, we should note that Scholem doubted Moshe de Leon's hand in composing the *Zohar* in his 1925 lecture, though he later came to agree with Graetz's conclusion that de Leon was the author of the *Zohar*.³⁶

Our point here is that well before Scholem, scholars of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* were debating this question. Indeed, even before the appearance of Franck's book in French and then German, the young German scholar Meyer Heinrich Landauer was engaged in the study of kabbalistic manuscripts at the Munich Hofbibliothek. Through his studies in the 1830s, Landauer arrived at a conclusion similar to Franck regarding the antiquity of the *Zohar*, albeit with an important twist: the book, he maintained, bore strong traces of Christianity, a function of an ancient ambience in which the boundary between Jewish and Christian worlds was thin. Somewhat later, after additional work in the manuscripts collection in Munich, Landauer revised this view to argue that the author of the *Zohar* was, in fact, a medieval Jew - one other than Abraham Abulafia.³⁷ What is interesting about Landauer is not only the fact that his claim of Abulafia's authorship became a target against which other scholars took aim; even more intriguing is the claim by Eveline Goodman-Thau that this young researcher, who died at the age of 33, moved beyond critical scholarship to become a "true Kabbalist" himself.³⁸

Indeed, Landauer represents the polar opposite of the paradigmatic *Wissenschaft* scholar, often cast as proudly ignorant, or at least contemptuous, of Kabbalah. Landauer died too young to make his way into the heart of the Jewish scholarly establishment. But David Joël, another German-Jewish scholarly contemporary, was able to make his way into the establishment. Joël was a university-trained scholar and rabbi who was appointed professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau in the last years of his life. Earlier in his career, he gained notoriety as the

author of a lengthy study on the religious philosophy of the *Zohar*, published in the midst of the intense mid-century debate over its composition in 1849. In it, he challenged the claims of contemporary scholars (e.g., Landauer and Franck) about the ancient roots of the *Zohar*, insisting that "the author of this work could not have lived before the 13th century."³⁹

We know that others with research interests in themes or figures relating to Jewish mysticism such as Joël's namesake, Manuel, or David Kaufmann also found their way to positions in rabbinical seminaries (Breslau and Budapest respectively). Of course, so too did one of the most well-known of German-Jewish scholars, the above-mentioned Heinrich Graetz, historian and Breslau seminary professor who discussed the origins of Kabbalah in his multi-volume *History of the Jews*. Graetz was intensely hostile to Kabbalah, inveighing against it as "a false doctrine which, although new, styled itself a primitive inspiration; although un-Jewish, called itself a genuine teaching of Israel; and although springing from error, entitled itself the only truth."⁴⁰ He also felt keen hostility for Moshe de Leon, whom he took to be the author of the *Zohar*. The only question about de Leon, Graetz wondered, was whether he "was a selfish or a pious imposter." With his typically charged judgment, Graetz averred that de Leon's "intention was certainly to deceive and lead astray."⁴¹

Much more could be said about Graetz and his venomous disdain for Kabbalah and the *Zohar*. For the purposes of this paper, it suffices to recall that he could not - and did not ignore these two subjects; they were important features of his framing of medieval Jewish intellectual culture. The same could be said of two key figures in the Hebrew-language scholarly movement that stood alongside *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, *Hokhmot Yisra'el*: Samuel David Luzzatto, the Italian Jewish savant who held Kabbalah in low regard, and Nachman Krochmal, the Galician Jewish thinker who had a more positive attitude. We should also make mention here of a somewhat later figure, Moses Gaster, a favored student of Graetz's at the Breslau seminary. The wide-ranging Romanian-Jewish scholar devoted a good deal of attention to the Kabbalah and the *Zohar* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A major pillar of Gaster's approach was the belief, contra Graetz, that Moses de

35. Ibid, 16. n. 1 and passim.

36. In his seminal synthesis from 1941, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Scholem remarks that "I have come to accept in substance the contention of Graetz... that the Spanish kabbalist Moses de Leon must be regarded as the author of the *Zohar*." See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941), 159.

37. This discussion of Landauer draws on Ronald Kiener, "From *Bi'at ha-Zohar* to Prophet to Ecstatic: The Vicissitudes of Abulafia in Contemporary Scholarship," *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism Fifty Years After: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism*, eds. Peter Schäfer and Joseph Dan (Tübingen: J. C. G. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1993), 146-147 and Eveline Goodman-Thau, "Meyer Heinrich Hirsch Landauer: Bible Scholar and Kabbalist," in Karl Erich Grözinger and Joseph Dan, eds. *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 276, 290. See also Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 7.

38. Goodman-Thau, "Meyer Heinrich Hirsch Landauer," 294.

39. David Heiman Joël, *Die Religionsphilosophie des Sohar und ihr Verhältnis zur allgemeinen jüdischen Theologie* (Leipzig: G. L. Frische, 1849), 73.

40. Graetz, *History of the Jews* (New York: George Dobsevage, 1927), III: 547.

41. Graetz, *History of the Jews* (New York: George Dobsevage, 1927), IV: 11. See also Schulte, *Die jüdische Aufklärung*, 119. It is curious to see Graetz, who himself was frequently accused of a sort of a highly emotional, intemperately Romantic view of the Jewish people, hold the line in defense of a rational and enlightened Judaism.

Leon did *not* write the *Zohar*. Rather, Gaster argued, in evocation of A. Franck, that "this Book is a compilation made at a later date from very ancient independent documents."⁴²

These examples of scholarly engagements lead us to the first of two conclusions. First, it should be clear that the study of Kabbalah was not, as others have already noted, *terra incognita* for 19th-century Jewish scholars in Germany. We can point to a spectrum of opinions and approaches. On one hand were those who ignored Kabbalah altogether. Close by were those whom Scholem took to be representative of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, scholars who "displayed the greatest aversion to everything connected with religious mysticism."⁴³ At the other end of the spectrum were the few such as Landauer who not only studied but personally identified with Kabbalah as a spiritual system or practice. But in between these two poles was a cohort of serious mid-century researchers such as Frank, Jellinek, and Joël, established figures in Jewish and general scholarly circles, who had varying degrees of appreciation for Kabbalah and its place in Jewish history and saw fit to devote attention to it. To be sure, scholarly engagement did not end with this cohort, but continued on and off through the turn of the century (e.g., via Gaster or the great bibliographical expert, M. Steinschneider) - at which point mysticism, Kabbalah, Gnosticism, and their modern descendents were newly celebrated by the likes of Buber and Scholem as evidence of a vibrant Jewish national spirit. At the cusp of this moment stood Philipp Bloch, the Kabbalah scholar whom we recalled at the beginning of this paper and with whom we shall close.

In 1904 Bloch gave a lecture on Lurianic Kabbalah to the newly created learned society, the Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums. In the published version, he opened the book with an epigraph that seemed to capture perfectly his disposition toward Kabbalah. Quoting from the 17th-century Delmedigo's *Matsrefle-hokhmah*, he declared: "A little bit of Kabbalah is good and adorns man; too much of it is not good for the one who is deeply wedded to it, for he is deterred from pursuing the other precious sciences."⁴⁴

Bloch's view of the limits of Kabbalah's value, unsurprising in light of Scholem's recollection of their encounter (and reflected in this epigraph), in fact

believes another point - the second and final point with which I would like to conclude. In a small encyclopedic work from a decade earlier, Bloch placed the discussion of the history of Kabbalah from Gaonic times alongside an historical analysis of what he called "jüdische Religionsphilosophie" (that is, Jewish philosophy from Saadya to David Nieto). The two fields were like limbs of the same body. Both, he suggested, were deemed worthy of - and in fact, were subjected to - serious examination.⁴⁵

This corporeal metaphor strikes me as a revealing indication of Kabbalah's relationship in 19th-century Jewish scholarship to philosophy - or to that sweeping category of *Religionsphilosophie* (equivalent to today's "Jewish thought" or "mahshevet Yisrael"). Admittedly, I have only offered a partial account of that relationship here. Nonetheless, it does seem sensible, based on the terrain that has been covered, to revisit the old assumption of bitter enmity between philosophy and Kabbalah. Far more commonly than we had thought, Kabbalah stood adjacent to, or was tucked under, the category of "Religionsphilosophie" in *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. A more detailed charting of that relationship, one not based on the assumption of nineteenth-century neglect or aversion, remains an important desideratum in Jewish studies.

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42. See Moses Gaster's 1923 article, "A Gnostic Fragment from the Zohar: The Resurrection of the Dead," reprinted in his collected papers, *Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Mediaeval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha and Samaritan Archaeology* (New York: Ktav, 1971), 375.

43. Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 112.

44. Delmedigo's aphorism on Kabbalah is on the untitled epigraph page in Philipp Bloch, *Die Kabbalah auf ihrem Höhepunkt und ihre Meister* (Pressburg: Adolf Alkalay & Sohn, 1905).

45. See Philipp Bloch, *Geschichte der Entwicklung der Kabbala und der jüdischen Religionsphilosophie* (Trier: Verlag von Sigmund Mayer, 1894).