Notes on the Study of *Merkabah* Mysticism and *Hekhalot* Literature in English

*with an appendix on Jewish Magic*

Don Karr

© Don Karr, 1985, 1995-2004  All rights reserved.

**License to Copy**

This publication is intended for personal use only. Paper copies may be made for personal use. With the above exception, no part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, without permission in writing from the author. Reviewers may quote brief passages.

[The original version of this article appeared in *Collected Articles on the Kabbalah*, volume 1, by D. Karr (Ithaca: KoM #5, 1985), pp. 17-20]

*Merkabah* (= chariot) mysticism developed out of speculation on and expansion of the visions of Ezekiel¹ and, to a lesser extent, Isaiah and Daniel.² This strain of mysticism meanders through the intertestamental pseudepigrapha³ and even touches corners of gnostic and Qumran texts.⁴

---

1. chapters 1, 8, and 10.
2. Isaiah, chapter 6; Daniel, chapter 2.
3. 1 Enoch 14; The Life of Adam and Eve (including The Apocalypse of Moses); The Apocalypse of Abraham. For translations of these, see James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Volume 1 (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1983). 1 Enoch 14 is particularly important; Gruenwald (AMM, p. 36) says, “…it is the oldest Merkavah vision we know of from outside the canonical Scriptures. … Indeed, one can consider this particular vision a model-vision of Merkavah mysticism.”
Merkabah material and references can be found in shreds, often more provocative than telling, in the Talmud and other rabbinic writings. However, the major concentrated expression of merkabah mysticism is that cluster of writings which has come to be called the hekhalot (= heavenly halls) literature, which is the focus of this paper.

Arguments over the dating of this body of literature continue, but there is general agreement to a range of 200-800 C.E. The bounds and structure of these writings are also matters of dispute, for the notions of titles and fixed contents of a specific canon of hekhalot books appear to be more academic conveniences than reflections of the state of the literature.

Since the ’seventies, scholarly work on the hekhalot texts has increased dramatically, as the publication dates on a clear majority of the books and articles discussed below attest. Before this spate of academic activity, there were in English little more than Gershom Scholem’s works and Hugo Odeberg’s attempt at a critical edition of one of the hekhalot texts to shed light on this oblique collection of writings. Even as this lament is being recalled, no time should be lost in acknowledging Scholem’s inescapable influence on this and all other aspects of the study of Jewish mysticism. Some of Scholem’s conclusions regarding the hekhalot have been challenged, and some of his observations on and characterizations of the


6. A list of Scholem’s works is given below. Morton Smith’s “Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati,” in Biblical and Other Studies, edited by Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963) was another early notice. In the ’forties, Smith translated Hekhalot Rabbati into English (the complete text—not just the second half) which was circulated among scholars in the field but never published. The typescript was corrected by Scholem, whose occasional notes appear in the margins. Scholem mentions Smith’s translation in Jewish Gnosticism..., page 11, note 4.

hekhalot texts have come to seem convenient, imposing order on that which is, in fact, near chaos. Yet, Scholem’s writings on this subject remain some of the clearest and best supported. They are also among the most accessible, not only in their style but in their actual availability. As for Odeberg, his lone work is more problematic. As significant as it was, Odeberg’s treatment of Sefer ha-Hekhalot (Book of the Hekhalot, dubbed by Odeberg “3 Enoch”) is now considered unreliable and misleading on many points. But, as contemporary scholar David Halperin has pointed out, Odeberg’s work has “proved easier to criticize than to emulate,” for critical editions of hekhalot texts—with English translation or not—are few indeed.

Today, however, we are in pretty fair shape to study merkabah mysticism and hekhalot texts, though some of the leading scholars in this field publish in German and, of course, Hebrew. Nevertheless, from the texts and studies now available in English, the persistent reader can certainly gain firm impressions of (i) the contents of the hekhalot texts, (ii) the issues captivating contemporary scholarship regarding the hekhalot texts, and (iii) the place of the hekhalot texts in the history and development of Judaism, early Christianity, and their mysticism.

In the following pages, books, sections of books, and articles on merkabah mysticism and hekhalot literature—including translations—are described. I also discuss the various texts attached, however loosely, with the hekhalot corpus, with indications of sources for translations and studies of them.

8. FACES, p. 364. (See below: Halperin).
9. In German there is Peter Schaefer and his team. Certainly, the most significant work which Schaefer has overseen is Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1981), which presents in the original Hebrew and Aramaic an array of manuscript readings side by side. Synopse was followed by Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur by the same team (1984, same publisher). Soon after, German translations of Synopse appeared (1987 onward, same publisher). Schaefer has also published a collection of his articles—ten in German, three in English—as Hekhalot-Studien (1988, same publisher).
The best general introduction to *hekhalot* and *merkabah* mysticism is Joseph Dan’s *Ancient Jewish Mysticism* (Tel Aviv: MOD [= Ministry of Defense] Books, 1993). Dan reviews all of the major topics, issues, and texts in a manner which does not exclude the non-specialist. Any reader can appreciate this well-grounded overview. Further elaborating on the topics covered in *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism* is the collection of articles which comprises Dan’s *Jewish Mysticism*, Volume One: LATE ANTIQUITY (Northvale/Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998). Many of Dan’s articles listed below have been reprinted in this book (hereafter JM1).

The works of Gershom Scholem form the basis of contemporary scholarship on Jewish mysticism, and, hence, they provide the foundation of subsequent work on *merkabah* mysticism and *hekhalot* texts. Those works by Scholem which address this subject at length are the following:

  - Pages 8-21; pages 373-6 (Merkabah Mysticism); and pp. 377-81 (Metatron)
  - Lecture 2: Merkabah Mysticism and Jewish Gnosticism

---

   a. ascent to the divine world
   b. the mysticism of Hebrew letters
   c. *Sar Torah* (Prince of the Torah) revelations

(*Three Types of Ancient Jewish Mysticism = JM1: Chapter 2.*)
Besides Dan’s works on ancient Jewish mysticism and Scholem’s *Jewish Gnosticism*..., there are a number of studies which focus on the topic of *merkabah/hekhalot* mysticism:


  Arbel’s summary of *hekhalot* and *merkabah* literature and scholarly approaches to it is not as engaging or detailed as, for instance, the introduction in Davila’s *Descenders to the Chariot* (see below). Arbel nicely treats the question, “What is **MYSTICAL** about *hekhalot/merkabah* mysticism?” i.e., what are its “mystical” characteristics and intentions?

  FROM THE SUNY PRESS CATALOGUE (Spring 2003): “While previous scholarship has demonstrated the connection between Hekhalot and Merkavah mysticism and parallel traditions in Rabbinical writings, the Dead Sea Scrolls, apocalyptic, early Christian, and Gnostic sources, this work points out additional mythological traditions that resonate in this literature. Arbel suggests that mythological patterns of expression, as well as themes and models rooted in Near Eastern mythological traditions are employed, in spiritualized fashion, to communicate mystical content.”


  This series of essays shows the relationship between *merkabah* mysticism and rabbinic *midrashim* following, generally, two motifs: the revelation on Mount Sinai and the eschatological rewards of the world to come.


  In the first chapter, Davila provides an excellent summary of the issues and debates in *hekhalot* scholarship. He then makes his case for understanding the *hekhalot* texts as not being mere literary constructs but as describing the experiences of real practitioners, whom Davila likens to shamans, i.e., “religious functionaries,” “intermediaries” seeking “to gain power over the spiritual world.”


  Deutsch gives an account of the relationship between Gnosticism and *merkabah* mysticism using Scholem’s written statements on these as a starting point. He surveys a range of scholarly opinion on issues surrounding these topics, drawing on many of the writers mentioned in this bibliography. Deutsch summarizes his view of Scholem on page 36: “Even though his [Scholem’s] comparative analysis of Gnosticism and Merkabah mysticism is problematic from a number of methodological perspectives, its role as an intellectual catalyst cannot be overstated.”

5

“Within Merkabah mysticism, God is frequently depicted as an exalted and highly remote figure. Thus, Scholem was partly right when he described the gulf between humans and the God in Merkabah mysticism. Yet, Scholem erred when he emphasized the impossibility of closing this gulf—that is, when he defined the God of Merkabah mysticism as absolutely inaccessible or transcendent. How was the distance between human beings and God breached in Merkabah mysticism? The answer to this question requires an appreciation of the paradoxical nature of the angelic vice regent” (Guardians, p. 9). Deutsch discusses Metatron in this role, with comments on Akatriel; he then examines similar figures in Gnosticism (Sabaoth) and Mandaeism (Abathur).


Elior details the traditions and literature leading up to the hekhalot texts. She writes, “Heikhalot literature preserves the living continuation of the sacred service by recovering it from the realm of space and time: the Temple/heikhal is lifted up to the heavens, and the priests serving therein become the ministering angels in the supernal Temples; the sacred service in these heavenly sanctuaries is described explicitly in terms of the rituals of the earthly Temple. This metamorphosis is implemented through the terminology of Merkavah mysticism, combining the hallowed memory of ritual with creative imagination and visionary inspiration, creating a bridge between the ‘revealed’ and the ‘hidden’” (INTRODUCTION, pages 14-15).


Eskola says in the introduction (page 17), “...it will be the main purpose of this work to investigate the relationship between Jewish merkabah mysticism and New Testament exaltation Christology by focusing on the central metaphor of the throne. In this study our interest lies in the occupants of the throne, in enthronements, and in the function of the throne in different contexts.”


“Many statements about Jesus in the Gospel according to John can be paralleled by what is said about Metatron in 3 Enoch and the Son in Valentinian Gnosticism. Perhaps the most striking similarity is that they all are represented as the possessor of the Name of God, the concept of which plays an enormous role in Judaism. As the figure of Metatron appears to be some sort of systemization of and elaboration upon everything that was said about the principal angel in older sources, works outdated even John, it would seem that both Johannine and Gnostic Christology owe to mystical Judaism.” (INTRODUCTION, pages 3-4)

In chapters 4 through 7, passages from Shi’ur Qomah, 3 Enoch, Razo shel Sandalphon (Secret of Sandalphon, a hekhalot-related text), and Hekhalot Rabbati are translated and analyzed.


The first half of the book analyzes the major features of the merkabah tradition; the second half describes the hekhalot texts one by one.


*From Apocalypticism...*is a collection of articles, most previously published. Four of the articles are new, and one appears in English for the first time.


*FACES* is a thorough study which challenges many conclusions and assumptions of previous scholars, tracing merkabah material from the Bible, through the apocalypses and rabbinic literature, concluding with the hekhalot texts. Translations of the text Re’iyot Yeziel (Visions of Ezekiel) and other important segments of hekhalot material are included.

*FACES* is valuable in a way that few books of this ilk are in that Halperin invites the reader to engage in his entire scholarly process, which he lays out in great detail in his 450-page text, two-tiered notes (footnotes and endnotes), seven informative appendices (Appendix I: “Orientation to Rabbinic Sources” is especially helpful), and full reference list (which is divided into sixteen sections according to topic).


This study investigates the references to the merkabah tradition in the Mishna and the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds. (See note 5.)


Chapter 5, “Using Names, Letters, and Praise: The Language of Ascent,” focuses on Hekhalot Rabbati; Chapter 6, “Combining Words and Deeds: Angelic Imprecations in The Book of Secrets,” discusses Sefer ha-Razim. The hekhalot practitioners are considered within the broader setting of the prevailing assumptions—Jewish, Christian, and pagan—of the culture in Late Antiquity concerning religion and ritual.

  *Poetics* offers a translation of *Ma’aseh Merkabah* with a speculative analysis regarding the functions of this text’s “ritual language.”


  The first half of the book (Parts 1 and 2) provides an excellent survey of *merkabah* material and the literature (apocalyptic, non-apocalyptic—including Qumran material, and Christian) clustered around it from Hellenistic times through the first century. Part 2 examines *merkabah* mysticism in some detail to set up an analysis of its connections with Johannine mysticism.


  Kanarfogel tracks the influence and use of *hekhalot* and other mystical and magical material to 12th- and 13th-century Germany and France. His argument is that esoteric teachings and practices spread beyond the Hasidei Ashkenaz to the *tosafists*, rabbinic descendents of Rashi, conventionally considered to have been inclined exclusively toward study of the Talmud.


  DESCENT offers a discussion of the heavenly journey, *yeridah*, literally “descent,” to the *merkabah* in various passages of the *hekhalot* literature. Kuyt outlines the contents of *Hekhalot Rabbati, Hekhalot Zutreti, Ma’aseh Merkabah, Merkabah Rabbah*, 3 Enoch, and one of the Genizah fragments. Translated excerpts from all these are included.


  Lesses concentrates on the adjuration sections of the *hekhalot* material. Along with an analysis of these “ritual performances,” Lesses presents a survey of current scholarship (covering many of the authors mentioned in the present paper). Further, she attempts to set the adjurations of the *hekhalot* into the milieu of the Greco-Egyptian ritual literature of late antiquity.

In the first section of *A Transparent Illusion*, Morray-Jones builds upon (and occasionally corrects) comments regarding the “water test” passages in his own earlier two-part article, “Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1-12): The Jewish Mystical background of Paul’s Apostolate, Part 1: The Jewish Sources” and “Part 2: Paul’s Heavenly Ascent and Its Significance (both in *Harvard Theological Review* 86, Cambridge: 1993). Thereafter, Morray-Jones offers an in-depth analysis of the “water vision episode” within the context of the *hekhalot* literature: *Hekhalot Rabbati* and, especially, *Hekhalot Zutarti*. An extensive appendix discusses “Solomon and the Queen of Sheba,” a story which “appears to derive from the same traditional background and to be related in some manner to the water vision episode itself” (page 230).


HMG is a detailed look at a selection of *hekhalot* texts. Instead of summarizing each text in turn, Schaefer organizes his analysis thematically, considering each text’s notion of God, angels, and man. He clarifies the roles of two distinct motifs: (i) ascent through the *hekhalot* to the throne of glory, and (ii) the adjuration—either to God or to one of his angels.


*Mystical Prayer...* gives a full treatment and translation of *Ma’aseh Merkabah* (Work of the Chariot).


*Scholastic Magic* analyzes and translates the *Sar Torah* (Prince of the Torah) texts with an eye toward the cultural environment which produced them.
Translations and References

The Hekhalot Corpus

The number of *hekhalot* texts in translation has grown slowly over the years. Alas, here we enter directly into the question of what *is* and what *is not* a member of the *hekhalot* family; the canons offered by various scholars differ. For instance, Schaefer's *Synopse* includes some items which some commentators find dubious, namely, *The Sword of Moses* and *Seder Rabba di Bereshit*. One well-known text, *The Visions of Ezekiel*, while almost always included on lists of *hekhalot* texts, is clearly of a character different from the so-called “core group.”

Discussions regarding which texts belong to the *hekhalot* canon have progressed along several lines:

1. Texts which have long been counted among the *hekhalot* are now thought not to belong, for example, *The Visions of Ezekiel*.
2. Magical works, such as *The Sword of Moses* and *Sefer ha-Razim*, are being drawn closer to the *hekhalot*.
3. Some works are being wholly reconsidered in that they might not be works at all but rather of one genre or another, as, for instance, the *Shi’ur Qomah* and *Sar Torah* texts.

As mentioned already, even the titles of these “books” are late inventions which have become conventions, used even by the scholars who refute their validity.

Using the lists of *hekhalot* given by a number of contemporary scholars, below is a reference outline of sources on various *hekhalot* titles, erring in favor of inclusion.
The “Core Group” of *Hekhalot* Texts

A. *Hekhalot Rabbati* (HR) [The Greater Hekhalot]

Translations:

1. HR chapters 15-29, prepared by Lauren Grodner, in David R. Blumenthal’s *Understanding Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1978), where it is referred to as “Pirkei Heikalot.”
2. HR chapters 1, 2, and 16-26, in Aryeh Kaplan’s *Meditation and Kabbalah* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1982).
4. HR Chapter 5 and 6 (up to the First Apocalypse), “annotated translation” = APPENDIX C of Ra’an An Busch’s dissertation, *From Martyr to Mystic*; see below.

References to HR throughout the following:

- Gruenwald. AMM.
- Schaefer. HMG.
- Kuyt. DESCENT.
- Lesses. POWER.

See also


B. *Hekhalot Zutreti, or Zutarti* (HZ) [THE LESSER PALACES]
Translators: Two editions of HZ in the original Hebrew and Aramaic have appeared (i) Schaefer’s *Synopse*, and (ii) a problematic “critical edition” by Rachel Elior (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1982). For a review of these two editions of HZ, see David Halperin’s “A New Edition of the Hekhalot Literature,” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 104, no. 3 (1984). There is no complete version of HZ in English; many important passages are given in Halperin’s FACES.

References: FACES, AMM, HMG, DESCENT, POWER, Scholem’s *Jewish Gnosticism*, and Morray-Jones’ *Transparent Illusion*.

C. *Sefer Hekhalot* = Hebrew Book of Enoch = 3 Enoch (3E) [BOOK OF PALACES]
Translators:

References: AMM, HMG, POWER, and the following articles by P.S. Alexander:

D. *Merkabah Rabba* (MR) [THE GREAT CHARIOT]

There are a few paragraphs of MR translated in Appendix One of Janowitz’ *Poetics of Ascent* (noted above) and Cohen’s *Shi’ur Qomah* (see below: F. Shi’ur Qomah).

With MR, we come to the first of many texts on which there is very little. We must turn to HMG, Kuyt’s outline in DESCENT, and Lesses’ references in POWER. Gruenwald’s chapter on MR in AMM begins with a description of material which probably does not belong to it, namely, a portion of the *Sar ha-Panim* (ShP, Prince of the Presence, or Countenance). Peter Schaefer treats ShP as an inde-pendent text in “Die Beschworung des Sar ha-Panim: Kritische Edition und Übersetzung” (The Adjuration of the Prince of the Countenance: Critical Edition and Translation), originally in *Frankfurter Judaische Beiträge*, vol. 6 (1978); reprinted in Schaefer’s *Hekhalot-Studien*. Of course, Schaefer’s translation is in German, but all is not lost. The same text has been put into English twice.


• by Michael Swartz in *Scholastic Magic* (described above) on pp. 136-142.

Further, Lesses discusses ShP in numerous places and outlines its contents in POWER, pp. 415-17.

E. *Ma’aseh Merkabah* (MM) [WORK OF THE CHARIOT]

Translations:

- Janowitz, Naomi. *The Poetics of Ascent*.
- Swartz, Michael. *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism*.

References: Along with the two books listed under “Translations” which both offer an analysis of the text, see AMM, HMG, POWER, and Daniel Abrams, “Ma’aseh Merkabah as a Literary Work: The Reception of the Hekhalot Traditions by German Pietist and Kabbalistic Reinterpretation,” in *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, Volume 5, No. 4 (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1998).
F. Shi'ur Qomah (SQ) [Measure of the Height {of the Divine Body}]

David Halperin suggests (FACES, p. 364) that SQ “probably ought to be considered a generic term for materials describing God’s organs rather than a single texts.” Martin S. Cohen (in his book listed below) holds out for SQ’s having been an independent, freestanding work, complete with a lost urtext looming in back of the extant versions. SQ has been included here in the “Core Group” because nearly all of the texts already discussed contain SQ material: HR, HZ, 3E, and MR.

Translations:


Texts Associated with the *Hekhalot* Corpus

The texts listed in the following set are those which are usually included in summaries and lists of *hekhalot* literature.

G. *Re’uyot Yehezkiel* (RY) [VISIONS OF EZEKIEL]

Translations:

- Halperin, David. *FACES*: Chapter VIII, Section A.

References: The best source for information on RY is *FACES*.

H. *Masekhet Hekhalot* (MH) [TREATISE OF THE PALACES]

Gruenwald’s chapter (AMM) on MH begins with these encouraging words: “*Masekhet Hekhalot* is the most frequently published Hekhalot text we have.” Alas, this comment reflects the state of the text in Hebrew, though there are two German translations: (i) by August Wunsche in *Aus Israelis Lehrhallen III* (1909); and (ii) by Klaus Herrmann, *Massakhet Hekhalot: Edition, Ubersetzung und Kommentar* [TEXTE UND STUDIEN ZUM ANTIKEN JUDENTUM, 39], Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1994. There is also a French translation by Nicolas Sed, “Deux documents sur la kabbale: *Le Commentaire sur le Sepher Yesirah* de Moise ben Nahman et le *Traite des Heykalot*,” in *Documents oubliés sur l’alchimie, la kabbale et Guillaume Postel*, offerts, a l’occasion de son 90e anniversaire, a Francois Secret par ses eleves et amis, “Scientific editor”: Sylvain Matton (Geneva: Librarie Droz, 2001).

I. *Hekhalot* fragments, or Cairo Geniza(h) fragments (CG)

In 1968-9, Gruenwald published (in Hebrew) “New Passages from Hekhalot Literature,” in *Tarbiz*, vol. 38, no. 4; these were the newly-discovered Geniza fragments. They have been published subsequently in Peter Schaefer’s *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (see note 9). Beyond Gruenwald’s remarks in AMM, see *FACES*, DESCENT, POWER, Swartz’ *Scholastic Magic*, and Jonathan Seidel’s article, “Possession and Exorcism in the Magical Texts of the Cairo Geniza,” in *Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present*, edited by Matt Goldish (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003).

J. Fragments on Physiognomy, Chiromancy, and Metoposcopy

A number of these fragments have been published by Gruenwald (in *Tarbiz*, vol. 40, 1970) and Scholem (in *Sefer Assaf*, Jerusalem: 1953), in
Hebrew. One fragment is discussed and translated into German by Schaefer in “Ein neues Fragment zur Metopskopie und Chiromantik” (in Hekhalot-Studien). Not only is there nothing of these texts in Eng-lish translation, but Gruenwald (in AMM) never really gets around to detailing their contents. See Scholem’s article, “Chiromancy,” in Kabbalah.

The list of hekhalot texts up to this point contains all items listed by Scholem in Jewish Gnosticism (pp. 5-7), plus the Genizah fragments which Gruenwald included in his account in AMM. Gruenwald also added

K. Sefer ha-Razim (ShR) [BOOK OF THE MYSTERIES]
Translation:

References:

The following items are frequently mentioned with the hekhalot cluster:

L. Baraita de Ma’aseh Bereshit, or Seder Rabbah di Bereshit (BMB) [TEACHING ON THE WORK OF CREATION, or GREAT ORDER OF CREATION]
Translation:
- In Meltzer’s Secret Garden, pp. 3-20. This translation appears to have been done from the French of N. Sed in Revue des Etudes juives, vol. 124 (1965).

Reference:

M. Harba de Moshe (HdM) [SWORD OF MOSES]
Translation:
- Gaster, Moses. The Sword of Moses. (see above: Section D.)
N. *Ottiyot [ALPHABET]* of Rabbi Akiba (ORA)
Translations (excerpts):

O. *Sar ha-Panim* (ShP) [PRINCE OF THE PRESENCE, or COUNTENANCE]
Refer to Section D above (MR); further, see
- POWER, pp. 190-203 and numerous other references.

P. *Tosefta* to the *Targum* on Ezekiel (TE)
See FACES, pp. 278-283.
A Selection of Articles and Books


  


______. “The Pilgrimage to the Merkavah: An Interpretation of Early Jewish Mysticism,” in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, vol. 6, nos. 1-2, edited by Joseph Dan (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1987)


De Conick, April D. *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* [Supplement to VIGILIAE CHRISTIANAE, 33], Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996.


Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought—see “Dan, Joseph (ed.)”


______. “Mystical Descents” in

• Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys, edited by J. Collins and M. Fishbane (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); and


Appendix: *Hekhalot Literature and Magic*

With the inclusion of such items as *Sefer ha-Razim*, the *Sword of Moses*, and *Sar ha-Panim* in clusters of texts associated with merkabah/hekhalot mysticism, Jewish magic takes several steps closer to the rabbinic core of these traditions. Certainly, the convenient notion of a neat separation between ascent texts and magic texts can no longer be sustained. Of late, the tendency among scholars is to dismiss such loaded terms as “magic” (a negative term—vs. “theurgy” or “religion,” positive terms) and “mysticism” to concentrate on the methods and aims of Jewish, usually along with early Christian and pagan (Greco-Roman), rituals and how these reflect the mindset and beliefs of their era. On this trend, see, for example, Rebecca Macy Lesses’ *Ritual Practices to Gain Power* (summary statement on pages 11-13), James R. Davila’s *Descenders to the Chariot* (CHAPTER 2 discusses the difficulties of the words “mysticism,” “magic,” and “shamanism”), and Naomi Janowitz’ *Icons of Power* (INTRODUCTION).

To begin an approach to antique Jewish magic, there are some fine summary articles:


---

* A bibliography of Jewish magic prepared by Alex Jassen and Scott Noegel at University of Washington, which is far more extensive than mine here (and not limited to English sources), is on-line at [http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/jmbtoc.htm](http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/jmbtoc.htm). Works are divided according to period and topic.
Jewish Magic—A Selection of Sources


- Volume 1, pp. 338-55, “Wisdom of the Chaldeans”
- Volume 1, pp. 365-68, “A Note on a Hebrew Amulet”
- Volume 1, pp. 387-461, “Samaritan Phylacteries and Amulets”
- Volume 2, pp. 1005-38, “Two Thousand Years of a Charm against a Child-Stealing Witch”


Goldmerstein, L. “Magical Sacrifices in the Jewish Kabbala,” in *Folklore* 7 (1896; includes a translated extract of *Sefer Raziel Hamalakh*).


Hirschman, Jack. *The Book of Noah* [TREE TEXTS: 1]. Berkeley: Berkeley/Tree, 1975 (selections, including two hymns, from *Sefer Raziel*).


Smith, Morton. “The Jewish Elements in the Magical Papyri,” in
- *Society of Biblical Literature 1986 Seminar Papers*, no. 25; and

______. “A Note on Some Jewish Assimilationists: The Angels (P. Berlin 5025b, P. Louvre 2391)” in
- *Journal of the Ancient Near East Society*, 16-17 (1984); and
- (idem) *Studies in the Cult of Yahveh*, Volume 2 (see above)


