

Hekhalot Literature in Context

Between Byzantium and Babylonia

Edited by

Raʿanan Boustan, Martha Himmelfarb,
and Peter Schäfer

Mohr Siebeck

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Ra'anan Boustan, born 1971; 2004 PhD; Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Martha Himmelfarb, born 1952; 1981 PhD; since 2007 William H. Danforth Professor of Religion at Princeton University.

Peter Schäfer, born 1943; 1968 PhD; since 1998 Ronald O. Perelman Professor of Jewish Studies and Professor of Religion at Princeton University; since 2005 Director of Princeton's Program in Judaic Studies.

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Introduction: Hekhalot Literature at the Intersections of Jewish Regional Cultures

RA'ANAN BOUSTAN

Over the past 30 years, scholars of early Jewish mysticism have with growing confidence located the formative stages in the development of Hekhalot literature in Byzantine Palestine and Sasanian or early Islamic Iraq between the fifth and ninth centuries C. E.¹ This “revisionist” position has emphasized the fluid nature of intertextual relationships in Jewish antiquity and the constructive role of literary and hermeneutic activity. It has thus largely displaced the contention, associated with the pioneering work of Gershom Scholem, that the Hekhalot texts record the esoteric doctrines, ritual practices, and mystical experiences of the earliest generations of rabbis whose teachings fill the Mishnah, the Tosefta, the so-called halakhic midrashim, and the Palestinian Talmud (ca. 70–400 C. E.).²

¹ See especially the following works, presented in chronological sequence: David J. Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980); Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*, trans. A. Pomerance (Albany, N. Y.: SUNY Press, 1992), first published in German as *Der verborgene und offenbare Gott: Hauptthemen der frühen jüdischen Mystik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991); Michael D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkavah*, TSAJ 28 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); Klaus Herrmann, “Jewish Mysticism in the Geonic Period: The Prayer of Rav Hamnuna Sava,” in *Jewish Studies between the Disciplines: Papers in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday*, ed. Klaus Herrmann, Margarete Schlüter, and Giuseppe Veltri (Brill: Leiden, 2003), 180–217; Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 233–72; Ra'anana S. Boustan, *From Martyr to Mystic: Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism*, TSAJ 112 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); Boustan, “The Emergence of Pseudonymous Attribution in Heikhalot Literature: Empirical Evidence from the Jewish ‘Magical’ Corpora,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 14 (2007): 18–38; Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009); Moulie Vidas, “Tradition and the Formation of the Talmud” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2009), 193–242; Boustan, “Rabbinization and the Making of Early Jewish Mysticism,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 101 (2011): 482–501; Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 68–149. This introduction largely builds upon the findings of these studies. I do not, therefore, cite them individually throughout.

² The field’s re-assessment of the relationship between rabbinic literature and Merkavah mysticism was inaugurated by Ephraim E. Urbach, “The Traditions about Merkavah Mysticism in the Tannaitic Period” [in Hebrew], in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom*

The diverse ritual, liturgical, and speculative materials that fill the pages of the Hekhalot corpus are thus increasingly treated as the products of a still highly variegated “post-rabbinic” Judaism, in which rabbinic authority and traditions were brought into dynamic interaction with an ever widening range of Jewish cultural forms and religious norms – and were transformed in the process.

It is perhaps ironic that, in some respects, the field of early Jewish mysticism has thereby returned to the general historical conclusions reached by scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in the nineteenth and early twentieth century regarding the dating and provenance of Hekhalot literature.³ But it has done so in an entirely different spirit: rejecting the Emancipation-era polemics against the purported decadence of Judaism – and especially its irrational “mystical” impulses – under the malign influences of Byzantine Christianity and Islam, this line of recent scholarship has instead stressed the ongoing vitality of Jewish religious creativity long after the early heyday of the rabbinic movement. In particular, it has traced in great detail the generative engagement of various types of Jewish religious specialists with comparable phenomena and contemporaneous developments among their non-Jewish counterparts.⁴

Building on these insights, the studies in the present volume explore the diverse and shifting historical contexts in late antiquity and the Middle Ages that fostered and shaped Hekhalot literature and its distinctive religious idioms. The individual studies collected here, when taken together, offer a bold new history of the literary formation, cultural meanings, religious functions, and textual transmission of Hekhalot literature from its late antique origins in the “Byzantine” west and among “Babylonian” Jews in the east to its subsequent transformations at the hands of medieval Jewish scholars, scribes, and ritual experts in the Mediterranean basin and Europe.

G. Scholem, ed. E. E. Urbach, J. Z. Werblowsky, and Ch. Wirszubski (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 1–28, and fully realized in Halperin, *Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*. Compare Gershom G. Scholem in *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965), esp. 1–35. In contemporary scholarship, Scholem’s position has been most vigorously defended in Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, *A Transparent Illusion: The Dangerous Vision of Water in Hekhalot Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Christopher Rowland and Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, *The Mysteries of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 219–498.

³ Most notably, Leopold Zunz, *Die synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters*, 2d ed. (Frankfurt: J. Kauffmann, 1920; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1967), 139–44; Heinrich Graetz, “Die mystische Literatur in der gaonäischen Epoche,” *MGWJ* 8 (1859): 67–78, 103–18, 140–53; Philipp Bloch, “Die *yoredei merkavah*, die Mystiker der Gaonenzeit, und ihr Einfluss auf die Liturgie,” *MGWJ* 37 (1893): 18–25, 69–74, 257–66, 305–11.

⁴ For astute assessment of the utility and pitfalls of such comparative work, see Annette Yoshiko Reed’s contribution to this volume.

From Literary History to Historical Context

The recent shift in the historical contexts in which Hekhalot literature is studied has primarily been achieved through in-depth investigation of the complex and protracted literary processes that gave rise to the Hekhalot texts as we know them today.⁵ Particular emphasis has been placed on the fluid textual identities and boundaries of Hekhalot texts and the ongoing redactional activity that continuously repositioned – and thus reinterpreted – the various units and genres of which the corpus is composed.⁶ Moreover, studies of the reception and transmission of Hekhalot texts in the Middle Ages, as reflected in both the documents from the Cairo Genizah and the European manuscript tradition, have likewise highlighted the ongoing literary and scribal creativity of those who took an active interest in this compelling, if often abstruse, strain of Jewish religious discourse.⁷

One result of these philological investigations has been that the initial literary formation of Hekhalot materials now stands much closer in both time and space to the earliest Genizah manuscripts from approximately the eighth to eleventh century. This proximity has enabled scholars to begin to reconstruct the literary history of the Hekhalot texts in the Mediterranean and the Middle East prior to their reception in medieval Ashkenaz (Central Europe) in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁸ Moreover, the various stages of composition, redaction, reception, and transmission that gave rise over time to the Hekhalot corpus appear to have overlapped and intersected, rather than representing discrete moments or types of literary activity. When analyzed carefully, the traces of these processes open up new avenues for interpreting the Hekhalot texts and the ideas and practices to which they give expression.

Attention to these literary dynamics and to the heterogeneity of the resultant textual materials has also called into question earlier attempts to reconstruct the mystical experiences once presumed to be the aim of this literature and the source of its visionary descriptions of God, his divine chariot-throne (*merkavah*),

⁵ The fruits of these investigations have been a succession of textual editions, research tools, and German translations created under the direction of Peter Schäfer, most importantly: Schäfer, ed., *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, in collaboration with Margarete Schlüter and Hans-Georg von Mutius, TSAJ 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981); Schäfer, ed., *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, TSAJ 6 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984); Schäfer, ed., *Konkordanz zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, in collaboration with Gottfried Reeg, 2 vols., TSAJ 12, 13 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986–88); Schäfer, ed., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur*, 4 vols., TSAJ 17, 22, 29, 46 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987–95).

⁶ See the studies collected in Peter Schäfer, *Hekhalot-Studien*, TSAJ 19 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988).

⁷ See, e.g., Klaus Herrmann, “Re-Written Mystical Texts: The Transmission of the Heikhalot Literature in the Middle Ages,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 75 (1993): 97–116.

⁸ See the studies of the Genizah materials containing Hekhalot and related materials by Peter Schäfer and Gideon Bohak in this volume.

and his angelic entourage. The assumption that Hekhalot literature encodes a singular and internally coherent religious system has not been borne out by close reading of the texts. Indeed, the range of ideological perspectives articulated in various Hekhalot compositions undermines unitary or homogenizing accounts of the religious phenomena or social groups thought to stand behind the surface of the Hekhalot texts. Instead, scholarly attention has increasingly been directed to Hekhalot literature as the product of new forms of scholastic and literary practice that emerged over the course in late antiquity.⁹ This historically and contextually sensitive scholarship has begun to provide a fresh account of the gradual and punctuated emergence of Hekhalot compositions, one that stresses the diverse configurations of generic forms their redactors deployed and thus the range of religious sensibilities to which they might give voice.

These gains in our understanding of the composition, redaction, and transmission of Hekhalot literature have been coupled with greater appreciation of the complex relationships between Hekhalot writings and the variegated Jewish literary culture of late antiquity, both within and beyond the boundaries of the rabbinic movement. In the first place, the Hekhalot corpus is now less often interpreted as a direct literary or phenomenological continuation of the accounts of heavenly ascent found in early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. Rather, close textual analyses have revealed a basic shift in the conception of heavenly ascent from the passive model of “rapture” in the apocalyptic genre to the active ritual technique prescribed in Hekhalot texts.¹⁰ Moreover, while some texts discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, like the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, demonstrate that exegetical traditions regarding Ezekiel’s *merkavah* were incorporated into liturgical compositions already in the Second Temple period, the ritual idiom and religious aims of these compositions differed fundamentally from that of Hekhalot literature.¹¹ Indeed, recent historical-linguistic research has confirmed the significant lexical and stylistic differences between the Hebrew of the Hekhalot texts and that of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*.¹² Thus, even where some affinities between Hekhalot literature and earlier ascent, ritual, and

⁹ See, e.g., Michael D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁰ Martha Himmelfarb, “Heavenly Ascent and the Relationship of the Apocalypses and the Hekhalot Literature,” *HUCA* 59 (1988): 73–100; Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. 110.

¹¹ See the nuanced assessment in Elliot R. Wolfson, “Mysticism and the Poetic-Liturgical Compositions from Qumran: A Response to Bilhah Nitzan,” *JQR* 85 (1994): 185–202. Compare Philip Alexander, *The Mystical Texts: Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Related Manuscripts* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), which characterizes the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* as mystical and sees strong phenomenological affinities between the *Songs* and the Hekhalot corpus.

¹² Noam Mizrahi, “The Supposed Relationship between the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* and Hekhalot Literature: Linguistic and Stylistic Aspects” [in Hebrew], *Meghillot* 7 (2009): 263–98. For the beginnings of a systematic analysis of the Hebrew of Hekhalot literature, see Noam Mizrahi’s contribution to this volume.

liturgical traditions can be discerned, the verbal, formal, and indeed conceptual peculiarities of the Hekhalot corpus have problematized the search for the origins of Jewish mysticism in the Second Temple period.

As the cracks in this “internalist” account of the unbroken evolution of early Jewish mysticism have begun to show, research has increasingly highlighted the multiple lines of conceptual and literary affinity between Hekhalot literature and various branches of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic literary culture from the end of late antiquity and the early medieval period. Thus, for example, renewed attention has been given to the mutual influence between Hekhalot literature and the emerging scholastic culture of the Babylonian Talmud.¹³ At the same time, others have pointed to the traces left in the language and thought-world of the Hekhalot texts by the novel forms of Christian imperial ideology and ceremonial that developed in the late-Roman or Byzantine cultural sphere.¹⁴ Moreover, Jewish cosmological thought in late antiquity, while quite distinct from Merkavah speculation, may have informed the conception of the heavenly palaces (*hekhalot*) so central to Hekhalot literature.¹⁵ Recent scholarship has likewise stressed the deep affinities between the conceptions of ritual action in Jewish magical literature from late antiquity and the Hekhalot corpus as well as pointing to concrete literary echoes between the two.¹⁶ Finally, important preliminary investigations have been carried out into the mutual influence of Jewish and Islamic esotericism and mysticism.¹⁷ Further research into each of these lines of literary and conceptual affiliation remains an urgent desideratum.

¹³ See, e.g., the recent engagement with the overlapping materials in 3 Enoch and the Bavli in Daniel Boyarin, “Beyond Judaism: Metatron and the Divine Polymorphy of Ancient Judaism,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 41 (2010): 323–65, and the contributions by Peter Schäfer, David Grossberg, and Moulie Vidas in this volume.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Philip S. Alexander, “The Family of Caesar and the Family of God: The Image of the Emperor in the Hekhalot Literature,” in *Images of Empire*, ed. Loveday Alexander (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 276–97, and the contributions by Alexei Sivertsev and Klaus Herrmann in this volume.

¹⁵ See Peter Schäfer, “In Heaven as It Is in Hell: The Cosmology of *Seder Rabbah di-Bereshit*,” in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions*, ed. Ra’anan S. Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 233–74, and the contribution of Reimund Leicht in this volume.

¹⁶ See, e.g., the materials published in Bill Rebigier and Peter Schäfer, eds., *Sefer ha-Razim: Das Buch der Geheimnisse*, 2 vols., TSAJ 125, 132 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), and Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked, eds., *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, 3 vols., TSAJ 42, 64, 72 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994–99); also Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 329–38; Shaul Shaked, “‘Peace Be upon You, Exalted Angels’: On Hekhalot, Liturgy, and Incantation Bowls,” *JSQ* 2 (1995): 197–219; Rebecca Lesses, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations, and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998). For comparative analysis of the ritual world of Hekhalot literature and other magical literatures, see the contributions by Rebecca Lesses and Michael Meerson to this volume.

¹⁷ See especially Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis*

Perhaps the most significant development in recent years, however, is the fundamental reassessment of the relationship between Hekhalot literature and the hymnology (piyyut) of the late antique synagogue. This line of research has advanced far beyond the dichotomy between the “mystical” poetry of the Hekhalot corpus and the “orthodoxy” of the liturgical poets of the synagogue.¹⁸ Indeed, a number of scholars have proposed that the authors behind the Hekhalot texts are drawn from among the payyotanim, themselves the priestly leadership of the synagogue communities of Byzantine Palestine.¹⁹ Whatever the merits of this view, a powerful case has been made that liturgical hymns from fifth- or sixth-century Palestine make use of the specific idiom of heavenly ascent practice that is characteristic of Hekhalot literature.²⁰

Insufficient attention has been given to the precise historical implications of these complex patterns of interaction, overlap, and appropriation at the intersection of Hekhalot literature and the other contemporaneous genres or corpora of Jewish religious expression.²¹ Indeed, significant questions remain regarding the specific cultural contexts and institutional settings out of which the various strands of Hekhalot literature emerged as well as the multiple trajectories of use and appropriation they subsequently travelled.

under Early Islam (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Professor Wasserstrom attended the conference at Princeton, but was unfortunately unable to contribute to this volume.

¹⁸ See the reiteration of this set of antinomies between “mysticism” and “orthodoxy” and thus between Hekhalot literature and piyyut by Ezra Fleischer in his posthumous “Piyyut,” in *The Literature of the Sages*, Second Part: *Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature*, ed. S. Safrai, Z. Safrai, J. Schwartz, and P. J. Tomson (Assen/Minneapolis: Royal Van Gorcum/Fortress, 2006), 363–74, esp. 369–70. For a more productive approach to the relationship between liturgical and mystical literatures, see already Michael D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkavah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); also Swartz, “*Alay le-shabbeah*: A Liturgical Prayer in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*,” *JQR* 77 (1986–87): 179–90, as well as the contributions by Michael Swartz and Ophir Münz-Manor to this volume.

¹⁹ Rachel Elijor, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004); Elijor, “*Hekhalot* and *Merkavah* Literature: Its Relation to the Temple, the Heavenly Temple, and the ‘Diminished Temple’” [in Hebrew], in *Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine*, ed. Lee I. Levine (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2004), 107–42; Jodi Magness, “Heaven on Earth: *Helios* and the Zodiac Cycle in Ancient Palestinian Synagogues” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 59 (2007): 1–52.

²⁰ On the use of themes and technical terminology native to Hekhalot literature within pre-classical piyyut, see Michael Rand, “More on the *Seder Beriyot*,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 16 (2009): 183–209. For careful analysis of the historical significance of this text for the development of Hekhalot literature and its relationship to the synagogues of Byzantine Palestine, see Michael D. Swartz, “*Piyut* and *Heikhalot*: Recent Research and Its Implications for the History of Ancient Jewish Liturgy and Mysticism,” in *The Experience of Jewish Liturgy: Studies Dedicated to Menahem Schmelzer*, ed. Deborah Reed Blank (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 263–82, as well as Swartz’s contribution in this volume.

²¹ But see now the study in this volume by Andrei Orlov, which tracks a cluster of motifs across a number of textual corpora.

The greater accessibility of newly published materials from both Hekhalot literature and cognate corpora, the growing interest in the Jewish culture of Byzantine Palestine and in the Sasanian context of the Bavli, and the new-found methodological sophistication regarding how scholars ought to make use of analytical categories such as mysticism, magic, and prayer to structure scholarly investigation all make this an apt moment to take stock of and consolidate the considerable advances that the field of early Jewish mysticism has made in recent years. While not achieving a clear consensus, the contributors to this volume undertake to situate Hekhalot literature in its diverse regional, literary, and socio-cultural relationships. In addition to the methods that have traditionally dominated the study of Hekhalot literature (historical philology, reception history, intellectual history, ritual studies, and comparative religion), we also wished to encourage the use of disciplinary perspectives that have rarely or only intermittently been applied to this material, such as historical linguistics, gender studies, and the history of the book.

The Structure and Content of this Volume

In order to fulfill these wide-ranging aims, we have divided the present volume into three sections that highlight the multiple historical contexts that gave rise to various facets or layers of Hekhalot literature during its composition and transmission, while also tracing patterns of thematic similarity between Hekhalot literature and adjacent corpora of Jewish and non-Jewish sources. The first section of the volume, *The Formation of Hekhalot Literature: Linguistic, Literary, and Cultural Contexts*, contains seven papers, each of which seeks to locate an aspect, unit, or sub-genre of Hekhalot literature within a particular geo-cultural, institutional, or sociological context. No global consensus emerges from these studies that can provide a straightforward answer regarding the provenance of the Hekhalot corpus as a whole. Indeed, the individual papers eschew such a simplistic solution. Yet, beyond emphasizing that the multiple and shifting contexts that produced this corpus are reflected in a heterogeneous array of religious interests and ideological perspectives, the studies also broadly support the view that Hekhalot literature emerged no earlier than the fifth century – and many of its textual compositions considerably later.

Noam Mizrahi's ground-breaking study, "The Language of Hekhalot Literature: Preliminary Observations," contributes an important historical-linguistic perspective to the current scholarly conversation, offering a systematic, if provisional, description of the linguistic profile of the Hebrew of Hekhalot literature. He lauds E. Y. Kutscher's methodology of isolating reliable texts within rabbinic literature in order to identify scribal contamination of other texts. Lacking such reliable texts among the Hekhalot textual witnesses, Mizrahi ap-

proximates Kutscher's approach by searching out linguistic features that can be used to pinpoint chronological change and/or geographical provenance. The Hebrew plural demonstrative pronoun, as a conservative grammatical element of language, serves as a well-attested chronological marker in Hebrew corpora. Mizrahi observes a chronological diversity of plural demonstrative pronouns throughout Hekhalot literature. He determines that the language of Hekhalot literature generally aligns with Mishnaic Hebrew₂ (MH₂). But comparison with other demonstrably late features reveals that Hekhalot literature exhibits mixed usage pronouns. Rather than stemming from the Tannaitic period, the extant textual forms of Hekhalot literature in fact reflect the archaizing tendencies characteristic of the late- or even post-Amoraic period. Mizrahi recommends further historical linguistic analyses that would ideally employ a larger and (if possible) more reliable sample of texts, would investigate a wider range of linguistic features, and would pursue comparison with other corpora, including Jewish magical texts from late antiquity and Hebrew sources from medieval Europe.

In his study of "Metatron in Babylon," Peter Schäfer reviews the evidence for Metatron in rabbinic and related literatures in order to determine whether this angelic figure belongs to the Palestinian or Babylonian cultural spheres. Beginning with those Palestinian sources that appear to mention Metatron, he shows that these references are located in late and perhaps even medieval redactional strata of those compositions; earlier Palestinian sources do not appear to be aware of the angel Metatron. By contrast, the application of the name Metatron to a heavenly power other than God seems to arise within Babylonian traditions that identify Michael with Metatron. In particular, the Babylonian Talmud, 3 Enoch, and the incantation bowls from Sasanian Iraq indicate widespread portrayal of two powers in heaven, God and a "lesser God." This "lesser God" is identified in different texts with Metatron or various other figures. Having observed the conceptual overlap between Metatron traditions in Hekhalot literature and those in the Bavli and the incantation bowls, Schäfer concludes that Metatron primarily rose as a heavenly figure within a Babylonian – rather than Palestinian – context.

Michael D. Swartz's paper, "Hekhalot and Piyyut: From Byzantium to Babylonia and Back," offers an interesting contrast to the pattern observed by Schäfer. Swartz analyzes the thematic and lexical parallels between Hekhalot literature and the synagogue hymnology from Byzantine Palestine from the fifth to early seventh centuries. The relatively secure dating of the piyyutim provides Swartz a powerful tool for determining the general timing of the emergence of specific features of Hekhalot literature, in particular the cosmological scheme of seven heavenly palaces (hekhalot) and the idea that a human traveler may ascend through these heavens by showing magical "seals" to the angels who guard their entrances. A newly published *Seder Beriyot* piyyut as well as two other pre-classical and classical era piyyutim contain references to these ideas and employ language from Hekhalot traditions. These compositions support the claim that

at least some early classical payyetanim were familiar with the ascent narrative pattern found in such Hekhalot texts as Hekhalot Rabbati and Hekhalot Zutarti. Swartz cautions against drawing broad conclusions concerning the exact form of these literary sources or dating the rest of Hekhalot literature from these intertextual clues. Yet, he recommends further exploration of the integration of ascent traditions within other literary genres from Byzantine Palestine, especially in the orbit of the synagogue.

In “The Emperor’s Many Bodies: The Demise of Emperor Lupinus Revisited,” Alexei Sivertsev subjects the concluding sections of the “martyr narrative” found in Hekhalot Rabbati to renewed analysis. He finds significant affinities between this otherwise unparalleled account of the dethronement of the Roman Emperor Lupinus and his substitution by a rabbinic martyr and the story in the Palestinian Talmud of King Solomon’s replacement by an angelic double. Building on the seminal work of Ernst Kantorowicz, Sivertsev argues that these narratives reflect Jewish knowledge of imperial panegyric with its exaltation of the Roman Emperor as a twinned being who possesses both an earthly and a heavenly body. Yet even Byzantine-Christian writers could invert this exalted image of the Emperor, subjecting him to withering criticism by depicting his “spiritual” double as demonic rather than divine. Sivertsev thus argues that the martyrological section of Hekhalot Rabbati gives expression to the self-empowering rhetoric of a particular Jewish subgroup, while also stressing that this triumphant appropriation of imperial ideology was not unique to an isolated Jewish counter-culture. The Jewish creators of this narrative were aware of and participated in a wider Byzantine discourse, which encompassed both imperial and anti-imperial voices.

Klaus Herrmann’s “Jewish Mysticism in Byzantium: The Transformation of Merkavah Mysticism in 3 Enoch” likewise explores the Byzantine context of certain Hekhalot compositions or literary strata. Herrmann evaluates earlier scholarship on 3 Enoch, starting from Scholem’s dating of the text to the fifth or sixth century despite his staunch “anti-Byzantine” position. Within the final redaction of 3 Enoch, Herrmann examines the re-orientation of Merkavah mysticism to an apocalyptic-eschatological worldview, its consistent anti-magical tendency, and the deification of Enoch. He concludes that these distinctive themes powerfully echo the iconographically dense world of Christian Byzantium. He also finds that 3 Enoch reveals a much stronger affinity to the rabbinic worldview and terminology than earlier Merkavah traditions. He suggests that this affinity is a result of a process of transformation within Jewish mysticism that occurred in the Byzantine sphere from the sixth century up to the period of iconoclasm.

David M. Grossberg’s study returns us to the Babylonian context, in particular the world that produced the Babylonian Talmud. In “Between 3 Enoch and Bavli *Hagigah*: Heresiology and Orthopraxy in the Ascent of Elisha ben Abuyah,” Grossberg considers the relationship between the Hekhalot corpus and classical rabbinic literature by applying redaction criticism to parallel narratives in texts

representing each corpus. Despite the obvious surface similarities between the accounts of the meeting between Elisha ben Abuyah and Metatron found in 3 Enoch and in Bavli *Hagigah*, he argues that the differences in their arrangement and phrasing reflect fundamentally distinct religious orientations, which he characterizes as the distinction between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Grossberg suggests that 3 Enoch's concern to police proper belief (orthodoxy) may represent a response to the vibrant Christological discourse in circulation in the authors' wider cultural milieu. By reading these two narratives through the distinction between orthopraxy and orthodoxy, Grossberg highlights the potential tension between an emphasis on belief and an emphasis on practice in late ancient Judaism, while also demonstrating that both could be constitutive elements of Jewish religious self-conception.

In "Hekhalot Literature, the Babylonian Academies and the *tanna'im*," Moulie Vidas likewise contributes to scholarly assessment of the historical and social contexts in which Hekhalot literature took shape as well as of the relationship of this literature to rabbinic forms of Judaism. Vidas presents the Sar ha-Torah (or "Prince of the Torah") narrative found in the Hekhalot corpus as a vision of the place of Torah in Jewish culture that was at odds with the ethos of Torah study articulated in the Bavli. While the Bavli valorizes dialectical debate and denigrates the retention of Torah knowledge through recitation, the Sar ha-Torah narrative celebrates the role of the *tanna'im* (the repeaters) and presents the ritual technology through which they sought to enhance their powers of memory. Vidas suggests that some Hekhalot texts offer a rare opportunity to hear the opposition to the voice of the Bavli, by highlighting the particularity of the Talmud's position on the ideal way to engage Jewish tradition. For Vidas, it is the recognition of this diversity that allows us to locate these Hekhalot traditions close to the heart of the rabbinic enterprise, while seeing in them an opposition to its increasingly hegemonic claims to authority.

The second section of the volume, *The Transmission and Reception of Hekhalot Literature: Toward the Middle Ages*, contains three studies that trace the multiple trajectories through which Hekhalot literature reached medieval Jewish communities in the Mediterranean and Europe as well as the impact of these sources on the wider Jewish literary culture. All three papers stress that scholars have available to them a range of evidence from the early medieval period that predates the European manuscript tradition through which Hekhalot literature is primarily transmitted. Thus, we can observe significant moments in the formation and transformation of Hekhalot traditions from late antiquity not only in materials from the Cairo Genizah, but also in the increasing use of Hekhalot literature in the liturgical poetry produced in Italy and Northern Europe from the ninth to twelfth centuries.

Building on his foundational research into the Hekhalot materials from the Cairo Genizah, Peter Schäfer draws together in "The Hekhalot Genizah" his

observations regarding the structural differences between the micro- and macroforms in the Genizah materials and the European manuscripts. Focusing on those fragments that run parallel to macroforms published in the *Synopse*, Schäfer finds that the majority of Hekhalot Genizah fragments point to an early stage in the formation of Hekhalot literature, one that stands in sharp contrast to the relatively late, unifying efforts of the primarily Ashkenazi editors. The Genizah thus provides a glimpse at a more variegated and less homogeneous textual tradition whose original and creative activity is at times more magical and less ascent-oriented than the European manuscripts. The variant readings also provide a view of the route that the manuscript tradition followed from the Orient through Byzantium and (Southern) Italy to Ashkenaz. Next steps for future research include a comprehensive catalog of all available Genizah fragments, examination of the content of Hekhalot fragments not covered by macroforms published in the *Synopse*, more thorough evaluation of the date and provenance of all relevant Genizah documents, and expert analysis of the language of the Genizah fragments.

Schäfer's analysis agrees to a considerable degree with Gideon Bohak's "Observations on the Transmission of Hekhalot Literature in the Cairo Genizah." In this study, Bohak analyzes three aspects of the Hekhalot Genizah fragments. First, he explores the textual and redactional relationship between the Genizah texts and similar or comparable material in the European manuscript tradition. Closely analyzing a sample fragment, he shows that this text presents three different understandings of its content and thus reflects three distinct historical moments in the transmission of Hekhalot literature. Second, Bohak demonstrates the relative popularity of different Hekhalot texts in the Cairo Genizah, highlighting the surprising frequency of fragments of *Tefillat Rav Hammuna Sava*, which is not included in Schäfer's *Synopse* and is thus too often treated as secondary to the main body of Hekhalot literature. Third, he provides several examples of personalized Hekhalot texts from the Genizah, which are to be distinguished from personalized magical texts due to the insertion of a single name without a matronymic or patronymic. These points are just a hint at the potential deductions one may make from the differences in usage and redactional form between the Hekhalot Genizah fragments and the European manuscripts.

In "A Prolegomenon to the Study of Hekhalot Traditions in European Piyyut," Ophir Münz-Manor moves us back to world of liturgical poetry, though at a later moment in its history. Since many European piyyutim include extensive angelological sections that use vocabulary, terminology, and motifs reminiscent of Hekhalot literature, Ophir Münz-Manor samples such piyyutim to identify their Hekhalot connections and consider their contributions to the investigation of the reception and transmission of Hekhalot traditions in the Middle Ages. Münz-Manor distinguishes between the angelological materials in piyyutim from late antique Palestine and those from medieval Europe, arguing that it is

only in the later period and in Europe that we find a substantial number of poems that reveal close affinities to Hekhalot literature. In many cases, the manuscript witnesses for these European piyyutim predate the European Hekhalot manuscripts, filling in important lacunae in our knowledge of the transmission of mystical traditions to medieval Europe. Münz-Manor thus calls for a thorough examination of the corpus of Hebrew liturgical poetry from medieval Europe to determine its literary and conceptual connections to Hekhalot literature, a project that is certain to have important implications for the history of both corpora and for medieval Jewish literature more broadly.

The third section of this volume, *Early Jewish Mysticism in Comparative Perspective: Themes and Patterns*, presents a series of five papers that explore diverse aspects of Hekhalot literature – and do so using a range of disciplinary perspectives. Methodological tools drawn from ritual studies, gender studies, and comparative religion sit side-by-side with tradition history, intellectual history, and history of science. What holds these papers together is their commitment to placing Hekhalot literature within a wider literary or discursive context and judiciously assessing the patterns of both similarity and difference that emerge from this comparative work.

In “Major Trends in Rabbinic Cosmology,” Reimund Leicht contributes to the growing scholarly interest in rabbinic cosmology, which has underlined both the diversity and the historical development of Jewish cosmological models and stressed the need for more precise methodological and conceptual tools. For Leicht, the Mishnah and Tosefta preserve evidence for discussions about *ma'aseh bereshit* as a kind of speculative exegesis of Genesis 1. On the other hand, the Talmud Yerushalmi and *Genesis Rabbah* reveal traces of cosmological thinking that never totally severs its connection with exegesis, instead supplementing it with a new form of discourse based upon analogy and rational argumentation. While these Palestinian rabbinic works are reminiscent of Greek models rather than Second Temple apocalyptic, the Babylonian Talmud ignores these innovative trends and restores a cosmological model that revives traditional motifs from much earlier periods in a dogmatically presented worldview. The cosmological tracts of the Geonic period thus inherit a diversity of approaches and in some respects perpetuate it. Leicht concludes that cosmological thinking plays only a marginal role in classical Hekhalot literature, as it is primarily interested in God as heavenly king and his angelic entourage rather than in the world's physical structure.

Rebecca Lesses' “Women and Gender in the Hekhalot Literature” takes up the important question of whether there were any female mystics in the world of Hekhalot literature and, if not, why only men could engage in the ritual practices it advocates. She pays particular attention to the stringent requirements for menstrual and sexual purity found in Hekhalot literature that prohibited the male practitioner from coming into contact with women during the process of

ritual preparation for adjuration or ascent. Using gender as a category of analysis, Lesses investigates the mechanisms of exclusion within the Hekhalot texts. She demonstrates that, because women are primarily treated by the creators of this literature as a source of impurity, not only are they themselves excluded from engaging in Hekhalot rituals, but are represented as a threat to the purity of the male practitioner. There are only a couple of exceptions to this general principle: a variant in the text of Hekhalot Zutarti found only in the late and highly idiosyncratic New York manuscript does suggest that women might be able to engage in ascent practice, while the medieval *Midrash of Shemhazai and Azael* narrates the heavenly ascent of a woman. But Lesses concludes that the latter example is not in fact an accurate reflection of earlier Hekhalot rituals. At the same time, other forms of ancient Jewish literature do contain examples in which women receive revelations and participate in rituals akin to those recounted in Hekhalot literature. Surveying three early Greek Jewish texts (Philo's *On the Contemplative Life*, the *Testament of Job*, and *Joseph and Aseneth*), Lesses discovers an alternative model that conceptualizes how women might achieve purity and thus participate in visionary mysticism.

In "What is Below?' Mysteries of Leviathan in the Early Jewish Accounts and Mishnah *Hagigah* 2:1," Andrei A. Orlov explores the association between traditions concerning the divine chariot-throne (*merkavah*) in early Jewish and rabbinic sources and the depictions of the Leviathans from the underworld found in the Slavonic *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Orlov argues that speculations about the mysteries of the *merkavah* found in the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel the Tragedian, the Enochic *Book of Similitudes*, and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* represent the formative conceptual background for the subsequent formulations in Mishnah *Hagigah* and other rabbinic materials regarding the teaching of esoteric subjects. The affinities among these traditions suggest a possible visionary context for the discipline of *ma'aseh merkavah* regulated in the Mishnah, and might support the insights of previous scholars who have argued for continuity between early Jewish ascent and enthronement accounts and later rabbinic mystical speculation and practice.

In light of the potential classification of Hekhalot literature as ritual texts, Michael Meerson's "Rites of Passage in Magic and Mysticism" suggests that it might be productive to interpret them through the lens of Arnold van Gennep's theory of the tripartite structure of sacral initiation. The three stages of the ritual process – separation, transition, and incorporation – are first identified and analyzed within the context of Greek mystery cults, and then applied to the Hekhalot ascent account. Meerson assesses whether essential features of these Greek ritual practices are also present in the ascent account and, if so, whether the two sets of rituals convey the same meaning and serve the same function. He concludes that the Hekhalot ascent presents a different paradigm from that of the Greek rituals for divine communion. The main difference between the two is evident

in the transition phase, which for Hekhalot ascent is communion with angels as a reward for surviving annihilation of the mortal body, in contrast to alliance with the divine in the Greek rituals, which is accomplished through the process of death and rebirth. Based on this difference, Meerson suggests that the ascent narratives of Hekhalot literature may not refer to any actual ritual practice, but may instead convey an “imaginative performance,” one to be recited rather than enacted.

In the volume’s final paper, “Rethinking (Jewish-)Christian Evidence for Jewish Mysticism,” Annette Yoshiko Reed offers a broader interpretative context for assessing the relevance of Christian evidence to the history of Jewish mysticism, in contrast to those scholars who have focused narrowly on the question of continuity between Hekhalot literature and Second Temple Judaism. Reed begins by reflecting on the place of Christian evidence – especially the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* – in modern reconstructions of the origins and history of Jewish mysticism. The study of the *Homilies* presents a poignant example of what is lost when the literary and argumentative strands of sources are unraveled for the harvesting of parallels. Even if multiple ideas later important for Jewish mystical traditions might be found in these fourth-century Syrian writings, it is clearly not yet as components combined and configured into the characteristic patterns of thought and practice that could be classified as “Merkavah mysticism.” The uncertain contribution of “Jewish-Christian” sources to the late antique transmission and transformation of later Hekhalot traditions may at least serve as a heuristic “check” on sweeping theories based on distant parallels.

The volume comes to a close on a suitably cautionary note. But Reed’s study, like the others presented here, also opens up new avenues for studying Hekhalot literature, both on its own terms and, when productive, across the diverse sites of Jewish cultural production at which the scribes, scholars, and ritual experts behind these texts creatively engaged with religious, literary, intellectual, and ideological developments in the late antique and medieval world.