

Some Forlorn Writings of a Forgotten Ashkenazi Prophet

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OWING TO RECENT STUDIES on Haside Ashkenaz, especially by Joseph Dan, and the publication of some of the Ashkenazi material from manuscripts, we have a better picture of the literature produced from the early decades of the thirteenth century.¹ Of paramount importance to this literature is the distinction Dan drew between different schools emerging out of the Ashkenazi masters. He proposed to distinguish between the main line represented by the writings of the Kalonymite school of R. Yehudah he-Hasid and R. Eleazar of Worms, on the one hand, and the school, which he described as the “school of the special cherub,” on the other.² In addition, he drew attention to, and eventually printed and analyzed, material that did not belong to either of the two schools and is found in anonymous manuscripts.³

More recently, in an innovative article dealing with the occurrence of the syntagm “Yeshu‘a Sar ha-panim,” Yehudah Liebes has noted disparate anonymous writings found mostly in manuscripts, which belong to an Ashkenazi school, that he called the “circle of *Sefer ha-ḥesbek*.”⁴ He

1. See especially Dan’s *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1968); *Studies in Ashkenazi-Hasidic Literature* (Hebrew; Ramat Gan, 1975); and *The “Unique Cherub” Circle* (Tübingen, 1999).

2. Dan, *Esoteric Theology*, 156–63; *Studies*, 89–111; *The “Unique Cherub” Circle*, passim.

3. See, e.g., *Esoteric Theology*, 143–63.

4. Yehuda Liebes, “The Angels of the Shofar and *Yeshua Sar ha-panim*,” *Early Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1987), 171–96. This view has been also adopted by Elliot R. Wolfson, “Metatron and Shi‘ur Komah in the Writings of the German Pietists,” *Mysticism, Magic and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Hasidism*, ed. K. E. Grözinger, J. Dan (Berlin, 1995), 61. It should be mentioned that this important article, dealing with a concrete possible impact of Jewish Christianity in medieval Judaism, has been ignored in the new wave of specula-

enumerated in his footnotes some of the writings belonging to this school but did not enter into any sustained bibliographical discussion; neither was the identity of the author(s) belonging to this school of any importance for his argument.

In light of these scholarly developments, I will try succinctly, and preliminarily, to identify the author of those writings and add two longer treatises to the literature belonging to that "circle."

1. SEFER HA-NAVON

An anonymous treatise characterized as dealing with the unity of God and an interpretation on Shema' Israel has been printed by Joseph Dan as *Sefer ha-navon*.⁵ He identified the treatise as belonging to Haside Ashkenaz, though not as a writing belonging to the main circle related to R. Yehudah he-Hasid and R. Eleazar of Worms nor to the circle of the Special Cherub. The first line of this anonymous book reads in the original Hebrew:

זה ספר נביאים וספר הזנון וספר כסא הכבוד

The translation would be: "This is book of prophets, and the book of the Wise and the book of the Seat of Glory." This is, *prima facie*, a rather simple line that hardly attracts the attention of the reader or even of the editor. The unusual form *sefer nevi'im* may be understood as a copyist error. However, for a more stubborn reader, this line may become the key to opening an entire investigation. It is obvious that the words *nevi'im* and *ha-navon* amount to the same numerical value (113) and this equivalence explains the elliptical form of *nevi'im* rather than *ha-nevi'im*. The phrase *kisse' ha-kavod*—as it is printed—amounts to 118, but a spelling without the "heh" would amount precisely to 113. Given the fact that the book itself resorts tens of times to *gematria'ot*, our recourse to this technique to interrogate this line is certainly warranted. In any case, none of the three syntagms adequately describes the content of the book: it deals basically with an interpretation of Shema' Israel, though many quotes from the Hekhalot literature, especially the *Shi'ur komah* and other sources, are adduced for this purpose. Though the seat of Glory is indeed

tion dealing with Christian influences on early medieval Jewish mysticism, and systematically neglected by Dan's analyses of Haside Ashkenaz. See, e.g., Joseph Dan, *Jewish Mysticism, Late Antiquity*, (Northvale, N.J., 1998), 234. See, however, Daniel Abrams, "The Boundaries of Divine Ontology: The Inclusion and Exclusion of Metatron in the Godhead," *Harvard Theological Review* 87.3 (1994): 317.

5. Dan, *Studies*, 78, 112–33.

mentioned in the short treatise, it does not play an important role in the general economy of the book. Thus, it is hard to understand why the author would use those titles, and why he would refer to such a small book by three different titles. In any case it seems that he is referring to a single book by these titles, since he opens the sentence with the word *zeb* (this), namely, a singular form.

A simple answer for these quandaries would be that the author intended to make a special point by resorting to at least two, in fact three *gematria*'ot. But let me postpone the proposal that may solve the quandary to a later phase of the discussion.

In one of his many interpretations on material from *Shi'ur komab*, the anonymous author writes about the fire encircling the divine stature: "*Karsimanab zar'ag* in gematria is *Shekbinab nikkar*, as well as *hineb nikar ba-mal'akb ba-dover bi*."⁶

All the three units amount to 665. This is indeed quite an artificial gematria, which is used in order to "make sense" of the names used in *Shi'ur komab*. I have found a numerological move in another Ashkenazi text, *Merkavab shelemab*, where it is written: "*Karsimanab* in gematria is *ba-Shekbinab*,⁷ because it [the fire] is around the Shekbinah, and *zarg'a* in gematria is *nikkar*,⁸ because it is visible to the angels but the Holy One Blessed be He is not seen by the angels."⁹

Though not totally identical, the two texts are quite similar and, to the best of my knowledge, no other parallel to them is found elsewhere in the material with which I am acquainted. Unlike *Sefer ha-navon*, the passage from *Merkavab shelemab* is attributed to a certain R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo ha-Navi.¹⁰ Can the textual affinity, and the identification of the *Merkavab shelemab* passage as written by R. Nehemiah, help us solve the quandary of the gematria discussed above? My answer is positive: A simple calculation will show that the consonants of the name Nehemiah amount in gematria to 113, while the second part of the phrase, *ba-navi*', corresponds to *nevi'im* in the title. Those affinities are, in my opinion, hardly accidental, and I see it as quite plausible that the author of *Sefer*

6. Dan, *Studies*, 131. It goes without saying that the vocalization of those names I use here are pure conjectures, but what is salient for our discussion are the consonants.

7. The *gematria* amounts to 385, in both cases, if we write *shekbinab* and not *ba-shekbinab*.

8. Both words amount to 280.

9. *Merkavab shelemab*, ed. S. Mussayoff (Jerusalem, 1926), fol. 30b.

10. Ibid, fol. 31b. On this figure, see the remarks of E. E. Urbach, "Sefer 'Arugat ha-Bosem by R. Abraham ben Azriel" (Hebrew) *Tarbiz* 10 (1939): 50–51.

ba-navon hinted at his own name in the opening line by means of the technique that is so characteristic of his writings, namely, by means of gematria. With this conclusion in mind let me turn to another anonymous Ashkenazi text.

2. THE COMMENTARY ON HAFTARAH

In two manuscripts there is an anonymous commentary on the Haftarah dealing with many issues connected to the first chapter of Ezekiel.¹¹ This text is replete with interpretations on topics in *Shi'ur komah* in the vein of R. Nehemiah in *Sefer ba-navon*. Let me adduce three examples that point to affinities between the two treatises. In *Sefer ba-navon*, the Hekhalot literature is referred to as *be-sefer hekbale kodesh*.¹² I did not find this type of reference except in the anonymous commentary.¹³ Moreover, as I have pointed out elsewhere, in those two books alone the name of the right hand of the *Shi'ur komah* is Rahavi'el.¹⁴ Last but not least, in *Sefer ba-navon*, the term *ne'elam* occurs in the following sentence: "YHWH is on the seat of Glory, at the beginning of the letters: *Yekaro ba-ne'elam ve-nistar ba-yibud. Ve-nistar ba-yibud*—that it is hidden even in comparison to the seat of Glory, which equals in gematria to *ba-ne'elam*."¹⁵

The editor of *Sefer ba-navon* claimed that the text is not accurate, and this is the reason why the gematria does not fit.¹⁶ According to my calculations it nevertheless fits: *ba-ne'elam* = 195 = *ke-neged kisse' ba-kavod*. This same gematria of 195 occurs also in the *Commentary on the Haftarah*. In a discussion about the four beasts of the seat of Glory the author wrote:

And the gematria of *ba-kets*,¹⁷ because he revealed the end to the Messiah and he also revealed it to the Beast. And the gematria *ba-tuits*,

11. MS. Berlin Or. 942, fols. 149b–157b, and MS. Roma-Angelica 46. See M. Idel, "The Concept of the Torah in Heikhalot Literature and Its Metamorphoses in Kabbalah" (Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981): 47–48, where I drew attention to the affinity between this commentary and *Sefer ba-navon*. See also my *Absorbing Perfection: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn., 2002), 129–30. It should be mentioned that in MS. Berlin 942, there is material belonging to R. Moshe Azriel ben Eleazar ha-Darshan, an author who was acquainted with R. Nehemiah's writings. See Gershon Scholem, *Reshit ha-kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1948), 199. See also below (note 56) where a quote in the name of R. Nehemiah is presumably taken from this *Commentary on the Haftarah*.

12. See, e.g., Dan, *Studies*, 124, 126, 127, 129, 131, 132, 133. The phrase *hekbale ha-kodesh* occurs also in the material found in *Merkavah shelemah*, fol. 32a, which belongs to the literature we are dealing with here.

13. See MS. Berlin, Or. 942, fols. 153b, 155b.

14. See Idel, "The Concept of the Torah," 47–48.

15. Dan, *Studies*, 126.

16. Dan, *Studies*, 126, n. 58.

17. *Ha-kets* = *ba-tuits* = *nekamah* = *ba-ne'elam* = 195.

because the *tsits* of Aharon is kept for the *'Ofanim*, and in gematria is *Nekamah*, because Metatron will take revenge of the nations of the world. And in gematria [it amounts to] *ba-ne'elam*, because *ba-ne'elam ba-gadol* [the great hidden one] sits on it.¹⁸

In both cases, God is called by the epithet that functions as a noun, *ba-ne'elam*, the hidden—which is quite an exceptional term. Therefore, I see the anonymous *Commentary on the Haftarah* as another treatise of the same R. Nehemiah. As we will see in the next section, the term *ne'elam*, referring to Metatron, occurs also in a third composition that this author wrote.

3. THE COMMENTARY ON THE SEVENTY NAMES OF METATRON

The best-known text (and most widespread in manuscript and printed form) of R. Nehemiah is an anonymous *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*. In a testimony written toward the end of the thirteenth century by R. Moshe Azriel ben R. Eleazar ha-Darshan from Erfurt, a descendant of R. Yehudah he-Hasid, we read:

Metatron is called Higron gem[atria] 'Ezer, because he cannot do anything if the Holy One Blessed be He, will not help him . . . and all are interpreted in the book of [R.] Nehemiah the son of [Solomon], blessed be the memory of the righteous.¹⁹

As Scholem has pointed out, the content of the book referred in this text has to do with “the names of Metatron that are mentioned in the book of *Shi'ur komah*.”²⁰

To the best of my knowledge no one has attempted to check the possible implications of this indication. Several versions of an anonymous commentary on the *Seventy Names of Metatron* are extant and have been dealt with by scholars more than any other of the topics dealt with by R. Nehemiah.²¹ I will attempt now to adduce some proofs for the affinities between these anonymous commentaries and the above-mentioned writings of R. Nehemiah.

18. Fol. 155a.

19. Scholem, *Reshit ha-kabbalah*, 201. I adopted Scholem's filling of the blank spaces.

20. Scholem, *Reshit ha-kabbalah*, 201, n. 1.

21. About the various versions of this treatise, see Dan, *Esoteric Theology*, 219–224; Dan, “The Seventy Names of Metatron,” *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C (Jerusalem, 1982), 19–23; Liebes, “The Angels of the Shofar.” For a bibliography related to this treatise, see the comprehensive material adduced by Abrams, “The Boundaries of Divine Ontology,” 301, n. 33,

A. *The Menorah and the Beating*

In the *Commentary on the Seventy Names* it is written that:

On high before the seat of Glory the Menorah is hanging and the high priest, the prince of the face,²² is lighting the stars from it. Because this is the way the stars are made. Every day the sun is beaten so that it will rise but it refuses to rise because of the wicked who are worshipping it. But when it is beaten seven, great luminous, and illumining stars emerge from it like the light of the sun during the seven days of creation. That Menorah has been shown by the Holy One, Blessed be He, to Moses.²³

Let me compare this passage to what we find in the *Commentary on the Haftarah*:

When the Holy One, blessed be He beats the beasts, sparks emerge from them and Metatron takes them and prepares candles from them, and out of the surplus of the candles he prepares those stars and he keeps them. When an infant is born from the womb of his mother, Metatron goes and prepares a star for him. And that star will exist as long as the man exists. And a Menorah is found in the front of the Holy One blessed be He, and every hour candles prepared from the sparks found on it.²⁴

Though not identical, the two passages reflect a combination of elements that is not common in the literatures I am acquainted with.

302–05; Abrams, “‘Sod kol ha-sodot’: The View of Glory and the Intention of the Prayer in the Writings of R. Eleazar of Worms and its Reverberations in Other Writings” (Hebrew), *Da’at* 34 (1995): 61–81; and the various discussions of Wolfson, “Metatron,” and Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 85–86. Abrams in “The Boundaries,” 301–5, pointed out convergences between a longer version of this commentary and the esoteric theories of R. Eleazar and concluded that these versions may be the elaborations or accretions of different compilers. This issue requires additional investigation.

22. In this treatise it is Metatron. See, e.g., par. 7 fol. 2a.

23. *Sefer ha-ḥesbek*, ed. Y. M. Epstein (Lemberg, 1865), par. 8, fol. 2a. See also 56, fol. 7b. For another affinity between the *Commentary on the Haftarah* and a version of the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, see Idel, “The Concept of the Torah,” 42, n. 53.

24. MS. Berlin 942, fol. 153b.

B. *Yeḥeyfiyah*, the End and the Revenge

As seen above, in the *Commentary on the Haftarah* there is a gematria of *ba-kets* = *ba-tsits* = *ba-nakam*. Before that gematria there is a sentence as follows: “*Yeḥeyfiyah*²⁵ and it is the name of Metatron . . . and in gematria *ba-kets*.”²⁶ A similar passage appears in the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*: “*Amasiyah* in gematria is *Yeḥeyfiyah* and also *ba-kets* because there is no angel in heaven that knows the end but this angel . . . and in gematria this equals *ba-tsits*.”²⁷ Furthermore, in another paragraph, it is said that “*Yeḥeyfiyah* in gematria is *katseb*, because he is the prince of the Torah which has no end . . . and also *ba-ne‘elam*, because he is more hidden than the supernal servant angels and also *nekamah*, because whoever knows the seventy names can take revenge upon the nations.”²⁸ Elsewhere in the same book, the issue of revenge occurs in the context of Metatron and the end.²⁹ The affinities between the ways in which the two books deal with these topics are quite substantial.

C. *Metatron/Enoch as the Pillar of the World*

Last but not least, in the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, we read of the following tradition: “*Alaliyah* in gematria is *Bore‘o* because he seizes the entire world in his fist and he hangs upon the Creator.”³⁰ Immediately afterward we find in the same treatise: “*Tabasiyah* . . . in gematria is a righteous one who comes to me who is the righteous³¹ one who is the foundation of the world”³² because he sustains the pillar³³ which is called righteous and the entire world is suffering³⁴ with him.”³⁵

25. Also this word amounts to 195.

26. MS. Berlin 942, fols. 154b–155a.

27. *Sefer ba-ḥesbek*, par. 52, fol. 6a.

28. *Sefer ba-ḥesbek*, par. 36, fol. 5a. I wonder whether the description of God as *ba-seter*, in *Merkavah shelemah*, fol. 23b, in another passage of R. Nehemiah, does not mean something parallel to the *ne‘elam*.

29. *Sefer ba-ḥesbek*, par. 26, fol. 4a.

30. *Sefer ba-ḥesbek*, par. 49, fol. 6b. See also *ibid*, par. 5, fol. 1b., par. 42, fl. 5b. On the sources of this view in Hekhalot literature and their parallel to mosaics related to Apollo/Helios, I will elaborate elsewhere.

31. Prov 10.25. Righteousness plays a paramount role in the writings of R. Nehemiah, and I will address this issue elsewhere.

32. *Tabasiyah* = 543 = *Tsaddik ba’ alay Yeod ‘Olam*.

33. See Bḥag 12b; *Midrash Tehillim*, on Ps 136.5 (ed. Shlomo Buber; Vilnius, 1891), 520.

34. This is a pun on the Hebrew verb of *ṣ-b-l*, which means both to sustain and to suffer.

35. *Sefer ba-ḥesbek*, par. 50, fol. 6b.

Elsewhere the author wrote as follows: "Metatron bears the world by his great power³⁶ and he depends upon the finger of God."³⁷

In the *Commentary on the Haftarah* we have a similar stance: "The pillar that sustains the world is called Tsadik, and he sustains it by his right hand, as it is written 'The righteous is the foundation of the world.'"³⁸

It should be mentioned that the *Sefer ha-navon* is found in MS. Roma-Angelica 46, and in MS. Berlin-Tübingen 239, and in both manuscripts, a version of the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron* is also found. As mentioned above, in MS. Roma-Angelica the *Commentary on the Haftarah* is also found. In my opinion, this fact points again to the affinity between the two treatises. Furthermore, at the beginning of MS. Roma-Angelica 46, fols. 1a–18a, there is another treatise, authored by R. Moshe Azriel ben Eleazar ha-Darshan, a master who mentioned R. Nehemiah explicitly.³⁹ It seems that this manuscript preserved not only three writings of R. Nehemiah found together but also the book of a person close to his time, some generations later, in which he has been mentioned.

On the other hand, elsewhere in the same manuscript a certain R. Troestlin the prophet is mentioned as the author of a commentary on the names of Metatron.⁴⁰ Gershom Scholem has drawn attention to commentaries on other poems found in manuscripts.⁴¹ Indeed, Scholem states in another place that R. Troestlin the prophet should be identified with R. Nehemiah the prophet.⁴²

36. This phrase occurs in the context of God, *Sefer ha-ḥesbek*, par. 33, fol. 5a.

37. *Sefer ha-ḥesbek*, par. 24, fol. 4a. See also Abrams, "The Boundaries," 301–2.

38. MS. Berlin Or. 942, fol. 154a. See also Wolfson, "Metatron," 78. Wolfson's suggestion in *Through a Speculum that Shines* (Princeton, 1995), 259, n. 304, that the recurring pillar motif of this "school" is a phallic symbol mistakenly imports kabbalistic sexual symbolism into a type of literature, which does not operate with it. R. Nehemiah preserved a view in which Metatron and other angels operate in some form of Atlas, as I will show in some detail elsewhere. See n. 62 below.

39. The material has been printed and analyzed by Scholem, *Reshit ha-kabbalah*, 195–238, and translated into English with some paraphrastic discussions in Dan, *The "Unique Cherub" Circle*, 241–51. More pertinent material and a more adequate edition of part of the material is found in Daniel Abrams, "The 'Unity of God' of R. Eleazar ha-Darshan" (Hebrew), *Kobez 'al Yad* 12 (1994): 149–60, which is ignored in Dan's later book. See also n. 64 below. For a detailed description of the treatises found in this late-thirteenth-century manuscript, see Klaus Herrmann, *Massekhet bekhalot* (Tübingen, 1992), 57–60.

40. See Scholem, *Reshit ha-kabbalah*, 206. As Scholem pointed out, Troestlin is a nickname for Menahem, a name quite close to Nehemiah.

41. Scholem, *Reshit ha-kabbalah*, 206. See also his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1967), 88, 370, n. 21.

42. See *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. A. Arkush, ed. R. J. Z. Werblowsky (Princeton and Philadelphia, 1987), 239 n. 86.

4. COMMENTARIES ON KALIR AND ON THE NAME OF
FORTY-TWO LETTERS

In 1926, Shlomo Mussayoff printed portions of an important manuscript in his possession that dealt with some parts of Hekhalot literature together with some Ashkenazi material. In *Merkavah shelemah*, between fols. 22b and 33b at the bottom of those pages, there is material that deals with commentaries on a variety of topics in a manner that is reminiscent of the three treatises that we have discussed above. Toward the end of this material the name of R. Nehemiah the prophet is mentioned, as has been pointed out above.⁴³ Yehudah Liebes already observed the affinity between the materials found in most of those passages⁴⁴ and what he called the “circle of *Sefer ha-ḥeshbek*” and then described those pages.⁴⁵ These folios include: (1) fol. 22b–27b, a truncated commentary on one of the poems of the Kalir;⁴⁶ (2) fols. 27b–31a, two short and truncated commentaries on the name of forty-two letters; and (3) fols. 30b, 32a–33b, a truncated commentary on a short passage from *Shi'ur komah*. The material in the last two pages is parallel to a passage from *Sefer ha-navon*.⁴⁷ In line with the above discussions about the righteous, the pillar, and the angel, we also find in the *Merkavah shelemah* a text to this effect. Indeed, Liebes already drew attention to this affinity between our text and the *Seventy Names of Metatron*.⁴⁸

5. ANOTHER COMMENTARY ON THE NAME OF
FORTY-TWO LETTERS

As pointed out by Liebes, at the end of the printed version of *Sefer Raziel ha-Mal'akh*, another version of a commentary on the name of forty-two

43. *Merkavah shelemah*, fol. 31b. See also fol. 32a.

44. On fol. 30a of *Merkavah shelemah* there is a quote that includes a passage from Sa'adya Gaon's *Sefer ha-emunot*, which may be an addition to the material from the circle, since some masters belonging to Haside Ashkenaz are mentioned, a practice not found in any of the other writings discussed above. See R. Abraham ben Azriel, *Arugat ha-bosem*, ed. E. E. Urbach (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1963), 4:78, n. 41; and Wolfson, *Speculum*, 232.

45. Liebes, “The Angels of Shofar,” 186, n. 20.

46. See Liebes, “The Angels of Shofar,” 186, n. 20. In *ibid.*, 173–74, Liebes analyzes a passage from this commentary. Asi-Farber's suggestion that on fol. 23b there is a passage, which belongs to R. Eleazar of Worms, is not plausible. See her “Concept of the Merkavah in the Thirteenth Century Jewish Esotericism” (Hebrew; Ph. D. Dissertation, Jerusalem, 1986), 237. See also Wolfson, *Speculum*, 262, n. 315, and n. 59 below. For a suggestion that R. Eleazar of Worms or one of his students contributed to or even wrote the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron*, see Abrams, “The Boundaries,” 303, n. 39.

47. Dan, *Studies*, 125, nn. 33–34.

48. Liebes, “The Angels of the Shofar,” 190, n. 51. Cf. Wolfson, “Metatron,” 78.

letters is extant, which differs from the two versions mentioned above, and it too belongs to the same body of literature.⁴⁹

6. A SHORT COMMENTARY ON THE NAME OF SEVENTY-TWO LETTERS

This is mentioned by Liebes and already printed in Prague.⁵⁰

7. ANGELOLOGICAL, MAGICAL, AND LITURGICAL MATERIAL

This is found in the different parts of the important codex MS. British Library 752,⁵¹ and was referred to by Liebes, in the name of Asi Farber-Ginat, as belonging to the "circle."⁵² Interestingly enough, the term *Yeshu'a*, which appears there, fol. 36a, is related to the biblical book of Nehemiah. It should be pointed out that in this manuscript, there is material that comes from the school of R. Moshe Azriel ben Eleazar ha-Darshan,⁵³ a fact that parallels what we noted above about MS. Roma-Angelica 46.

8. COMMENTARIES ON PIYUTIM

We have seen above that in the *Merkavah shelemah*, a fragment of a commentary of the poem of the Kalir has been printed. Liebes has pointed

49. Liebes, "The Angels of the Shofar," 186, n. 13, 187, n. 20.

50. Liebes, "The Angels of the Shofar," 191, n. 54. See *Keneh hokhmah*, (Prague, 1610), fol. 27a.

51. On the content of this manuscript, the identity of its transmitter, and the history of its content, see the debate between Israel Weinstock, "The Discovery of Abu Aharon of Baghdad's Legacy of Secrets" (Hebrew) *Tarbiz* 32 (1963): 153–59, and Gershom Scholem, "Has Abu Aharon's Legacy of Secrets Been Discovered?" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 32 (1963): 252–65, and Weinstock's rejoinder, "The Treasury of 'Secrets' of Abu Aharon—Imagination or Reality?" (Hebrew), *Sinai* 54 (1964): 226–59. Given the great importance of gematria in R. Nehemiah's writings, a fresh look at the material found in this manuscript is necessary. Without adopting Weinstock's specific theory of either the *Bahir* or the transmission of esoteric knowledge by Abu Aharon, it is clear in my opinion that authors hinted at their names in a subtle manner in their titles, as seen above in the case of *Sefer ha-navon*. By eschewing the resort to gematria, a main technique used by the Ashkenazi Hasidim, one does not become more "scientific," but less. See Dan, *The "Unique Cherub" Circle*, 210–12, 218–20, who inadvertently though mistakenly resorts to an Ashkenazi technique by systematically spelling Weinstock's name as Winestock. Compare, however, to 39, n. 13.

52. Liebes, "The Angels of the Shofar," 189, n. 42. See also Scholem, *Major Trends*, 366, n. 108, where he adduces a short passage from this manuscript fol. 45a that belongs to this circle. I hope to return to the material found in this manuscript elsewhere.

53. Fols. 78a–79a, printed by Scholem, *Reshit ha-kabbalah*, 205–8.

out that another commentary on a poem, a truncated text published by E. E. Urbach, belongs to this school,⁵⁴ and indeed some of the references adduced by Urbach in the footnotes are related to the fragments from *Merkavah shelemah*. As Liebes pointed out, discussions about liturgy in this school had an impact on the Ashkenazi Maḥzorim.⁵⁵

9. SHORT QUOTES IN THE NAME OF R. NEHEMIAH

These, which fit the views found in the above treatises, are cited in R. Abraham ben Azriel's *'Arugat ha-bosem*. They include: (1) A discussion about the *shi'ur komah*;⁵⁶ (2) A short passage stemming from another commentary on the name of forty-two letter;⁵⁷ (3) a short interpretation of Is 6.1;⁵⁸ and (4) a short sentence on the song of angels.⁵⁹

10. A LIST OF NAMES OF ANGELS APPOINTED UPON THE TEKI'OT

This belongs, according to Yehudah Avida' and Liebes, to the writings of this circle, despite the fact that in one of the manuscripts it is attributed to R. Eleazar of Worms.⁶⁰

Therefore, both external evidence, namely, attribution of some commentaries to R. Nehemiah, and internal evidence, namely, the conceptual and literary correspondences between the different pieces described above, as well as the structure of some of the codices in which several books of the same author appear together, confirm Liebes's view of the

54. See Urbach, *'Arugat ha-bosem*, 4:74–78; Liebes, "The Angels of the Shofar," 186–87, n. 20. See also *ibid.*, 188, n. 33. Indeed there is a gematria in this text on p. 77, Pargod = barniel, which occurs also in the *Commentary on the Haftarah*, fol. 156b. I suspect that in this genre, namely, commentaries on piyutim, more material authored by R. Nehemiah may be identified in manuscripts.

55. "The Angels of the Shofar," *passim*.

56. *'Arugat ha-bosem*, 1:127–28, in the name of R. Nehemiah the son of Zushman. This passage corresponds to a passage in the *Commentary on the Haftarah*, MS. Berlin 942, fol. 150b.

57. *'Arugat ha-bosem*, 1:39, in the name of R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo.

58. *'Arugat ha-bosem*, 1:33, 198, in the name of R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo. On this short passage and its affinity to the view of R. Eleazar of Worms, see Abrams, "Sod kol ha-sodot," 74 and n. 63.

59. *'Arugat ha-bosem*, 2: 298, in the name of R. Nehemiah.

60. See, respectively, "The Angels Appointed on the Shofar that Elevate the Teki'ot" (Hebrew), *Sinai* 32 (1953): 70–89, 255–56, which included those small though influential texts from different manuscripts and from some Ashkenazi maḥzorim and pointed out the affinities between some of those names of angels and the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron* printed in *Sefer ha-ḥesbek*, and "The Angels of the Shofar," 172, 185, n. 9. See also n. 46 above.

affinities between some of these texts. However, it seems that for the time being there is no additional name of a person who belonged to the circle—R. Troestlin the prophet aside—that can be identified, although the name of R. Nehemiah does recur several times. Given the fact that the entire corpus described above is rather small, I see no reason not to attribute all those writings to R. Nehemiah alone.

Here is not the place to enter into a conceptual analysis of the above material, and it is plausible to assume that more anonymous material belonging to R. Nehemiah will be identified in manuscripts.⁶¹ Those writings have a pronounced interest in *shi'ur komab* traditions, in divine names, and in angelology, much more than we can discern in the main tradition of Haside Ashkenaz, as represented by the authors from the Kalonymite school. So, for example, the angel Yaho'el, found in Late Antiquity as a major angel, does not appear in the vast corpus of the main school but recurs several times in R. Nehemiah's treatises. This seems to be an indication of his access to traditions not available to, or at least not accepted by, his compatriots. A distinction between the contents of R. Nehemiah's writings and those of the main school is desirable in order to see if indeed two different lines of thought are involved here. At this stage of the analysis of R. Nehemiah's writings, it seems evident that some specific aspects of his exegetical practice are absent in the main school of Haside Ashkenaz, in the circle of the special Cherub, or in *Sefer ha-ḥayim*. On the other hand, it is plausible that some form of division of labor is involved, as there are no significant overlaps in the literary genres found in those schools. Though it would be an exaggeration to distinguish too sharply between those schools, given their common sources, both in the rabbinic literature and in the Hekhalot traditions, and presumably even in some shared oral traditions, it seems that R. Nehemiah differed, in a substantial manner, from all the other exponents of the Hekhalot traditions by preserving material that is not documented in those schools.⁶²

61. See, e.g., the "Te'amim" brought in the name of "my teacher R. Nehemiah" in MS. Parma Palatina 2342, fol. 266b, and meanwhile, Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 85–86. See also the remarks of Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Peering through the Lattices": *Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period* (Detroit, 2000), 139–40; 169, n. 93; 203, n. 32; 244, n. 67.

62. Urbach's suggestion in *Arugat ha-bosem*, I:128, n. 2, that R. Nehemiah may perhaps be an editor of R. Eleazar's writings, is quite tenuous. The similarity he pointed out there between a short sentence of R. Nehemiah and a corresponding passage in R. Eleazar of Worms' *Sode razaya'* is a common resort to much earlier material. For some analyses in which I distinguish between his views and those found in the main school, see Moshe Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism* (Budapest, 2004), chap. 2, and Idel, *BEN: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism* (in preparation), chap. 2.

This role of conduit is important, especially given the impact some forms of earlier traditions related to Yeshu‘a Sar ha-Panim had on Ashkenazi maḥzorim, as was pointed out by Avida‘ and Liebes.

It should be mentioned that the impact of *Sefer yetzirah* on his thought is quite peripheral, unlike the central role played by the book in the Kalonymite school. A corollary to this absence is the ignorance of astronomy and astrology, so conspicuous in that school, and the absence of discussions regarding the creation of the Golem in all the writings of R. Nehemiah described above (although this is a topic found in these two schools as well as in *Sefer ba-ḥayim*).⁶³ Also the presence of philosophical material varies from one work to another. My assumption is that *Sefer ba-navon*, in which a quote from Sa‘adya and from other writings is found, is the latest in his literary activity, while in all the other treatises, which are presumably earlier, philosophical concepts are marginal. In any case, according to the data we have at hand now, it seems that R. Nehemiah was active in the first third of the thirteenth century, parallel to the activity of the Kalonymite school, especially R. Eleazar of Worms.⁶⁴ This dating may explain the mutual ignorance of one another’s writings.

Unlike the Kalonymite school, or the so-called Special Cherub, R. Nehemiah does not make claims about old traditions he inherited nor does he mention revered teachers. Rather, he proposes his interpretations by means of cascades of gematria‘ot in which he includes phrases he himself invented in order to explain the meaning of meaningless names. His inventiveness in this domain transcends anything I have seen in Haside Ashkenaz, and he returns time and again to the same topics from different angles. Perhaps this approach has something to do with his description as a “prophet,” which is to say, as an inspired author. Interestingly enough, while R. Moshe Taku criticizes attempts made by other figures to attain prophecy by means of recitations of divine names, it seems that he does not address R. Nehemiah.⁶⁵ A final point worth noting: in the Kalonymite school, there are some sharp anti-Christian expressions, which have no parallel in the writings of R. Nehemiah.

It is my contention that R. Nehemiah has not been adequately noted in the general descriptions of the thought of Haside Ashkenaz,⁶⁶ but his

63. See M. Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany, N.Y., 1990), 54–95.

64. The most reliable facts are quotations of his views in Abraham ben Azriel’s *‘Arugat ba-bosem*, a work written around 1235, cf. *‘Arugat ba-bosem*, 4:113.

65. See M. Idel, *Abraham Abulafia: An Ecstatic Mystic*, trans. J. Chipman, revised by M. Lazar, (Culver City, Calif., 2002), 18–20.

66. Dan scarcely mentions his name in his studies on Ashkenazi Hasidism. See *The Esoteric Theology*, 40, 41, 66.

impact on some thirteenth-century authors is nevertheless conspicuous. I have in mind four late-thirteenth-century thinkers: Abraham Abulafia,⁶⁷ Abraham ben Azriel in *'Arugat ha-bosem*, as seen above, R. Ephraim ben Shimshon,⁶⁸ but especially R. Eleazar ha-Darshan and R. Moshe Azriel ben Eleazar ha-Darshan, who mentions his name explicitly and integrated material from his commentaries in his own writings, and perhaps even preserved them. As Liebes pointed out, a passage from the *Commentary on the Seventy Names of Metatron* had been influential on several seventeenth-century Ashkenazi kabbalists,⁶⁹ and I found a verbatim quote from the same passage (as if it were part of the Hekhalot literature) in the late-seventeenth-century R. Moshe ben Shema'yah.⁷⁰

To conclude, the interpretations R. Nehemiah offered to the angel-names that relate to the Shofar blowing and are printed in many maḥzorim—may have contributed to a certain sense of awe in Jewish ritual over the centuries. At least in this specific case, though the author has been forgotten, his commentary was not forlorn, but entered into the circulation of part of Jewish Ashkenazi ritual.

67. Abulafia was not aware of the real identity of his source, nor of the tradition regarding R. Nehemiah as a prophet. The impact of R. Nehemiah on this kabbalist is greater than just a citation from his work and it needs a separate inquiry. See n. 21 above. It is interesting that Abulafia wrote the book in which he quotes the *Commentary on Seventy Names of Metatron* in Rome, and it is in Rome, in the Angelica library, that the most important collection of the writings of R. Nehemiah and also R. Moshe ben Eleazar ha-Darshan are found.

68. Especially the references to Yaho'el, found in his commentary on the Pentateuch. See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 89; Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 51.

69. See his "Angels of the Shofar," 177, 180–81.

70. *Va-yikhtov Moshe* (Crakau, 1899), fol. 32d