

# JEWISH MYSTICISM IN THE GEONIC PERIOD: THE PRAYER OF RAV HAMNUNA SAVA\*

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## *Introduction*

In the last 20 years not many other areas of Jewish studies have experienced the boom that early Jewish mysticism has. The interest in this field was in no small measure spurred on by the publication of the *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, edited by Peter Schäfer in 1981, which became the textual basis for all further scholarly works in the field.<sup>1</sup> Ever since, several monographs and numerous essays have been appearing on the subject every year—apparently this not very extensive body of writings continues to exert a quite strong fascination on scholars. Those who are active in this special field are always astonished to note that just when it seems that all the theses imaginable on the origins and social background of these writings have been discussed, a new explanation is offered. It is well-known that Gershom Scholem tried to place early Jewish mysticism, which found its literary voice in the Hekhalot writings, in the center of Rabbinic Judaism, whereby we should remember that he formulated his thesis in obvious opposition to 19th-century scholars of Judaism, from whom he wanted to disassociate himself.<sup>2</sup> As indicated by the title, *Jewish*

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<sup>1</sup> In collaboration with M. Schlüter und H.G. von Mutius, Tübingen 1981; the *Synopse* was followed by the edition of the *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1984), a concordance in two volumes (*Konkordanz zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, Tübingen 1986 und 1988) and four volumes of the German translation (*Übersetzung der Hekhalot Literatur*, Tübingen 1987–1994). I would like to thank Peter Schäfer, who gave me full access to the database of the Hekhalot project and the ongoing project to work out a comprehensive picture of the magical texts from the Cairo Genizah collection.

<sup>2</sup> See Scholem's pamphlet *מסורת המעשים על חכמת ישראל*, first published in *לוח* 7, ד'תר"ד, Tel Aviv 1944, pp. 94–112, and republished by A. Shapira in *דברים בנו*, vol. II,

*Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, which Scholem chose for his major contribution to this field, published in 1960,<sup>3</sup> it is evident that according to him the three mentioned areas have to be seen in a close relationship.<sup>4</sup>

Ephraim Urbach, renowned for his standard work on the intellectual world of the Rabbis *Haz"l—Emunot ve-Deot*, known in English as *The Sages. Their Concepts and Their Beliefs*,<sup>5</sup> published his criticism of Scholem's thesis in, of all places, the Jubilee volume honoring Scholem on the occasion of his 70th birthday in 1967.<sup>6</sup> Scholem knew very well how to appreciate this birthday present: at any rate in his personal copy of this Jubilee volume (now in the Scholem Library in Jerusalem) we find some interesting marginal notes on this criticism,<sup>7</sup> only one of which, unlike all his other corrections and notations, is not penned in Hebrew, namely the one commenting on the passages where Urbach analyses the famous story of "the four rabbis who entered the *pardes*" which is transmitted in the rabbinical (*Tosefta*, *Yerushalmi* and *Bavli*)<sup>8</sup> as well as in the mystical tradition (*Hekhalot Zūṭarti* and *Merkavah Rabbah*)<sup>9</sup> and therefore serves as a cornerstone of Scholem's interpretation of Talmudic lore in the light of the mystical one.<sup>10</sup> Scholem reasoned that the *pardes* story should

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Tel Aviv 1985, pp. 385–403. This pamphlet was recently translated into English by A. Shapira, *On the Possibility of Jewish Mysticism in Our Time & Other Essays*, Philadelphia 1997, and into German by P. Schäfer (in collaboration with G. Necker and U. Hirschfelder) under the title *Die Wissenschaft vom Judentum. Gershom Scholem Judaica 6*, Frankfurt a.M. 1999.

<sup>3</sup> A second revised edition was published in 1965.

<sup>4</sup> Especially the term "Jewish Gnosticism" was questioned again and again, but this is not the place to look more closely at the problem of Judaism and Gnosticism; on this subject see J. Dan's article "Jewish Gnosticism", first published in *JSQ* 2, 1995, pp. 309–328, and now republished in id., *Jewish Mysticism*, vol. I: Late Antiquity, Northvale NJ—London 1998, pp. 1–25.

<sup>5</sup> Jerusalem, 1969; the English translation by I. Abrahams is based on the second Hebrew edition and was published 1979 in Jerusalem.

<sup>6</sup> *המסורות על הורה הסוד בתקופת הגאונים*, in: *Studies in Mysticism and Religion presented to Gershom G. Scholem on his Seventieth Birthday*, Jerusalem 1967, pp. 1–28 (Hebrew section), here p. 14. See also J. Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, vol. I: Late Antiquity, Northvale NJ—London, 1998, p. XXVI.

<sup>7</sup> Scholem's marginal glosses could form the basis for several dissertations, with respect not only to scholarly questions but also to biographical-psychological ones.

<sup>8</sup> tHag 2,1 (fol. 77b); yHag 2,1 (fol. 77b); bHag 14–15b; cf. also ShirR on Song 1:4. On the whole subject see the analyses by Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*, New Haven 1983, pp. 86–92.

<sup>9</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, §§ 344f. (*Hekhalot Zūṭarti*) und §§671f. (*Merkavah Rabbah*).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. Dan, *Jewish Mysticism*, vol. I: Late Antiquity, Northvale NJ—London, 1998, p. XXIII.

be assigned to the mystical tradition particularly because of Aqiva's warning to his companions (recorded only in the Bavli) which, according to him, was a direct precursor of the ecstatic-visionary ascent tradition and, in fact, only made sense in the context of this tradition.

R. Aqiva said: When you come to the stones of pure marble say not "Water! Water!. For it is written: *None who speaks lies may endure before my eyes.*"<sup>11</sup>

When Urbach discusses this crucial phrase, he argues: "These words appear neither in the Tosefta nor in the Yerushalmi. This fact, plus the change brought about in the Bavli tradition through the handing down of the beginning of the baraita, resulting in the loss of the link between the visual and the factual half [German: *Bild und Sachhälfte*], are reason enough to doubt that this sentence is at all an integral part of the tradition of the four [rabbis]." Thus, in contrast to Scholem, Urbach emphasizes the disparity between the image conveyed by rabbinical sources and that found in Hekhalot literature. At this point Scholem could not help but express his astonishment in the margin of the text with the German exclamation "Oho!" As a matter of fact, we could say that to a certain extent Scholem's reaction seems to anticipate later studies on this question, which, however, only started after his death in 1982.

Urbach's argument was first supported by David Halperin in his form-critical study *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature*,<sup>12</sup> in which he argued that the rabbinical Merkavah texts show no evidence of ecstatic mysticism. Later on, in his 1988 monograph, *The Faces of the Chariot*,<sup>13</sup> he developed this argument into an antithesis, according to which the 'Am ha-'areš, the uneducated masses who opposed the Rabbis, were the real-life adherents of Hekhalot literature. This literature, Halperin wrote, was really nothing but the "revolutionary manifesto of the Jewish masses," which reflected their struggle against the rabbinical elite as well as for recognition in Jewish society in antiquity—"an unequal and frustrating struggle which they waged with magic as their chief weapon."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ps 101:7.

<sup>12</sup> New Haven 1983.

<sup>13</sup> *The Faces of the Chariot. Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision*, Tübingen 1988.

<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that this class struggle thesis was formulated just one year before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Peter Schäfer also emphasizes the anti-rabbinical tendency as well as the magical radicalness of these writings, which, however, are to be seen as the expression of the opposition of elitist circles and in no way as the protest of the *‘Am ha-‘arez*. In his study, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, first published in German under the title *Der Verborgene und Offenbare Gott* (Tübingen 1991), he writes:

The circles that formed this literature were engaged in nothing less than a radical transformation of the conception of the so-called classical or normative Judaism, which for centuries was determined by the rabbis; and this transformation, which in reality equals a revolution, is inadequately understood by the term *mysticism*.<sup>15</sup>

The rebellious character of the Hekhalot literature is also recognized by Joseph Dan, who sees the evidence for this, however, not so much in the magic components of the texts as in a variety of elements, in particular their special and unique terminology,<sup>16</sup> which hint at the existence of a well-defined, distinctive group of spiritualists who somehow separated from the mainstream body of rabbinic culture and created its own matrix of activities, literary creativity, terminology and spiritual endeavors.<sup>17</sup>

Extremist positions virtually provoke a mediatory position, a synthesis. This is what Michael Swartz believed he had found, as he formulated it in his *Scholastic Magic. Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton NY 1996); whereby he concentrates on the so-called *Šar Torah* tradition:

The *Šar Torah* literature thus cannot be characterized either as the product of the ignorant masses or of the scholarly class. For Jewish society in late antiquity was not composed merely of an elite and a lower class of *am ha-‘arez*; we have seen that there were synagogue functionaries, scribes, non-intellectual professional reciters (*tannaim*), and a complex network of professions and social groups. These groups were literate and acquainted with much rabbinic law and lore; and yet they still stood outside the central circles of the rabbinic academy and may at times have been in tension with them.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Quoted according to the English translation by Aubrey Pomerance, Albany, 1992, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. also A. Kuyt, *The ‘Descent’ to the Chariot*, Tübingen 1995.

<sup>17</sup> *Jewish Mysticism*, vol. V, p. XIX.

<sup>18</sup> Here p. 220. One almost feels tempted to ask—with tongue in cheek—whether the American middle-class as the actual upholders of their society served as the model for Swartz’s thesis.

Could the number of possible and impossible theses now be exhausted? In recent years Rachel Elior has tried to locate Merkavah mysticism within the priestly tradition, thereby interpreting the Hekhalot texts above all, to put it briefly, as an answer to the destruction of the Second Temple. The thesis about the origin of mystical movements as a response to crises and catastrophes is, of course, not new, but even in the field of mystical studies the “revolutionary phase” (as expressed by Halperin and Schäfer) seems to have given way to a more conservative one.<sup>19</sup>

*The Prayer of Hamnuna Sava, the magical texts of the  
Cairo Genizah and mysticism in the Geonic period*

It is thus all the more astonishing that despite the great interest in this literature there are still several smaller works associated with it which have been completely neglected by scholars up to now. As it happens, the previously cited study by Michael Swartz is devoted to precisely the theme which is also the main motif of *Tefillat Hamnuna Sava* (henceforth: THS), the prayer by Hamnuna the Elder: namely, attaining a better understanding of the Torah with the aid of magic practices.<sup>20</sup>

There are various reasons for the complete neglect of the THS in research on early Jewish mysticism. The first and main reason: The prayer is still in manuscript form and was not edited in the *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, which forms the textual basis for scholarship in this field, because none of the manuscripts selected for the *Synopse* contains this writing.<sup>21</sup> For those scholars familiar with manuscripts

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<sup>19</sup> Cf., e.g., her article “From Earthly Temple to Heavenly Shrines. Prayer and Sacred Song in the Hekhalot Literature and Its Relation to Temple Traditions”, *JSQ* 4, 1997, p. 223: “. . . it was in reaction to the destruction of the earthly Temple that the creators of the tradition of the ‘descent to the Merkavah’ and the ‘ascent to the Hekhalot’ conceived the heavenly shrines, as depicted in the Hekhalot literature, in a degree of detail and variety unparalleled in any Jewish literary work of Late Antiquity. These constructs of the imagination arose as a spiritual response to the sense of loss, desolation and deprivation caused by the horrors of reality”.

<sup>20</sup> Parallel to M. Swartz’s *Scholastic Magic* another study by Rebecca Lesses, the doctoral thesis which she submitted to Brandeis University in 1995, *Ritual Practices to Gain Power*, was written. Despite the different approaches both scholars agree on one point: not to include the THS in their work.

<sup>21</sup> I would like to note that Professor Schäfer had already collected MSS containing

it is not difficult to find *THS*. At present, at least five Genizah fragments of the prayer are known to me, the oldest dating back to the 11th century, and it is extant in more than two dozen medieval manuscripts. Therefore the prayer is better documented in manuscripts than other well-known Hekhalot writings such as *Hekhalot Zutarti*, *Ma'aseh Merkavah* or *Merkavah Rabbah*.<sup>22</sup> The manuscript tradition reveals a vivid picture of the transmission of the *THS*, which belongs both to the Oriental tradition of esoteric writings as well as to the European mystical lore of the *haside ashkenaz* and Kabbalistic circles.<sup>23</sup> But even if the *THS* had already been published, it would hardly have played a major role in the ongoing debate on early Jewish mysticism for this—as we have seen—is still focused on the question of the origin and beginnings of Merkavah mysticism, trying to establish an overall picture of this phenomenon.

We only need to take a brief look at the *THS* text to realize that the prayer was clearly composed at a different time than most of the texts contained in the *Synopse* and can thus be dated in that phase of Jewish mysticism which has yet to be duly treated by researchers in mysticism—the Geonic period. A reader of Scholem's epochal work *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*<sup>24</sup> will register with astonishment that there was apparently no mysticism in that period—at least not in the *Major Trends*. Scholem jumps from the chapter on the beginnings of Jewish mysticism in the rabbinic period directly to the chapter depicting the world of the *haside askenaz* (“the pious of Germany”), who flourished in the 11th–12th centuries, as if there had been a gap of 500 years when mysticism ceased to exist.<sup>25</sup> Not until 1971 does Scholem's entry on the “Kabbalah” in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* provide a brief historical overview of this time, under the subheading “Mysticism in the Geonic period”, albeit an extremely

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this prayer of incantation, but then, because of my interest in it, refrained from doing redactional work on the *THS* within the framework of the Berlin project on early Jewish mysticism and magic.

<sup>22</sup> On the manuscript tradition see P. Schäfer, *Handschriften zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, in: id., *Hekhalot-Studien*, Tübingen 1988, pp. 154–233, as well as the introductions to the German translation of the Hekhalot corpus *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur*, vol. I–IV, ed. by P. Schäfer in collaboration with H.-J. Becker, K. Herrmann, L. Renner, C. Rohrbacher-Stickers and St. Siebers, Tübingen 1987–1994.

<sup>23</sup> The textual history will be discussed in detail in the forthcoming edition of *THS*, which I am going to prepare for publication.

<sup>24</sup> First published New York 1941.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. Dan, *Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History*, New York 1987, p. 77.

brief item to fit the encyclopaedia space requirements.<sup>26</sup> In Scholem's other works we find merely occasional references to the mysticism of the Geonic era, above all in his pioneering work, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala*, which mentions *THS*, but only marginally.<sup>27</sup>

Recently, in connection with the research on the magic bowls and especially with the systematic and comprehensive analysis of the text fragments on magic in the Cairo Genizah collection, a project directed by Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked at the Berlin Institut für Judaistik, a special interest in this epoch has arisen. Up to now three volumes have been published. Within the framework of these investigations new, more in-depth questions are being posed, relating, in particular, to the links between Hekhalot literature, magic and liturgy. Most of all, the tradition of recording statutory prayers in magical-mystical texts raises questions directly analogous to those often presented and discussed in the controversy about the links between rabbinic texts and Hekhalot literature.

Within the magical material of the Cairo Genizah Peter Schäfer found several fragments of the Eighteen Benedictions in the Palestinian version which forms the basis for the magical ritual. In his analysis of these prayers he has questioned the historical setting of these traditions as follows:

Hence, we may conclude again that the circles behind our prayer are close to those who composed the Hekhalot literature. Whether this implies that they actually belonged to the initiates of Merkavah mysticism, is a different question. The latter probably is the easiest way out: one immediately thinks of the *ḥaside ashkenaz*, the German Pietists, who were very convinced of their own purity and piety.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to compare this article with the preceding version which Scholem wrote for the German *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, published in 1932, col. 630–732. It is obvious that Scholem at that time had not yet worked out a more detailed time concept for dating early Jewish mystical writings.

<sup>27</sup> 1962, p. 279; cf. also the revised English edition *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R.J.Z. Werblowsky, Princeton 1988. It only states that this prayer contains a secret name that achieved a certain significance in the so-called early kabbalistic *Iyyun Circle*. Another reference is to be found in Scholem's *Das Buch Bahir. Ein Schriftdenkmal aus der Frühzeit der Kabbala* . . . , Darmstadt 1980, p. 68, where he stated: "Aber auch manche andere Autoritäten . . . , die man der Erfindungsgabe der Kabbalistengeneration von 1300 aufs Schuldkonto gesetzt hat, lassen sich schon als Autoritäten in der gaonäischen Mystik nachweisen, wie z.B. Rab Hamuma der Alte, von dem schon Elasar von Worms (in Cod. Man. 81f. 190b) ein Zaubergebet überliefert".

<sup>28</sup> "Jewish Liturgy and Magic", in H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger und P. Schäfer (eds.), *Geschichte—Tradition—Reflexion. Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*, vol. I: *Judentum*, Tübingen 1996, pp. 541–556, here p. 549.

Evident in those magic prayers is their closeness to the traditions of the medieval *ḥaside ashkenaz*, a feature which might even lead one to search for their authors in the very circles of the *ḥaside ashkenaz*—something impossible, however, for purely chronological reasons, as Peter Schäfer himself has shown: the oldest Genizah fragments date back already to the 10th and 11th centuries. This proximity indicates the problem area of the possible links between Hekhalot mysticism, magic and prayer, which is especially relevant when we look at the further development of mysticism in mediaeval Europe.<sup>29</sup>

In his article “‘Peace Be Upon You, Exalted Angels’: on Hekhalot, Liturgy and Incantation Bowls,” published in 1995 in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, Professor Shaked made the following observation about the relationship between the magic texts, Hekhalot literature and Jewish liturgy on the basis of his research on the bowls:

There is a considerable affinity between the Jewish liturgical tradition, which was in the final stages of redaction in the period just before the advent of Islam, and the magic texts. At the same time there was also considerable affinity between those liturgical texts and the Hekhalot literature.<sup>30</sup>

Within the framework of the Berlin project *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza* more textual evidence was published which confirms the above-mentioned links between the different streams of tradition. In the introduction to the second volume the attempt was made to define the *status questionis* of the relationship between liturgy, mysticism and magic by pointing out that

the phenomenon of the magical use of liturgical texts in connection with *nomina barbara* can be grasped only sketchily as yet. A comparison with the use of *nomina barbara* in the incantations of the *śar ha-panim* or in

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Schäfer's remarks on the liturgical tradition within the Hekhalot literature, whose mystical character described by Schäfer with the term *unio liturgica*; id., *The Hidden and Manifest God*, New York 1994, p. 163.

<sup>30</sup> See p. 204; cf. also the following remark on this subject in the collection of amulets and incantation bowls which Shaked published together with Joseph Naveh in *Magic Spells and Formulae. Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem 1993: “There can be little doubt that there were certain connections between the practice of magic in Palestine in the period of Late Antiquity and the literature of the *Hekhalot*, although the details of these connections have not yet been precisely determined . . . The *Hekhalot* literature constituted a new trend which may have exercised influence over some writers of amulets, while traditional formulae went on being used without showing any influence on the *Hekhalot* school”.

the prayers of the Hekhalot literature will doubtless play a central role here. In any case a more detailed analysis of this phenomenon will be able to help to clarify an important aspect of the relationship between magic and liturgy.<sup>31</sup>

In my article I would like to stress that there could be no better text illustrating the question of the relationship between Hekhalot, liturgy and magic texts than the *THS*. What has been noted as a truly striking phenomenon—the merging of different worlds and traditions in the mystical and magical texts as well as the inscribed bowls—seems, indeed, to have been the programme of the author of this prayer.

### *Analysis of the Main Features of THS*

#### *The Preparation of the Ritual*

*THS* provides a complete ritual, helping the adept to gain a better understanding of the Torah. Like the procedures described in other *Šar Torah* texts, the one here has two main stages. The ritual preparation (fasting, special diet, and some other elements) and the incantation prayer itself.

Our first question is: Why was this prayer ascribed to Rav Hamnuna Sava? Almost all the other Hekhalot texts are attributed to Rabbi Aqiva, Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Nehunyah. As Shaked has pointed out: “these texts quote Palestinian sages of the Mishnaic period, but never any Babylonian figures.”<sup>32</sup> Here for the first time a Babylonian *amora* of the third and fourth century is mentioned. But why Hamnuna Sava? We could even ask more generally: Why was this prayer written at all? Despite the fact that there are always good reasons to compose a prayer, in this case the work seems to have been a waste of time. Dozen of similar traditions are scattered all over the Hekhalot literature and it is obvious that the author of the *THS* was familiar with at least some of them. From a historical point of view, the choice of a Babylonian *amora* could indicate the transmission of some

<sup>31</sup> See p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> “‘Peace be Upon You, Exalted Angels’: on Hekhalot, Liturgy and Incantation Bowls,” JSQ 2, 1995, p. 205.

Hekhalot material from Palestine to Babylonia, a process which is sporadically reflected in the Hekhalot literature itself.<sup>33</sup> With regard to the pseudepigraphic character of Hekhalot literature Michael Swartz has pointed out: "There is little in rabbinic literature to support the depiction of Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Nehuniah as masters of magical secrets."<sup>34</sup> Only in the case of R. Aqiva do we have to take into account that he is mentioned in the story of the four rabbis who entered *pardes*, which served, as we have seen, scholars like Scholem as a link between rabbinic literature and the Hekhalot tradition. A close inspection of all the rituals within the framework of Merkavah mysticism shows that R. Aqiva and R. Yishmael are linked to many different and sometimes contradictory traditions which are the basis of at least some of the divergent positions in modern scholarship. Of course, the author of *THS* was not a modern scholar, but he might very well have had a similar impression of the complexity and often contradictory nature of the various traditions. The name Hamnuna therefore does not only reflect the transmission of some Hekhalot traditions from Palestine to Babylonia but could also indicate a conscious distance to those traditions on which *THS* is based. If the prayer represents, as I have stated above, a programme intended to balance Hekhalot-, liturgical, magical and, as we will see, some haggadic traditions, there could be hardly a better choice to represent this programme than Hamnuna Sava. Traditional descriptions of the rabbis and their world as well as modern encyclopedia articles single out at least two major features of his personality: that he was both a master of Torah as well as a liturgical scholar.

Among the many traditions ascribed to him in the rabbinic literature we find the following in Talmud Bavli Shabbat 10a:

Rava saw R. Hamnuna prolonging his prayers. He said, They forsake eternal life and occupy themselves with temporal life. But he [R. Hamnuna] held, the times for prayer and [study the] Torah are distinct from each other.

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<sup>33</sup> Compare the phrase "The wise from the house of the master in Babylonia" in T.-S. K 21.95.C, fol. 2a, line 13ff. = *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, p. 103, and the difficult section 305 in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, in which the use of the *Šar Torah* ritual practiced in Babylonia is to be legitimized by the authority of the Palestinian court of law; see Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, p. 160.

<sup>34</sup> *Scholastic Magic*, p. 217.

He strongly advocated the study of the Law, which, according to him, should precede everything, even good deeds. In Bavli Shabbat 119b it is stated that God decreed the destruction of Jerusalem solely because children were not trained in the Torah, as it is written: *I will pour it out upon the children in the streets* (Jer 6:11), which is a reference meaning that the children are in the streets and not in the schools.<sup>35</sup> The destruction of the Temple and the study of Torah are linked in the prayer as well.

Hamnuna also appeared in the Talmudic tradition as a considerable liturgical scholar. Several benedictions are ascribed to him: five to be spoken at the sight of different Babylonian ruins (Ber 57b), two on seeing large ruins (Ber 57b), two on seeing large armies (Ber 58a), and one before engaging in the study of the Torah (Ber 11b); the last one I would like to quote here:

R. Hamnuna said: [Blessed art Thou . . .] who has chosen us from all the nations and given us Thy Torah, Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who has given the Torah. R. Hamnuna said: This is the best of all blessings.

This blessing has been universally adopted, and is still recited at the public readings of the Torah.<sup>36</sup> Various other prayers are ascribed to him (Ber 17a).

But Hamnuna as a magician who tried to achieve a better understanding of the Torah with the aid of magical practices? There are other rabbis who could fill the bill more easily. And yet: In the incantation prayer itself we find some links to those liturgical traditions which are connected to him in the Talmudic lore. In Ber 57b we find the following tradition:

Rav Hamnuna preached: A person seeing wicked Babylon must pronounce five blessings. Seeing Babylon, he says, Blessed be He who destroyed wicked Babylon . . . On seeing the place from which dust being carried away [the ruins were quarried for building materials] he says, Blessed be He who says and does, who decrees and carries out . . .<sup>37</sup>

The phrase "He who says and does, who decrees and carries out" (אומר ועושה נזיר ומקיים) in the last Berakha, which found its way into

<sup>35</sup> Cf. also b Qid 40b: "Man is judged first in respect of Torah alone".

<sup>36</sup> ברוך אתה יי' אלהינו מלך העולם אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים ונתן לנו את תורתו ברוך אתה יי'נותן התורה.

<sup>37</sup> דרש רב המנונא הרוואה בבל הרשעה צריך לברך חמש ברכות, ראה בבל אומר ברוך ששהחריב בבל הרשעה ראה מקום שנוטלין ממנו עפר אומר ברוך אומר ועושה נזיר ומקיים.

the morning prayer, is also cited in the Berakha introducing Hamnuna Sava's incantation prayer. Moreover, the two concepts, *נוֹר* and *מְקִיִּים*, are found typically in magical procedures and turn up several times in *THS* incantations along with the terms *אֲנִי מַשְׁבִּיעַ* ("I adjure") and *אֶקְרָא* ("I call"). One might even be tempted to consider it a pure coincidence, the appearance in the introductory Berakha of this prayer wording which the Talmud Bavli attributes to Hamnuna, if the same formulation did not crop up at the end of the prayer. The prayer closes with a hymn of praise, derived from *Hekhalot Rabbati*, which concludes as follows: "Praise be to Thee, Lord, Wise of the secrets and Lord of the Hidden," which belongs to a larger quotation from a Hekhalot text. In Margarete Schlüter's article, "Untersuchungen zur Form und Funktion der Berakha in der Hekhalot-Literatur" ["Investigations on the Form and Function of the Berakha in Hekhalot Literature"], which appeared in the *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* in 1985,<sup>38</sup> the author emphasizes that "the Sage of the secrets" really does not fit in with the preceding hymn of praise. She writes:

The Berakha has no real connection with the hymn, making no mention of secrets. The theme is not God as "the Sage of the secrets," but as Lord of the evidence of power . . . it thus turns out that the Berakha's role in the hymn celebrating God as Lord of the accoutrements of power appears out of place.

In *THS* the effect is entirely different. Here the formula corresponds with the Torah magic of the prayer and establishes a direct link to Hamnuna Sava. Exactly the same statement attributed to Hamnuna Sava in the prayer is also found in Talmud *Bavli Berakhot* 58a:

Further Rav Hamnuna said: He who sees the hosts of Israel, speaks: Praise be to the wise of the secrets.

In his explanation on this text, Rashi pointed out that the term "Wise of the secrets" means nothing but the knowledge of the thoughts of the human heart. The *THS* author was far from espousing such an antimagical interpretation. On the contrary: this phrase provided a good opportunity for him to connect the Torah teacher and liturgical scholar of the rabbinic tradition Hamnuna with the magical prayer and Torah ritual.

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<sup>38</sup> Vol. 13, 1985, pp. 83–146, here p. 117.

The prayer is revealed by the angel Sagnasgi'el: "This prayer presented to me Sagnasgi'el, the prince of the countenance, and he said . . ."<sup>39</sup> This angelic name is well known from Hekhalot literature, magical texts and bowls. On a bowl published by James A. Montgomery in 1913, we find the name within the following phrase:

Blessed be you, YHWH, they hurry (to carry out) his word. By the name Yofi'el—your name, Yehoel (this is what) you are called, šsngy'l (Sasangi'el which is obviously a variant of Sagnasgi'el),<sup>40</sup> YHWH, and all the rest of their names: ['r]ms' (= Hermes), Meṭaṭron, Yah . . .<sup>41</sup>

On this bowl as well as in Hekhalot literature the angel is identified with Meṭaṭron. In a Hekhalot text where Meṭaṭron acts as the leader of the heavenly liturgy we find the following tradition: "This is the prince who is called Yofi'el, Yahdari'el. In the holy camps he is called Meṭaṭron, he is called Sasangi'el."<sup>42</sup> The tradition of the 70 names of Meṭaṭron, which is handed down to us in 3 Enoch as well as in the *Alphabet of Rabbi Aqiva*, ends with this very same angelic name to which the following explanation is added:

. . . faithful youth, lesser YHWH (יהוה קטן), named after his Lord, as it is written: *My name is in him*,<sup>43</sup> Rakhrakhi'el, Na'ami'el, Sagnasgi'el. Why is his name called Sagnasgi'el? Because all the storehouses of wisdom were committed into his hand. All of them were opened for Moses on Sinai, until he had learned, in the forty days that he stood on the mount, Torah in the seventy aspects of the seventy languages; the Prophets in the seventy aspects of the seventy languages; the Writings in the seventy aspects of the seventy languages; halakhot in the seventy aspects of the seventy languages; haggadot in the seventy aspects of the seventy languages; traditions in the seventy aspects of the seventy languages; tosafot in the seventy aspects of the seventy languages. As soon as they were completed, at the end of forty days, he forgot them all in a moment—until the Holy One, blessed be he, summoned Yefefiah, the Prince of Torah, and he gave them as a gift to Moses, as it is written: *The Lord gave them to me*.<sup>44</sup> After that he remembered the Torah.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>39</sup> חפלה זו מסר לי סנסניאל שר הפנים ואמר.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, p. 425 and the endnote ff on p. 544.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted according to Shaked "Peace be Upon You, Exalted Angels": on Hekhalot, Liturgy and Incantation Bowls", *JSQ* 2, 1995, p. 201.

<sup>42</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 397.

<sup>43</sup> Exod 23:21.

<sup>44</sup> Deut 10:4.

<sup>45</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 76f.

In some manuscripts of the *THS* this tradition was quoted at the beginning of the prayer. The later redactor did nothing but strengthen the original intention of the *THS* author. He chose this angelic figure because it best fits the central theme of the prayer: the Torah ritual.

Perhaps we might even go one step further by asking why Sagnasgi'el and not Metatron is mentioned or why they are not linked with one another, as in the above-mentioned quotation from the bowl and in the Hekhalot tradition—this question will be treated below.

The preparatory procedure revealed by Sagnasgi'el runs as follows:

Everyone who knows this secret by himself<sup>46</sup> should perform it in holiness, in purity and in cleanliness. He should sit in cleanliness three days long and wash himself every day with living water. He should neither eat meat nor drink wine, but he should take only pure bread with water. In the 3rd night he should rise from his bed at the time of the morning watch after the crowing of the cock. He should wash his face, his hands, his feet and he should don clean clothes. He should anoint his whole body from head to foot in a clean place with olive oil (in the European textual tradition olive oil was replaced in part by attar of roses). Then he should sit and speak: I will bless the Lord at all time—the whole psalm (Ps 34) three times. Afterwards, three times [the passage] from “happy” until “bless his holy name” (the reference here is to the so-called *Ashre*-prayer consisting of Ps 145 surrounded by the last verse of the preceding psalm, with Ps 84:5 added at the end). Afterwards, he should stand on his feet in a pure place and pray this prayer with the correct [prayer] intention between himself and his Creator. And so the angel swears to him that he cannot flee from there before his desire and his request have been fulfilled.<sup>47</sup>

The main features of this procedure (fasting, special diet, clothing) are quite common in the *Šar Torah* tradition and have many parallels in magical texts. Without going into details I would like to mention only those elements which are not typical for the other *Šar Torah* rituals. Of the liturgical terms: אשמורת (“vigil”), קריית נבר (“the crowing of the cock”) and כוונה (“intention/devotion”), only the first one

<sup>46</sup> This phrase reminds us of Mishna Hag 2,1.

<sup>47</sup> MS London 737, fol. 298b/23–299a/11:

היודע בעצמו שיעשה דבר זה בקדושה (299א) ובטהרה ובנקיות ישב ג' ימים בנקיות וירחץ בכל יום במים חיים ולא יאכל בשר ולא ישתה יין אלא פת נקיה במים. ובלילה ג' יעמוד ממשתו באשמורת הבקר לאחר קריאת הנבר וירחץ פניו ידיו ורגליו וילבש בגדים וקיום. ואחר כך יסוך בשמן זית כל גופו מראשו עד רגליו במקום נקי וישב ויאמר אברכה את יי' בכל עת כל המימור ג' פעמים. ואחר כך ינמור תהלה לדוד ג' פעמים מן אשרי עד שם קדשו לעולם ועד ואחר כך יעמוד על רגליו במקום נקי ויתפלל תפלה זו בכוונה בינו לבין קונו. וכך נשבע לו המלאך שאינו זו משם עד שעושיין הפצו ושאלו.

occurs in another Hekhalot work known as *Merkavah Rabbah*; this text is very close to *THS* in the way it connects numerous elements from the broader world of magic and many liturgical traditions with the adoration of the *Śar Torah*. It runs as follows:

R. Yishma'el said: Every scholar who knows this great mystery should lie in his bed in the evening and recite the *Shema'*, and [likewise] in the morning. At the first vigil (שמונה עשרה) and at the ninth hour of each day and in the night, he should get out of his bed, wash his hands and feet two times with water and anoint himself with oil, put on *tefillin* and pray standing before his bed. When he has ended his prayer, he should sit again on his bed and say, interpret, adjure, mention, decree, and fulfill . . . (various names follow which are equated with the name of Meṭatron).<sup>48</sup>

A certain closeness of these traditions derived from *Merkavah Rabbah* to the *THS* is evident, whereby the *Merkavah Rabbah* tradition is even more embedded within the traditional liturgy. Both traditions, *Merkavah Rabbah* and *THS* have the tendency to connect *Śar Torah* traditions with liturgical concepts.<sup>49</sup> The term *kavvanah* in the context of mystical-magical tradition reminds one directly of the prayer mysticism of the *ḥaside ashkenaz* and, above all, of the Lurianic Kabbalah. To be sure, the *THS* is remote from these traditions. In a manuscript tradition of the *THS* which originated in kabbalistic circles, precisely this concept has been interpreted in a speculative manner.<sup>50</sup> It illustrates the interest shown by later transmitters of this tradition in this magic prayer. Inherent in the prayer itself, in fact, is a further interpretation of this concept, which extends beyond the rabbinic linguistic usage and aims at a magic-theurgic prayer practice. Evidence that this concept also achieved a certain significance in other aspects of the mysticism of the Geonic era is indicated by those post-Talmudic traditions with *nomina barbara* and sacred names, many of them fairly unimportant, which were interpreted according to their numerological value, by means of gematria. Interpreters were thus able to impart mystical meanings and intentions (*kavvanot*) to such names—a widespread practice later found in medieval esoteric texts.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 682.

<sup>49</sup> See Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, pp. 110f.

<sup>50</sup> MS Leiden Wam. 25, Or. 4762, fol 169b/10.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. G. Scholem's article "Kabbalah" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 10, 1971, col. 510.

Psalms and quotations from these play an important role, not in the *Šar Torah* tradition, but in the magical world. There is even a special magical tradition, known as *Shimush Tehillim*, in which every psalm is tied to a special magic purpose.<sup>52</sup> According to this tradition Ps 34 is good for securing the favor of princes and governments, and Ps 145 is recommended against sudden fright. It is obvious that the author of the *THS* was not inspired by these magical traditions when he included both psalms in the preparatory ceremony. His choice of the two psalms seems to have been influenced by the liturgical custom according to which both are linked to the recitation of the Torah, whereas Psalm 145 generally plays an important liturgical role. But this was by no means the only reason. The two psalms correspond to the basic structure of the prayer itself: they are composed according to the Hebrew alphabet, and the alphabet in conjunction with two secret names of God forms the basic structure of this prayer. These names, TYG‘S (תיעץ) and T‘ŠŠ (טעש), occur 22 times in the prayer, and always together with a third name consisting of a letter of the Hebrew alphabet and the divine name YH: also: ‘YH, BYH, GYH and so on. The double name טעש תיעץ is attested in some magical writings, but none of them could be linked thematically to the *THS*.<sup>53</sup> The second name, T‘ŠŠ, is prominent in the so-called *gedullah*-hymns of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, in which the superior knowledge of the mystic is extolled. The first one, TYG‘S, occurs in a *Hekhalot* tradition blessing the apotropaic character of the divine name (§393). This name also found its way into the angelological tradition of 3 Enoch and the cosmological text *Seder Rabbah di-Bereshit*, where the following Aramaic phrase was added to it: “The Prince, great and honored in song and praised at the head of all the celestials.”<sup>54</sup> These *Hekhalot* traditions are likely to have been

<sup>52</sup> Bill Rebigier, a staff member of the Berlin Project on the Magical fragments of the Cairo Genizah, is analysing this text for his doctoral dissertation. I would like to acknowledge his drawing my attention to the traditions connected with Psalms 34 and 145.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, vol. I, pp. 163 and 170; vol. II, pp. 171 and 174, pp. 228 and 230 and pp. 329 and 332. Only in the very late magical fragment (16th century!) T.-S. New Ser. 324.92, fol.1b/9ff., published in *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, vol. III, pp. 357–365, is the divine name YH, in combination with the Hebrew alphabet, mentioned as useful against forgetfulness. This recipe seems to be directly influenced by *THS*, whereby the author has skipped the magical procedure itself and combined the divine name with biblical phrases.

<sup>54</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 25.

the origin for both of the central secret names of God in the *THS*, which structure the prayer and correspond to Psalms 34 and 145. However, the extent to which the *THS* author was familiar with these Hekhalot texts is, in the end, beyond our ken. The occurrence of this name in the *THS* nevertheless seems to locate it within a context of linked traditions, meaning that all of the traditions associated with mystics' ascents were somehow integrated within a *Šar Torah* ritual.<sup>55</sup> The preparatory procedure ends with the statement that the adept who has completed this prayer is assured of a place in the world to come. In rabbinic tradition we find the maxim that "Whoever recites 'A Psalm of David' (Ps 145) three times a day is assured of belonging to the world to come."<sup>56</sup>

The tendency—already apparent in the first section of the *THS*—to connect different traditions with one another, emerges even more clearly in the prayer itself, and this is what I shall now describe.

### *The Incantation Prayer*

The incantation prayer begins with the formula "In Thy name Lord, God of Israel. Praise be to Thee Lord, our God, King of the world, Rock of all worlds, Lord of all creatures, everlasting God, who says and does, who decrees and establishes living life"<sup>57</sup>—it is composed in the language of the Jewish prayer book, indeed, the phrasing can be found almost verbatim in the morning prayer, which does not seem astonishing for a magical prayer to be spoken in the morning. As we have seen above, the phrasing **אָמַר וְעוֹשֶׁה נִזְדָּר וּמַקְיִים** links this prayer with Hamnuna Sava in the Talmudic tradition.

Next comes the following hymn:

Be adorned, be uplifted, be holy, be praised, be unique, be lauded,  
be exalted, be extolled, be adorned, be elevated, **ṬYḠṢ Ṭ'ŠŠ 'YH**,

<sup>55</sup> This does not mean that the *Šar Torah* tradition is to be interpreted merely as a further development or even as a substitute for the ascent of the mystic. That the historical traditional and religious links are much more complex is demonstrated by Daphna Arbel's article "'Understanding of the Heart.' Spiritual Transformation and Divine Revelations in the Hekhalot and Merkavah Literature" published in *JSQ* 6, 1999, pp. 320–344; see also below.

<sup>56</sup> b Ber 4b.

<sup>57</sup> MS London 737, fol. 299a/14–17:

בשם יי' אלהי ישראל באי אמה צור כל העולמים אדון כל הבריות האל הנאמן אומר  
ועושה נזדר ומקיים די החיים.

God of Israel, King of the Kings (of Kings),<sup>58</sup> praised be Thy Name, magnificent King, for Thou dwellest on a high and exalted throne, in the chambers on high and in the palace of exaltation. For Thou hast revealed your great secret (סודך הגדול) to Thy people.<sup>59</sup>

This hymn is part of the Hekhalot tradition, deriving from the Qedusha songs of mystical writing *Hekhalot Rabbati*, where the enthroned Godhead is praised in a quite similar manner:

Be adorned, be uplifted, be exalted, magnificent King, for Thou dwellest on a high and exalted, awesome and terrifying throne, in the chambers of the palace of exaltation. The servants of Thy throne are terrified and shake the *‘aravot*, the stool of Thy feet every day with jubilant voice and tumultuous song and loud hymn, thus, as it says:<sup>60</sup> *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the entire earth is filled with His glory.*<sup>61</sup>

Whereas the hymn in *Hekhalot Rabbati* merges flowingly into the heavenly Qedusha of the angels, the hymn of praise in *THS* lauds the revelation of the divine secret (סוד) to Israel. How did this hymn praising the divine throne, a hymn, to judge by its origins, belonging to the ascent traditions of the Hekhalot literature and having nothing at all to do with magical practices, how did it turn up in an incantation prayer like *THS*? Or—and here I pick up Shaul Shaked’s question, which I cited earlier—to put it more generally: How did Hekhalot hymns turn up on magic bowls and amulets? Although in many cases we cannot answer this question here, nevertheless, we are in the happy position of being able to trace the transmission process of this particular poetic puzzle-piece from *Hekhalot Rabbati*. In fact, this hymn of praise crops up several times in the Hekhalot literature. For instance, the same hymn forms the poetic conclusion of that *Šar Torah* complex which was linked to *Hekhalot Rabbati* in many manuscripts.<sup>62</sup> After an exact description of the magical procedure comes this very same hymn praising God on His throne. It is connected with the incantation ritual as follows:

<sup>58</sup> This word is missing in MS London 737.

<sup>59</sup> MS London 737, fol. 299a/17–299b/1:

תתהדר תתרוםם תתקדש תשתבח תתיחד תתפאר תתעטר תתעלה תתקלס תתנשא תתנשא.  
 תינעץ טעשש איה יי אלהי ישר' מלך מלכים ברוך שמו מלך מפואר כי על כסא רם  
 ונשא אתה שוכן בחדרי מרום ובהיכל נאווה כי אתה גלית סודך הגדול לעמך.

<sup>60</sup> Isa 6:3.

<sup>61</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 153.

<sup>62</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 306.

R. Yishma'el said: How does a person begin before he prays to this Prince of the Torah (*Šar Torah*)? When he stands up he should say: Be adorned, be elevated, be exalted, magnificent king, for Thou dwellest on a high and exalted, awesome and terrifying throne, in the chambers of the palace of exaltation. The servants of your throne are terrified and shake the *‘aravot*, the stool of Thy feet, every day with jubilant voice and tumultuous songs and loud hymns, thus, as it is said:<sup>63</sup> *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the entire world is filled with his glory*. He should adjure and say: Who will not elevate you, awesome and terrifying king, over all your attendants! With trembling and shaking do they serve you, with alarm and quaking they are terrified by the decree. (As if) with one mouth they bring forth your name, awesome One, because of the terror and the fear. They stand before you, none too early and none too late. And whoever prevents the voice of his colleague during (the pronouncement) of your name, (even if only) by the width of a hair, is knocked down and a flame of fire pushes him aside, thus, as it is said:<sup>64</sup> *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the entire world is filled by his glory*.<sup>65</sup>

This piece clearly shows the link between the two once independent traditions, on the one hand, the hymn to God on the Throne of God and, on the other, the incantation ritual. From being attached at one time to the incantation of the *Šar Torah*, this hymn of praise to God's throne hereby turns into one extolling Him who has revealed the secret of the Torah magic. It has thus become an integral part of the magical activity. So this hymn appears at the beginning of the Hekhalot composition *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, where *Šar Torah* rituals and ascent traditions are very closely intertwined, in the following guise:

R. Yishma'el said: I asked R. 'Aqiva: A prayer that a man recites in order to give praise to RWZYY, Lord, God of Israel<sup>66</sup>—who knows what it is? He said to me: May holiness and purity be in your heart! And he recited (the following) prayer: Praise be to Thee forever on the Throne of Glory. For Thou dwellest in the chambers on high and in the palace of exaltation. For Thou hast revealed to Moses the secrets

<sup>63</sup> Isa 6:3.

<sup>64</sup> Isa 6:3.

<sup>65</sup> Elsewhere, the hymn of praise actually marks the introduction of a prayer whose theme is closely related to the *Šar Torah* tradition, but which, unlike *THS*, seems largely to exclude the magic element; cf. *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, §§ 322–334, here § 322.

<sup>66</sup> It is interesting to note that this paragraph is introduced in MS New York JTS 8128 as follows: “. . . the prayer that one recites when he ascends to the Merkavah (כשעולה למרכבה) and I asked of him the praise of RWZYY . . .” In this textual tradition the link between the ascent and the magical Torah ritual is obvious.

(רזים) and the secrets of the secrets (רזי רזים), the mysteries (כבשים) and the mysteries of the mysteries (כבשי כבשים), and Moses has revealed them to Israel, so that they can engage in Torah with them, and increase study (תלמוד) with them.<sup>67</sup>

An even clearer parallel to *THS* is found in the writing *Merkavah Rabbah*, where the *Šar Torah* myth seems completely to blot out the ascent—a closeness which had already been noticed in connection with the magical procedures introducing this prayer. The parallel text runs as follows:

R. Yishma'el said: "Happy is the man who learns this secret from morning prayer to morning prayer. He gains this world and the world to come and many, many worlds . . . be holy, be praised and be exalted in eternity, Lord, God of Israel, King of the Kings of Kings, praise be to Him. For Thou dwellest on a high and exalted throne, in the chambers on high, (in the) palace of exaltation. For Thou hast revealed the secrets (רזים) and the secrets of the secrets (רזי רזים), the hidden (סתרים) and the hidden of the hidden (סתרי סתרים)."<sup>68</sup>

In another passage in *Merkavah Rabbah*, just before the *Šk'ur Qomah* description of the enthroned divinity, we find the following:

This is the great, powerful and terrifying, mighty and pure, honored and holy name. Be praised, be holy, be lauded, be exalted in eternity, Lord, God of Israel, King of the Kings of Kings, praise be to Him. For Thou dwellest on a high and an exalted throne, in the chambers on high, (in the) palace of exaltation. For you have revealed to Moses how one glorifies Thy name in fear, in purity and in holiness.<sup>69</sup>

This hymn in *Merkavah Rabbah* marks the end of an extensive text on the exaltation of the divine name, which consists mainly of Tetragramm permutations and evidences a clear affinity to the exaltation of God's name and corresponding Tetragramm permutations in *THS*.

A short quotation from this *Hekhalot Rabbati* hymn also turns up in a Genizah fragment located within the context of the *Šar Torah* tradition. The practices mentioned in this fragment—fasting, a "bread

<sup>67</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 544.

<sup>68</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 675. In the following paragraph further parallel features to *THS* are found, esp. the wording "Wise of the secrets and Lord of all the hidden" (יי חכם הרזים ואדון כל הסתרים).

<sup>69</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 694.

and water” diet, new clothes—are especially close to those in *THS*. Moreover, this Genizah fragment names the angel-prince Sagasgi’el, who, as we have seen, acts as the revelation angel of *THS*, expressly referring to him as the “Prince of the Talmud” (שר התלמוד), in other words, as the “Prince of Study”:

Rabbi Yishma’el said: (there are times) when he is called QRBS’L and there are times when he is called QRBSB’L who is near to SGSG’L (= Sagasgi’el) . . . the Prince of Talmud . . . be adorned, be uplifted, be exalted, magnificent king, for Thou dwellest on a high and an exalted throne . . . (The servants of) Thy throne are terrified and shake the ‘aravot, the stool of your feet every day with (jubilant) voice . . .<sup>70</sup>

All the traditions mentioned so far connect this hymn with the *Śar Torah* theme. One of the manuscripts edited in the *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur*, the famous Hekhalot manuscript housed in the Jewish Theological Seminary and registered as no. 8128,<sup>71</sup> illustrates that this hymn of praise could also have been quite commonly associated with other magic contents. After detailing some technical instructions on the correct use of the Ineffable Name,<sup>72</sup> the text continues:

This is the name that is named on every occasion so that it [the occasion] is successful, [the name] that is even spoken over a dead man so that he lives again. Be holy, be praised, be exalted in eternity [Two secret names are following], Lord, God of Israel, king of the kings of kings, praise be to him on the high and exalted throne, (for) Thou dwellest in the chambers of the chambers on high, in the palace of exaltation, for Thou hast revealed secrets (רזים) and the secrets of secrets (רזי רזים). We, the creatures of heaven and of earth, should give thanks to Thee. Praise be to Thee Lord, Lord of all secrets (רזים) and Lord of the hidden (סתרים).<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, p. 185 (see also the commentary on p. 188). Another hymn from *Hekhalot Rabbati* (§ 94) follows.

<sup>71</sup> See K. Herrmann, “Re-Written Mystical Texts: The Transmission of the Hekhalot Literature in the Middle-Ages”, in: *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 75, 1993, pp. 97–116.

<sup>72</sup> “Call it [the name] not seated, but standing: LTY’H’ Z’G’H’. The sum is 72. Pronounce it thus and learn with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might (cf. Deut 6:5) in order to do my will. Be on your guard against every transgression, bless yourself against every sin, against every blame and every transgression, for I shall be with you on every occasion, in every hour, in every moment and at all times”.

<sup>73</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 512 (MS New York JTS 8128). The last formula is, as we have seen, very close to the end of *THS*, which links this prayer with Hamnuna Sava in the rabbinic tradition.

A similar magical use of this Hekhalot fragment is also found in one of the Hekhalot fragments from the Cairo Genizah; here, too, there is no reference to the *Šar Torah* complex; instead we find links to other *Hekhalot Rabbati* traditions<sup>74</sup> and also to *Sefer ha-Razim*.<sup>75</sup> The text runs as follows:

And this is what you should write: In Thy Name, Lord, God of Israel, the strong (Tetragramm permutations follow together with the divine names Zebaot, I am, who I am, the Living and the constant One, who was and will be), be adorned, be uplifted, be exalted, magnificent king, for Thou dwellest on a high (and exalted) throne, in the chambers of exaltation . . . angels, heros, ruthless, powerful and severe higher than mountains and sharper than hills are standing . . .<sup>76</sup>

Therefore I would not be surprised if this hymn were also to be found now in other magic fragments from the Cairo Genizah or even on a magic bowl. At any rate, in the case at hand we have been able to follow in detail the trail of a Hekhalot song into the world of magic. As one example out of an array of puzzle-piece items it serves to document the appearance of similarly isolated Hekhalot pieces on magical fragments, amulets and magic bowls—a process for which Shaul Shaked has correctly drawn an analogy to the Kabbalah:

In the absence of further detailed information (on the relationship between Hekhalot and magic texts), one may have recourse to the analogy of late mediaeval and modern magic and its relationship with the Kabbalah. With the spread of the kabbalistic schools in the sixteenth century and afterwards, many writers of amulets were deeply influenced by the knowledge they derived from the Spanish Kabbalah and referred in their texts to some ideas that were typical of the Kabbalah writings.<sup>77</sup>

And now we can add: *THS* is one example of this process in the pre-kabbalistic world.

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<sup>74</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, §§ 213f.: description of the powerful and terrifying guardian angels at the entrance of the seventh palace together with their no less dangerous horses.

<sup>75</sup> See the description of this fragment in *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, pp. 82–85.

<sup>76</sup> The last sentence (its first words are missing in the fragment) marks the beginning of § 213 in the *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*.

<sup>77</sup> J. Naveh and Sh. Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae. Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem 1993, p. 17.

The first magical invocation in *THS* is connected with an historical event: the destruction of the Temple. The link between this event and the *Šar Torah* myth was clearly not the invention of the author of *THS*. At the end of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, the most famous *Šar Torah* text—the one already mentioned before—links the magical procedure with a highly poetical introduction in order to locate the *Šar Torah* myth on the historical map of Israel. This introduction is composed as a dialogue between God, the angels and Israel. God accepts Israel's complaint that rebuilding the Temple and studying the Torah at the same time cannot be fulfilled, and reveals the secret of the *Šar Torah*: to promise to study the Torah "not by toil and effort, but through the name of this seal and the mentioning of my crown," as the magical practice is termed here.<sup>78</sup> The intervention by the angels who want to prevent the revelation of this secret ("this secret (ר) should not be let out of your treasure house . . . people should wrestle with the Torah as they have always done for generations . . .")<sup>79</sup> is answered by God with a clear rejection of their protest:

No, my servants, no my attendants, don't press me in this matter! This secret (ר) will leave my treasure house, the hidden wisdom (ערמיה) will leave my storehouses. I revealed it to [my] beloved people . . . Up to now it didn't occur to me to tell any of the generations since the days of Moses. It has been reserved to this generation to be made use of it until the end of all generations.<sup>80</sup>

Peter Schäfer has pointed out that this dialogue is based on the rabbinic tradition dealing with the rivalry between the angels and men.<sup>81</sup> Just as the angels tried to prevent the revelation of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai in the rabbinic tradition, so they objected to the disclosure of the secrets of the *Šar Torah* in the mystical lore. On the other hand, however, there is a certain tension between this mystical tradition and the rabbinic tradition. The circumstance that the revelation of the *Šar Torah* was supposed to decisively enhance the status of the Second Temple vis-à-vis that of the First Temple conflicts with those rabbinic traditions which, though linking the First and Second Temples with each other, only emphasize the deficiencies

<sup>78</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 289.

<sup>79</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 292.

<sup>80</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 293.

<sup>81</sup> "Engel und Menschen in der Hekhalot-Literatur" in: id., *Hekhalot-Studien*, pp. 250–276, here pp. 271f.

of the Second Temple by comparison with Solomon's building. Despite these differences the whole text serves as a fine example of the adaptation of rabbinical traditions within the framework of the mystical lore.

Thus the connection between the revelation of the *Śar Torah* secret and the Temple was obviously familiar to the author of *THS* when he composed the following part of the prayer:

In<sup>82</sup> the hour when his (God's) people sinned against him, he arose,<sup>83</sup> carried out the resolution of the destruction of his city, his house and his sons, and ordered them (the angels): Close your gates so that their (Israel's) prayer does not reach me. (Immediately)<sup>84</sup> YHWZTQYH arose in front of him, together with YTHWZQYH, the angels of mercy who intercede for Israel, in front of TYG'S T'SŠ DYH, Lord, God of Israel, at the time of his wrath, and they spoke in his presence: After the exile and the scattering of your people Israel amongst the nations, you are now locking the gates of prayer?! At once he revealed this holy name to them and spoke: Every hour that my people adjure (משביעים) with this name, I hear their prayer. And so I ordered you (the angels): When you hear the adjuration of my holy name, open your gates and allow the prayer of my people to reach me—do not halt the prayer of my sons!<sup>85</sup>

It is obvious that the author of *THS* is falling back on popular haggadic motifs in composing this incantation prayer. The wording כלל ונחרצה derives from Isa 28:22 and is also found in the *Śar Torah* section at the end of *Hekahlot Rabbati* in the following context:

For you (Israel) did not act appropriately by opposing me (God), so that I was angry with you, and I arose and carried out the resolution

<sup>82</sup> In MS London the text moves back and forth several times between the 2nd and the 3rd person—the scribe corrected the 2nd person as the 3rd one in several places, but not at all consistently. Elsewhere, too, the text contains several corruptions, therefore other MSS were consulted for the translation as well.

<sup>83</sup> In other MS traditions we find the additional tradition “seated himself on his judgement throne”.

<sup>84</sup> מיד is missing in MS London.

<sup>85</sup> MS London 737, fol. 299b/7–17:

בשעה שחטאו לפניך עמד ועשה כלל ונחרצה על עיר {ך} {ו} ועל בית {ר} {ו} ועל בניו וצו אתכם סגרו דלתותיכם כדי שלא תכנס תפלתכם לפני ועמד לפניך יהושפיקה ועמו יהושפיקה מלאכי רחמים מלמדי זכות של ישראל לפני תינען שעצז דיה יי אלהי יש {ש} {ר} בעת זעפו אמרו לפניו אחר גלות ושלטול עמך ישר' בין הננים תסגור להם שערי תפלה מיד גלה להם שם הקדוש ואמר כל שעה שמשביעים עמו בזה השם אני אשמע תפלתם וכך צוה אף אחם כך צוה אתכם תשמעו שבועות שמי הקדוש הזה פתחו דלתותיכם ותכנס תפלת עמי לפני ולא תעכבו בתפלת בני

to destroy my city, my house and my sons. And I did not act appropriately by rising against you and sealing a judicial verdict over you . . .<sup>86</sup>

The main item relevant here in the rabbinical tradition is the following tradition from Talmud Bavli Berakhot (32b):

R. El'azar said: Ever since the day when the sanctuary was destroyed, the gates of prayer have been shut, as it says: *Even when I cry and call [for help], he stops up my prayer*<sup>87</sup> . . . Ever since the day when the sanctuary was destroyed, a wall of iron builds a partitioning wall between Israel and her father in heaven . . .<sup>88</sup>

Notwithstanding all the rivalry between angels and human beings recorded in rabbinic literature, one area does stand out even here, where angels appear less as opponents than as advocates of human beings and actively support them: during prayer. Here rabbinic tradition ascribes to angels the role already mapped out for them by the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha: that of carrying out the task of bringing human prayers to God.<sup>89</sup> In the rabbinic tradition adopting this complex, the issue is not of course, as in *THS*, to introduce magical practices aimed at inducing favorable answers to prayers. Another rabbinic tradition inserts itself here, however, one that could be regarded as the link joining the motives of the locking of the prayer gates and the revelation of God's name. In the twenty-second chapter of the homily Midrash *Pesiqta Rabbati* we find the following tradition:

Why is it that when Israel pray they are given no answer? R. Yoshua b. Levi replied in the name of R. Pinhas ben Yair: Because they do not revere the mystery of the Ineffable Name (סוד שם המפורש). And there are several verses to support his reply: *Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that speaks: Behold, here I am* (Isa 52:6); *And I will betroth thee to me in faithfulness: and*

<sup>86</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 283.

<sup>87</sup> Lam 3:8.

<sup>88</sup> Ezek 4:3 follows.

<sup>89</sup> See P. Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen. Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorstellung*, Berlin-New York 1975, pp. 62ff. Evidence that this complex of traditions, too, was associated with the rivalry between the angels and Israel is to be found in the rabbinic lore. Some of these traditions was then taken up in the Hekhalot literature; see *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, §§ 173, 787ff. and P. Schäfer, "Engel und Menschen in der Hekhalot-Literatur", in id., *Hekhalot-Studien*, Tübingen 1988, pp. 266ff.

*thou shalt know the Lord* (Hos 2:22); *I will set him on high, because he has known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him* (Ps 91:14f.). In this world Israel swear in God's name even when they lie, but in the time-to-come they swear and fulfill (and will always abide by what they undertake), as it is said: *And wilt swear: "As the Lord liveth," in truth, in justice, and in righteousness; then shall the nations bless themselves by Him, and in Him shall they glory* (Jer 4:2).<sup>90</sup>

In the parallel tradition of the *Midrash Tehillim* to Psalm 91 the eschatological aspect is accented somewhat differently:

R. Jehoshua b. Levi said in the name of Pinhas b. Yair, Why does Israel pray in this world and is not heard? Because they do not know the Ineffable Name, but in the time-to-come the Holy One, blessed be He, let them know his name, as it is said (according to Isa 52:6), In that hour they pray and are heard.

In the *THS* the revelation of the Name is not viewed as a future occurrence, but rather the potent effect of the divine name is seen as having already been in force since the destruction of the Temple. The idea behind this understanding of the effective power of the divine name could not be better expressed than in that hymn of a magic fragment now published by Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked. Here we find the following benediction:

Praised be Thou, Lord, our God, King of the World, who has sanctified us through His commandments and has commanded us to pronounce His great name in love.<sup>91</sup>

Corresponding to the adaptation of haggadic materials in mystical and magical texts of the gaonic period are echoes of esoteric traditions in late midrashic works. Here we should mention above all the writings *Alfabeta de R. Aqiva*, *Midrash Mishle* (chapter 10 contains a summary of major Merkavah themes), *Pirke de-R. Eliezer* (esp. the description of the world of the Divine Throne in chapter 4, which has many links to the mystical writings) as well as some "minor" midrashic texts which were published in Jellinek's *Beit ha-Midrash*. Among these "minor" writings is the post-Talmudic *Midrash Petirat Moshe* (Midrash on the Death of Moses),<sup>92</sup> which contains edited versions of tradi-

<sup>90</sup> Quoted from *Pesikta Rabbati. Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbaths*, vol. 1, transl. W. G. Braude, New Haven and London 1968, p. 469.

<sup>91</sup> Westminster College Misc. 59, fol. 1a/1–3 published in *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, vol. III, Tübingen 1999, pp. 179ff.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. G. Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, München <sup>8</sup>1992, p. 328;

tions directly reminiscent of *THS* and thus hinting at a common tradition-history background.<sup>93</sup> Moses' stubborn resistance to the decision forbidding him ever to set foot in the Holy Land again finally prompts God to issue the following order to the "princes of the firmament" (שרי הרקיע):

And when God saw that Moses made light of the matter and that he did not want to pray for himself, at once the Holy One, blessed be He, became angry and decreed and sealed judgment over him and swore by his great name (נשבע בשמו הנדול), that Moses should not enter the Land (of Israel), as it is said:<sup>94</sup> *Therefore (לכן) ye shall not bring this assembly . . .*<sup>95</sup> When Moses saw that the decree against him had been sealed, he took a resolve to fast and stood up in order to pray,<sup>96</sup> and said: I will not move from here until Thou annullest that decree. What (else) did Moses do? He donned sackcloth<sup>97</sup> and rolled himself in the dust and stood in prayer<sup>98</sup> before God, until the heaven, the earth and the foundations of creation were shaken. They said: Perhaps it is the desire of God to create His world anew?! Whereupon a heavenly voice was heard proclaiming: His desire to renew the world has not yet come, but, *In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind*<sup>99</sup> (אש), and 'man' (אש) must surely refer to Moses, as it is said:<sup>100</sup> *Now the man Moses was very meek, (above all men that were upon the face of the earth).* What did God do? He proclaimed in every heaven,<sup>101</sup> and in every heavenly Court, that they should not receive Moses' prayer, and not appoint any angel to bring the prayer of Moses before me, because I have sealed the death decree against him.<sup>102</sup> Go down and shut all the gates (of heaven) so that Moses' prayer can

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Eng. transl. of the 1982 ed. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* authored by H.L. Strack & G. Stemberger, transl. by M. Bockmuehl, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1991, p. 362: "The 'midrash of the passing of Moses' is preserved in several recensions to be dated between the seventh and the tenth or eleventh century".

<sup>93</sup> BHM, vol. I, pp. 115–129; this tradition was also added to DevR; see G. Stemberger, *ibid.* [Ger. ed.], p. 328.

<sup>94</sup> Num 20:12.

<sup>95</sup> DevR adds: "and לכן always implies an oath, as it is said: *And therefore (לכן) I have sworn unto the house of Eli*".

<sup>96</sup> The parallel version in DevR reminds one directly to the story of *Honi ha-Meagel* ("the Circle Drawer"): "and drew a small circle and stood therein and said . . ."; cf. b. Taan 23a.

<sup>97</sup> DevR adds: "and wrapped himself with sackcloth".

<sup>98</sup> DevR adds: "and supplications".

<sup>99</sup> Job 12:10.

<sup>100</sup> Num 12:3.

<sup>101</sup> DevR: "in every gate of each heaven".

<sup>102</sup> In DevR an angelic figure, the "angel of proclamation" is introduced: "Now at that hour God hastily summoned the Angel in charge of Proclamation, Achzeriel by name, and He commanded the ministering angels . . ."

no longer come up (to me). At that hour heaven and earth and all the fortresses of the earth and all the constructions of creation trembled because of Moses' prayer, which was like a sword that tears and cuts to pieces and does not halt, because Moses' prayer sounded like the Ineffable name (שם המפורש) of God that he had learnt from the mouth of his teacher, the angel Zagzag'el. About this hour Ezekiel said:<sup>103</sup> *And I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing—a voice of a great rushing* refers to Moses, as it is said:<sup>104</sup> *Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people.* What is the meaning of *Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place?* When the wheels of the Chariot and the fiery Seraphim saw that God commanded that Moses' prayer should not be accepted and that He did not respect (Moses') person, nor did he grant him more life, nor did he bring him into the land of Israel, they exclaimed: *Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place*, for before Him there is no respecting of persons, great or small . . .<sup>105</sup>

The shutting of the prayer gates, the effect of God's name, the magical use of the sword and the revelation of the Name through the angel Zagzag'el<sup>106</sup> are motives very close to *THS*. The magical procedure designed to promote the forcible access of the prayer to God is missing in the Midrash, albeit even here distinct echoes of these traditions (the angel Zagzag'el as the revealer of the divine secret, the powerful divine name) can be discerned. Therefore we can expand Shaul Shaked's observation: Not only in the fields of prayer, Merkavah Mysticism and magic but also within the Haggadic tradition a coming together is visible: magic and mystical traditions are echoed in midrashic compositions and, on the other hand, mystical and magic texts adapted midrashic elements. No doubt about it: We are still far away from kabbalistic writings like the *Bahir* and, in particular, the *Zohar*. But the tendency, so characteristic for the mystical literature of the High Middle Ages is already present in the writings of the Geonic period.

In *THS* the motives discussed are taken up in the next incantation and worked over further. Here it says:

I Mr. X adjure, decree and establish, I Mr. X over you, heaven and heaven of the heavens by means of this holy, pure and everlasting

<sup>103</sup> Ezek 3:12.

<sup>104</sup> Exod 11:3.

<sup>105</sup> BHM, vol. I, pp. 120f.

<sup>106</sup> This angelic figure is very close to Sagnasgi'el, who serves as the angel of revelation in *THS*—in several MSS we find both angels expressly identified with one another or even hybrid forms of their names.

The last section of this quotation reminds one directly of a Hekhalot tradition contained in the text *Hekhalot Zutarti* and in a fragment from the Cairo Genizah. Here it states about Prince ‘Anafi’el:

'Anafī'el said: If anyone wants to pray this prayer and contemplate the work of his creator, let him mention just one of these letters and I will not turn to my right or my left before I turn to him and do whatever he wants. I will wipe out anyone who slanders him, apart from an angel who is an emissary of the king of glory . . .<sup>109</sup>

<sup>108</sup> MS London 737, fol. 299b/17–300b/9.

[illegible]

<sup>109</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 421. It is interesting to note that in the Genizah

Whereas in the early Hekhalot texts, which include *Hekhalot Zūṭarti*, the difference between God and the angel princes is not always clearly marked—indeed, as in the case of the angel princes Meṭaṭron or ‘Anafi’el, they sometimes appear as a second heavenly power or deity—for the *THS* author God remains the supreme ruler to whom prayers are directed and who links up with his servants, the people of Israel. Here we should return to the question whether Meṭaṭron has possibly been deliberately ignored in the prayer. It is well known that Meṭaṭron, an important figure in the mystical and magical tradition, is also a highly problematic angelic figure. In the Babylonian Talmud he is mentioned only three times and two of these traditions attack a clearly negative connotation of his name.<sup>110</sup> There is the famous story of Aḥer (“the Other”), a pseudonym for Elisha‘ b. Avuyya (in order to avoid the pronouncement of his name), which polemicalizes against traditions in which Meṭaṭron is seen as a second divine power in heaven. In the end the consequence of Aher’s question, “Are there in fact two powers in heaven?” is not only his own punishment, but also Meṭaṭron’s degradation. On the other hand, Meṭaṭron is very much present in this prayer, if not expressly by name. The phrase “I (God) connect you (Israel) (this angel), for my name is in him” is a clear reference to him, and the following name HQṬWSYH YH (with some differences in the manuscripts) is obviously fashioned from his most provocative name: יהוה קטן = “the lesser Lord.” Could it have been that the *THS* author did not mention him intentionally, that he even censored his name? Indeed, it is conspicuous that the angel’s role in the *THS* is, as we have seen, much closer to the rabbinic tradition than to all those Hekhalot traditions which often make only a blurred distinction between the angel princes and God.

The prayer now to be cited, with its request that the gates of the Torah, the gates of Wisdom etc. be opened, presents the aim of the first section of *THS*:

I call before you, Creator of mercy, Lord of mercy, Leader (of the world) in mercy, full of mercy over all your creatures, open the gates

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fragment, on the other hand, ‘Anafi’el reacts negatively to the incantation; cf. *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, p. 105, and *Übersetzung zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, vol. III, p. 179f.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. G. Scholem’s article “Meṭaṭron”, in: *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 11, col. 1143–1146.

The opening of the gates, as an image for grasping and understanding the Torah, is a theme which crops up several times in Hekhalot literature. The closest that *THS* comes to this is seen in a prayer text handed down as part of the context of the *Shi'ur Qoma* tradition:

And I, (Mr.) X, son of (Mr.) Y, your servant, dust and ashes, . . . have come to lay before you my supplication and my prayer, in order to find grace, mercy, righteousness and compassion before the throne of the glory of Your kingdom. For you are close to them who call upon you and may be found by all those who seek you, holy One and awesome One. Blessed are you, full of compassion. Blessed are you, and splendid. Do my desire and request and favor before the throne of your glory. Open, also for me, your servant, the gates of prayer, the gates of repentance, the gates of Torah, the gates of wisdom, the gates of understanding, the gates of knowledge, the gates of righteousness . . . And inscribe me for a good life for the sake of your great, mighty, awesome, ineffable, courageous, strong, exalted, wonderful, holy and honored Name. *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the entire earth is filled with His glory.*<sup>112</sup>

Although, unlike the *THS*, this prayer contains no conjuration elements, in his article “Prayer in the Hekhalot Literature” Philip Alexander expressed the hypothesis, on the grounds of the introductory formula typical of magical texts: “And I, Mr. X, son of Mr.

אָקראַ אַזי פֿאַנדיג בורא רחמים ובעל רחמים ומתנהג ברחם ומלא רחמים על כל בריותיך  
אחא פתח לי שערי תורה שערי חכמ' שערי בינה שערי דעה שערי צדקה שערי רחמים שערי  
שלום שערי חתינה שערי חיים שערי פרנסה לעמך כלכלה שערי מחילה שערי סליח'שערי ששון  
שערי שמח... כי אחא יי' דעת לבו וכליותיו שמען שמך הגדול והקדוש הוזה פתח לבי בתורתך.  
וילמדני תורתך ויהיו כל סתרי תורתך גלויים לפני ואהיה בקי בכלום והזקיק לי את הקוספיה  
ועששה אותך ורצוני ושאלי ובקשתי לי אני עבדך בשם השם הוזה. והי זה איה איה איה {א} (ה)

<sup>112</sup> Isa 6:3.

Y . . .”, that this prayer, too, could be placed with magical writings such as *Sefer ha-Razim* and *Harba de-Moshe*.<sup>113</sup> In *THS* (which Philip Alexander was not familiar with) we actually have an incantation prayer that not only confirms this hypothesis, but also leads us directly to the literary venue in which this prayer is likely to have originated. Thus this prayer stands as a contrast to the *THS* and for the tendency in the process of developing tradition to strip incantation prayers of their magical components and to recompose them analogously to the standard prayers of the Siddur.

The *Śar Torah* procedures within the Hekhalot literature prayers would normally end here. The opening of the gates of the Torah and Knowledge are the goal and the climax of the *Śar Torah* tradition. *THS*, however, takes up a further central theme of Jewish prayer: the request for forgiveness and the atonement of sins. The beginning of this passage reads as follows:

Again I call TYG'S T'SŠ Y'h, Lord, God of Israel, before you and pronounce before you this only name HYH YH YH, which since time immemorial you have engraved on the throne of your glory. For when (your sons)<sup>114</sup> come and rise before you—thus have you spoken: When I see my sons who are standing before me, then the measure of divine judgement is raised in order to plunge the world into *tohu vabohu* [= chaos]. (Then) I look at the measure of divine judgement and at the measure of mercy, and your mercy overcomes your rage, and let yourself repent evil and you speak up for those who say DHH 'H, for you have ordered your servants who write down the books of life and the books of death before you: When my sons pronounce my only name and you hear it out of the mouth of my people—their sins should be made white at once, and write down by the power of that name their merit(s). I call before you . . . (long lines of Tetragramm permutations follow) . . . excuse me, forgive me, I, Mr. X, your servant, expiate all my sins, (my guilt and my offences),<sup>115</sup> and I shall be pure for the life of the coming world . . .<sup>116</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Published in R. Goetschel (ed.), *Prière, mystique et judaïsme. Colloque de Strasbourg (septembre 1984)*, Paris 1987, pp. 43–64.

<sup>114</sup> As with the other MSS.

<sup>115</sup> As with the other MSS.

<sup>116</sup> MS London 737, fol. 301a/5–21:

שוב אקרא אני לפניך תינען טעצש ייה יי אלהי ישר' אוכיר לפניך שם היחיד הזה היה ייה  
יה אשר מאז  
חקקתו על כסא כבודך כשהו עומדים לפניך וכן אמרת אם ראית בני עומדים לפניך  
ותעמוד מדת הדין  
ותחזור עולם לתרו ובהו מסתכל אני במדת הדין ובמדת רחמים וכובשין רחמך את כעסך  
ואתה נחם על הרעה

It is therefore no wonder that in the manuscript transmission of the *THS* we find a tradition that states that the night of Yom Kippur is the appropriate time for the Hamnuna Sava prayer.<sup>117</sup> Another extant incantation text from the Geonic period expressly connects the *Šar Torah* tradition with Yom Kippur.<sup>118</sup> This part of *THS* reminds one also of those magical prayers in which the confession of sins and the plea for fulfillment of one's own wishes are intertwined. From the second volume of *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, the following text is given here as an especially typical example:

And also I your servant, son of your maid stand at this hour with everyone, to say a prayer and to ask for mercy and support before the throne of your glory, so that you (may) forgive my sins, and pardon my misdemeanors and transgressions, (and) may you be full of mercy towards me, hear my cry for help and fulfil my request and my desire. . . .<sup>119</sup>

This much is clear at any rate: in *THS* the Torah magic is associated from the outset with the aspect of forgiving and atoning for sins. God's name, which in the *THS* enables the prayer to reach God above and opens the Torah gates is, above all, also the name which was said to result in the forgiveness and the atonement of sins when it used to be uttered by the High Priest in the Temple on Yom Kippur. In this way *THS* belongs to that tradition of the

מלמדי זכות מזכירין דהא אה וכך ציוית את משרתך הכותבי' לפניך ספריי חיים וספריי מתים אם יזכירו בני שמי  
 היחיד ותשמענו אותו מפ' עמי מיד הלבינו וענותיהם וכתבו את זכותם באותו השם אני קורא לפניך יהו הנה  
 יאו תהיה אהו הנה יהו אה הו או הה הה הו אה יה זה היה זה יהו והה  
 הרה והו יו והי מהול וסלת  
 לי אני פלו' עבדך ובכפר על חטאי ואודה נקי לחיי עזה

<sup>117</sup> MS Leiden, Warn. 25, Or. 4762, fol. 169b/4.

<sup>118</sup> This text, called *Sidra de-Shimusha Rabba*, was published by Scholem in *Tarbiz* 16, 1944/45, pp. 196–209.

<sup>119</sup> T.-S. K 1.25, fol. 1b/4ff; *Magische Text aus der Kairoer Geniza*, vol. II, pp. 175ff; cf. also the two following prayers in this edition. The prayer quoted is on p. 181.

*Hekhalot* writings which automatically connect magical procedures directly to certain liturgical events. In *Merkavah Rabbah*, that *Hekhalot* text whose closeness to *THS* has been emphasized several times, we find the same tendency, whereby Aseret, New Year, Each Month and the First of Adar are listed as special days for the magic ritual.<sup>120</sup>

It can be seen in the whole passage that again the *THS* author in turn harks back to common haggadic traditions, which he brings together in a kind of shorthand, but with true craftsmanship. The concept of the letters of the divine name being engraved on the throne is found in both the *Hekhalot* and the Midrash tradition. The motifs about the possible relapse of the world into *tohu vabohu* and about God's conflicting attributes, mirrored in his punitive judgement-court (מִדַּת הַדִּין) and his mercy (מִדַּת הַרַחֲמִים), have numerous parallels in the rabbinic tradition.<sup>121</sup> An important parallel text to the latter complex of traditions is the following quotation from the Talmud Bavli Berakhot 7a, which had been included in the *Hekhalot* tradition as well:<sup>122</sup>

R. Yohanan says in the name of R. Jose: How do we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, says prayers? Because it says: Even them will I bring to My holy montain and make them joyful in My house of prayer (Is. 56:7). It is not said 'their prayer' but 'my prayer'; hence (you learn) that the Holy One, blessed be He, says prayers. What does He pray? R. Zutra b. Tobi said in the name of Rav: May it be My will that My mercy conquers My anger, and that My mercy prevail over My (other) attributes, so that I may deal with My children in the attribute of mercy and, on their behalf, stop short of the limit of strict justice'. It was taught: R. Yishmael b. Elisha says: I once entered into the innermost part (of the Sanctuary) to offer incense and saw Akatri'el YH, the Lord of Hosts, seated upon a high and exalted throne. He said to me: Yishmael, My son, bless Me! I replied: May it be Thy will that Thy mercy may suppress Thy anger and Thy mercy may prevail over Thy other attributes, so that Thou mayest deal with Thy children according to the attribute of mercy and mayest, on their behalf, stop short of the limit of strict justice!

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, pp. 110f.

<sup>121</sup> See K. Grözinger, "Middat ha-din und Middat ha-rahamim; die sogenannten Gottesattribute 'Gerechtigkeit' und 'Barmherzigkeit' in der rabbinischen Literatur", in *FJB* 8, 1980, pp. 95–114.

<sup>122</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 151. See Daniel Abrams, "From Divine Shape to Angelic Being; the Career of Akatriel in Jewish Literature," *Journal of Religion* 76, 1996, pp. 43–63.

The liturgical formula יְהי רַצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ in connection with the apotropaic character of God's name has also be included in a liturgical fragment of the Hekhalot tradition:

May it be your will, Lord, our God, that your mercy conquers your anger at the hour when we mention your great and awesome name, so that we will not drown in fire, for all your attendants blaze (like) fire.<sup>123</sup> May it be your will, compassionate and good father, that we will be saved in that hour from the evil spirits, for your name is pleasing to you, your name is holy to you, your name is pure to you, your name is great, your name is awesome, your name is splendid, and Israel is holy and pure through you. And you did not reveal your name to all the nations of the world, but to us alone. You called us sons and servants for the sake of your name. Blessed be your name for ever and ever, you who made us so . . . expounded (is the name) that is on the crown, expounded is his name (Tetragramm permutations follow).<sup>124</sup>

The idea of whitewashing one's sins is widely found in the Midrash, whereby the concept "*Lebanon*", identified with the Temple in Deut. 3:25 and containing the Hebrew root לָבַן = "white," plays a special part. This tradition can be expressly linked with Yom Kippur as is illustrated by the Midrash on Psalm 9:1 ("but his [= Israel's] Father in heaven makes white their sins on the Day of Atonement, pardons and forgive him").

The whitewashing force of the Temple and its rites corresponds in *THS* to the powerful efficacy of the Tetragrammaton, whereby the reciter of the magical prayer replaces the High Priest in the Temple.

The following part of *THS* contains elements which we have already found in the first part, in particular, the plea that the prayer be heard, that the gates of the Torah be opened, whereby the piece is concluded by a warning against the abuse of the divine name.<sup>125</sup>

Just as a hymn of praise from the Hekhalot tradition forms the prayer's introduction, so the author lets the prayer conclude, too, with an extensive hymn derived from the Hekhalot literature. In *Hekhalot Rabbati* we find the following praise of God within the framework of the so-called songs of the Throne:<sup>126</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Literally: "for all Your attendants are fire (and) blaze"; cf. Ps. 104:4.

<sup>124</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 393.

<sup>125</sup> I hope to publish a comprehensive analysis of *THS*, including the whole manuscript tradition, in the near future.

<sup>126</sup> *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 268.

Who is like Thee, Lord, God of Israel, Lord of powerful deeds, Lord, God of Israel, superiors and inferiors kneel and throw themselves down before Thee, Lord, God of Israel. *Serafim* glorify and rejoice before Thee, God of Israel. The throne of Thy glory extols Thee and gives Thee pride and dignity, strength and splendor for Thyself, Lord God of Israel. Thy servants crown Thee with crowns and sing to Thee a new song. They appoint Thee king for ever, and Thou shalt be named One for ever and ever . . . Blessed art Thou, Lord, Wise of the secrets (חכם הרוזים) and Lord of the Hidden (אדון הסתרים).

In *THS*, the beginning and the end of this hymn is nearly identical, but the middle part has been changed. By the time the *THS* author wanted to incorporate the hymn, he happened to have reached the letter *mem* according to the prayer's alphabetical structure. So he molded the hymn to praise God's secret name  $\text{TYG}'\text{S } \text{T}'\text{S}\check{\text{S}}$  *alef/bet/gimel/dalet* . . . YH another eight times and to complete the Hebrew alphabet. In the original version of this hymn of praise God's name is already extolled five times ("Lord, God of Israel"). Using this eulogy as a basis, the *THS* author incorporated different angel groups, dropping, however, the extolment of the throne of glory in *Hekhalot Rabbati* ("The throne of Thy glory extols Thee . . ."), which originally pointed to the throne songs and the throne mysticism of this Hekhalot writing. In *THS* the hymn took on the following form:

Who is like Thee,  $\text{TYG}'\text{S } \text{T}'\text{S}\check{\text{S}}$  NYH, Lord, God of Israel, Lord of powerful deeds and Lord of all wonders, for Thou are  $\text{TYG}'\text{S } \text{T}'\text{S}\check{\text{S}}$  SYH, Lord, God of Israel, superiors and inferiors kneel, for Thou are  $\text{TYG}'\text{S } \text{T}'\text{S}\check{\text{S}}$  YH, Lord, God of Israel. *serafim* and *hayyot ha-qodesh* sing to Thee in fear and terror, for Thy name is  $\text{TYG}'\text{S } \text{T}'\text{S}\check{\text{S}}$  PYH, Lord, God of Israel; they rejoice before Thee with praise, song and hymns of praise, for none is beside Thee,  $\text{TYG}'\text{S } \text{T}'\text{S}\check{\text{S}}$  SYH, Lord, God of Israel, Thy servants laud and praise Thy blessed name (other readings: holy name; name of Thy glory)  $\text{TYG}'\text{S } \text{T}'\text{S}\check{\text{S}}$  QYH, Lord, God of Israel; the *galgalim* of Thy Merkavah answer Thee,  $\text{TYG}'\text{S } \text{T}'\text{S}\check{\text{S}}$  RYH, Lord, God of Israel, to Thee they present a hymn of praise, the *hayyot*, the bearers of the throne of Thy glory, the *Ofannim* and the *Keruvim* praise Thy name,  $\text{TYG}'\text{S } \text{T}'\text{S}\check{\text{S}}$  SYH, Lord, God of Israel, Thy servants crown Thee with crowns and sing to Thee a new song. They appoint Thee king for ever and ever, and Thou shalt be named One God for ever, for Thou  $\text{TYG}'\text{S } \text{T}'\text{S}\check{\text{S}}$  TYH, Lord, God of Israel. Praise be to Thee,  $\text{TYG}'\text{S } \text{T}'\text{S}\check{\text{S}}$  S'M'S, Lord, God of Israel, King of the secrets (מלך הרוזים) and Lord of the Hidden (אדון הסתרים).<sup>127</sup>

<sup>127</sup> In MS London 737, fol. 301b/23–302a/9 some text is missing, indicated by

## Conclusions

In the mediaeval period, as we can see from the Geniza material, a measure of harmony was achieved between Hekhalot, liturgy and the magic texts . . . It probably demonstrates a secondary coming-together of the two or rather three domains: Hekhalot, magic, and liturgy (domains that had never been kept entirely apart), a meeting that forms yet another synthesis. Along a stretch of time, it is possible to notice how groups of literary traditions seem periodically to drift together and again break away from each other.<sup>128</sup>

the copyist with the phrase **נל חסד הצ' וק** (that means the phrases with the divine names **ציה** and **קה** are omitted). The Genizah fragment T.-S. New Ser. 322.49, fol. 1a/9–2b/8, and the London manuscript 736 (see K. Herrmann, *Massekhet Hekhalot. Traktat von den himmlischen Palästen. Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Tübingen 1994, pp. 38–39) have preserved a much better version of the text, and were used to reconstruct the missing text:

מי כמֹדךְ אַתָּה תִּינַעַץ טַעֲשֵׁשׁ נִידָה יי' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲרוֹן נִבְרֹתוֹ וּבִעַל כָּל נִפְלֹאוֹת כִּי אַתָּה תִּינַעַץ טַעֲשֵׁשׁ סִיָּה יי' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹךְ יִכְרַעוּ עֲלוֹיָנוּ וְחַחֲנוּנוֹ כִּי אַתָּה תִּינַעַץ טַעֲשֵׁשׁ עֵינָהּ יי' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹךְ יִדְלֹלוּ שְׂרָפִים וְחַיֹּת הַקֹּדֶשׁ כְּבוֹדָהּ בְּאַיְמָהּ וּבִירְאָהּ כִּי שִׁמְךָ תִּינַעַץ טַעֲשֵׁשׁ פִּיהָ יי' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹךְ יִשְׁמַע וּבִכְוֹדָהּ שִׁמְךָ וּבִכְוֹדָהּ תִּינַעַץ טַעֲשֵׁשׁ צִיָּה יי' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִפְאָרוּ מִשְׁתַּחֲוִי וּמִהַלְלִים יִבְעוּ מִבּוֹרֵךְ אֲדָשָׁן אֲדָשָׁן כְּבוֹדָהּ תִּינַעַץ טַעֲשֵׁשׁ קִיָּה יי' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִגְלִיל מִרְכַּבֹּתָיו יַעֲנוּ לֹךְ תִּינַעַץ טַעֲשֵׁשׁ רִידָה יי' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹךְ יִתְנוּ שִׁירָה חַיִּית נִשְׁאֹתָ כִּסֵּא כְּבוֹדָהּ וְהַאֲזִינִי וְהִכְרוֹבִי מִקְדִּישִׁי שִׁמְךָ תִּינַעַץ טַעֲשֵׁשׁ שִׁיָּהּ יי' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִכְתִּירוּ לֹךְ מִשְׁתַּחֲוִי כְּתָרִים וַיִּשְׁירוּ לֹךְ שִׁיר חֹדֶשׁ וַיִּמְלִיכוּךָ לְצַח צִנְחִים וְתִקְרָא אֶל אֶחָד לְעוֹלָם וְעַד כִּי אַתָּה תִּינַעַץ טַעֲשֵׁשׁ תִּהְיֶה יי' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה תִּינַעַץ טַעֲשֵׁשׁ מִנֵּעַן יי' אֱלֹהֵי מֶלֶךְ הָרוּחִים וְאֲדוֹן כָּל הַסִּתְרִים

<sup>128</sup> “‘Peace be Upon You, Exalted Angels’: on Hekhalot, Liturgy and Incantation Bowls”, *JSQ* 2, 1995, p. 207.

to figure out the building blocks which form the basis of this incantation prayer and were fitted together to shape an editorially well reflected literary composition.

Indeed, much of the older Hekhalot tradition seems imbalanced: the names of the rabbis who do not seem to be deeply involved with the sayings that are attributed to them; the standard prayers and liturgical formulas, incorporated every so often into Hekhalot tradition, whose literary tie to the context, however, appears unmotivated; at times, Midrash traditions are cited before a magical ritual itself, supposedly to enhance the legitimization of these traditions, which themselves, however, seem to be more a negation of Midrash. All of these inconsistencies in the end help to explain the emergence of *THS*: here, the rabbi's name fits the prayer and its contents; here, the wordings of the daily prayer are associated with Hekhalot hymns and incantation formulas, and finally the haggadic element here is not inserted as a preliminary element, but incorporated into the main body of the prayer itself.

Traces of the tendency apparent in this prayer are also recognizable in other Hekhalot writings. Indeed, we can say that, in a certain sense, some of the still highly controversial scholarly positions on the origins and the social context of this literature, which we mentioned at the outset, ultimately reflect these very divergent tendencies. It should be pointed out, however, that these positions often do not take sufficient account of the internal developmental process of Merkavah mysticism, or they absolutize a tendency emerging in a work and use it as a basis to explain the entire literature. To mention only one example, alongside texts which evidence a markedly elitist, exclusivist consciousness, we find traditions with a starkly contrary orientation that promise a magic Torah spell for everyone. In any case, care should be taken to avoid rash generalizations: anyone who, e.g., supposes the *'am ha-'arez* or all of Israel to stand behind the Torah ritual and views Hekhalot literature as the revolutionary manifesto of the Jewish masses in their struggle against the rabbinic establishment, misjudges the inner dialectic of these traditions, which are obviously directed against those tendencies of Merkavah mysticism that reveal a markedly elitist, even quasi-messianic consciousness. Also the "magical radicalness" found in numerous Hekhalot texts should not be rashly played off against traditional rabbinic Torah piety—these magic texts are oriented towards rabbinic moral concepts, if not in the

practices they describe, at least in their aim of achieving a better understanding of the Torah or of keeping the Torah alive in people's memories. As such, they therefore tend to be at odds with those mystical texts which have no more to offer than "displaying the king in his beauty" (לראות את המלך ביופיו). A special feature of gaonic mysticism seems to be its wish to balance these tensions and to harmonize quite diverse bundles of tradition with one another. On the other hand, it would be prudent not to attribute a model character to these harmonizing tendencies, to claim that what Hekhalot literature *per se* represents is a product of the Jewish middle class, sandwiched, so to speak, between the uneducated lower class and the rabbinic upper class. That much is clear in any case: whoever originated the Hekhalot literary traditions concerning the ascent of the mystic, the magic Torah rite or the speculation about the "mystic figure of the Godhead," however and wherever one may place this literature in a historical or social-historical perspective, those who later passed on the traditions felt very strongly the need to tie these mystical and magical traditions together. Nevertheless, corrective and polemic tendencies are quite visible in this harmonization process.

*THS* is thus closely linked to other texts of the Geonic era which similarly demonstrate the coming together of strands from various traditions, whereby it is quite possible to recognize the different tendencies of the respective authors or redactors. For example, the magic element, intrinsic to the *THS* and the magical texts from the Cairo Genizah, takes a back seat in mystical writings like 3 Enoch and *Massekhet Hekhalot*, or is even absent altogether in midrashic compositions like *Alfabet de-Rabbi Aqiva*, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, and *Midrash Mishle*, in which mystical elements were included. All this indicates the relevance of the mysticism of the Geonic era, especially when we look at the further development of the esoteric tradition in mediaeval Europe. Moreover, when we look at *THS* it is evident that this prayer contains many elements that became important to this tradition: Hekhalot, *Šar Torah*, liturgy, magic, Haggadah, the alphabet in combination with secret names and Tetragramm permutations. So it is certainly no accident that Eleazar of Worms cited this prayer several times in his esoteric work *Sode Razayya* and, indeed, included the complete text (along with some peculiar renditions, which almost certainly originated with the *ḥaside ashkenaz*) in the section entitled *Sefer ha-Shem* of this work. Besides, Hamnuna Sava is one of the leading

lights of the Zohar tradition. The medieval interest in the *THS* is reflected by the very considerable redactional changes which this prayer underwent in the course of its reception. However, the story of the prayer's reception deserves to be the subject of a separate study. And, more important, the missing chapter of Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*: "Mysticism in the Geonic Period" needs to be filled in.

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