

chwer lösbaren Konflikt hin, der über Jahre schwelte und der ganz unmittelbar die problematische Position Shelomo Jizchaqis gegenüber der Gesellschaft der heinischen Gelehrten bezeichnet.

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Rashi's Awareness of Jewish Mystical Literature and Traditions

Influenced perhaps by Rashi's simple, contextual style of interpretation in both his biblical and talmudic commentaries, Joseph Dan published a brief article nearly fifteen years ago in which he endeavored to show that Rashi had no recourse to (or interest in) *Hekhalot* literature.¹ As is well known, this literature consists of a collection of mystical texts and treatises that were composed during the late talmudic or early Geonic periods. Although not completely unified in terms of either themes or language, these treatises, as their overall title suggests, were intended to guide a mystical adept as he sought to enter into a sequence of Diving palaces (*hekhalot*) and realms by invoking specific (and often unusual) names, formulae and rituals.²

Rabbinic figures from the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods and beyond are mentioned in these texts,³ and a number of these texts were known by rabbinic mystics in pre-Crusade Ashkenaz.⁴ They were further redacted and amplified by the German Pietists c. 1200.⁵ Other rabbinic figures in medieval Ashkenaz (including a number of Tosafists) made use of this material, and there is even evidence that individuals or groups of laymen in France and Germany knew of the existence of these texts.⁶ Indeed, Agobard, the Archbishop of Lyons in the first quarter of the ninth century, appears to have become aware of parts of this literature from the Jews in his realm.⁷

¹ Joseph Dan, Rashi and the Merkavah, in: *Rashi, 1040–1990: Hommage a Ephraim Urbach*, ed. Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, Paris 1993, pp. 259–64.

² On the nature and content of *Hekhalot* literature, see, e.g., Peter Schäfer, *A Hidden and Manifest God*, Albany 1995, and Michael Swartz, *Scholastic Magic*, Princeton 1997.

³ See now Meir Bar-Ilan, Shalshelet ha-Qabbalah be-Sifrut ha-Hekhalot, in: *Da'at* 56 (2005), pp. 5–37.

⁴ See, e.g., Avraham Grossman, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim*, Jerusalem 1981, pp. 100–01; Israel Ta-Shma, Sifriyatam shel Hakhmei Ashkenaz Benei ha-Me'ah ha-Yod Alef/ha-Yod Bet, in: *Qiryat Sefer* 60 (1985), pp. 307–09; and below, nn. 21, 30.

⁵ See, e.g., Annelies Kuyt, Traces of a Mutual Influence of the Haside Ashkenaz and the Hekhalot Literature, in: *From Narbonne to Regensburg: Studies in Medieval Hebrew Texts*, ed. N. A. van Uchelen/I. E. Zwiep, Amsterdam 1993, pp. 62–86; idem., The Haside Ashkenaz and Their Mystical Sources: Continuity and Innovation, in: *Jewish Studies in a New Europe*, Copenhagen 1998, pp. 462–71; Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, Princeton 1994, pp. 235–69.

⁶ See my 'Peering through the Lattices': *Mystical, Magical, and Pietistic Dimensions During the Tosafist Period*, Detroit 2000, pp. 27–28 (and the literature cited in nn. 25–26), 127–32, 173–74, 196, 213, 244.

⁷ See Robert Bonfil, Eduto shel Agobard me-Lyons 'al 'Olamam ha-Ruhani shel Yehudei 'Iro be-Me'ah ha-Teshi'it, in: *Mehqarim be-Qabbalah, be-Filosofyah Yehudit uve-Sifrut ha-Musar vehe-Hagut*, ed. J. Dan/J. Hacker, Jerusalem 1986, pp. 333–38, 347–48.

Dan cites two pieces of evidence to support his claim that Rashi was not among the circle of rabbinic figures in Ashkenaz who were aware of or who cited *Hekhalot* literature. The first is from Rashi's commentary to Ezekiel. The opening chapter of Ezekiel describes aspects of the Divine Chariot and realm, the so-called *Merkavah*. Even as Rashi adamantly refuses in two places in his commentary to Ezekiel (1:27, 8:2) to delve into the esoteric meaning of the heavenly body or being called *hashmal* (in Rashi's words, 'lo nittan reshut / 'asur le-hitbonen be-miqra zeh'). he does provide a rabbinic interpretation of this concept (in his commentary to Ezekiel 1:4, citing *Hazal*), in addition to his *peshat* interpretation. Dan notes, however, that it remains unclear whether Rashi actually knew the esoteric interpretation that he declined to discuss. Even if he did know it, Rashi was perhaps concerned with the theological difficulties that the average reader might experience if he interpreted the *hashmal* according to *Hekhalot* teachings and terms, in which the *hashmal* is linked to the image of the Godhead. In either case, however, Dan's argument here (that Rashi did not know the *Hekhalot* material or that he preferred not to divulge it) remains essentially an argument from silence.⁸

Dan's other proof comes from Rashi's talmudic commentary to tractate *Hagigah* 14b. According to the Talmud, the mystical experience of R. Aqiva in which he (and three of his Tannaitic colleagues) entered *pardes* makes reference to a cautionary sign. When the mystical adept reaches the palace in which he sees stones or blocks of pure marble ('*avnei shayish tahor*), the Talmud asserts (in the name of R. Aqiva) that he should not declare 'water, water'. The Talmud does not explain this injunction. In both *Hekhalot Rabbati* (The Greater Book of the *Hekhalot*) and *Hekhalot Zutarti* (The Lesser Book of the *Hekhalot*), however, we find that the sight of water during a mystical experience signifies that the adept has failed in such an instance to reach his goal. He cannot enter into the so-called sixth palace, nor can he continue onward in his ultimate quest, to fully 'lower himself into the Divine Chariot' (to become a *yored merkavah*). The sight of water automatically terminates the mystic's journey.⁹

According to Dan, Rashi's explanation of this talmudic passage is completely at odds with the *Hekhalot* approach. The upshot of Rashi's interpretation is that when the mystic sees the watery reflection of the marble, he should not feel the urge to discontinue his journey, nor should he assert that he cannot go on. For Rashi, only if the adept actually admits defeat is he proscribed from continuing his mystical journey.¹⁰ On the basis of this passage, Dan maintains that Rashi was clearly unfamiliar with an essential point of *Hekhalot* literature, that water is an absolute sign that a mystical journey has ended.

David Halperin, on the other hand, adduced a variant of the *Hekhalot* passage under discussion that interprets the phrase 'stones of pure marble' in a way that is nearly identical to the interpretation offered by Rashi to the talmudic passage ('they shine like pure water'). According to this *Hekhalot* variant, even

⁸ See also Y. S. Spiegel, 'Al Kammah Meqorot ve-'Inyanim be-Perush Rashi le-Yirmiyah vi-Yehzqel, in: *Rashi - 'Iyyunim bi-Yezirato*, ed. Z. A. Steinfeld, Ramat Gan 1993, pp. 204–05.

⁹ See *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Tübingen 1981, sec. 409–10.

¹⁰ Rashi. *Hagigah* 14b, s. v. *shayish tahor* (מבדיק [מבריק] כמים צלולין) and s. v. '*al tomru mayim mayim* (יש כאן איר גלך).

as the sight of water does typically stop a mystic's journey in its tracks, the watery reflection of the marble stones described by R. Aqiva in this instance does not have such an impact. Rather, just as the Jewish people continued on their exodus from Egypt despite the fact that the waters of the Red Sea appeared to be an obstacle, the watery reflection of the marble stones is just that – an apparent obstacle (perhaps an optical illusion) that does not stop a deserving adept like R. Aqiva. As such, Rashi's commentary not only accords with the *Hekhalot* corpus in this case; it may well have been drawn from it.¹¹ Similarly, Rashi's interpretation of the talmudic expression (in tractate *Sanhedrin*) that God did not turn over three of his Heavenly keys to any other heavenly figure follows precisely the *Hekhalot* understanding of this Heavenly storehouse and concept.¹²

Elsewhere in his *Hagigah* commentary, Rashi interprets the talmudic phrase *sitrei Torah* (secrets of the Torah) as 'those contained in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, the mystical Book of Creation (*Sefer Yezirah*), and *Ma'aseh Bereshit*, the first and last of which are found in a Baraita text'.¹³ In his commentary to chapter 6 in the book of Isaiah (Isaiah's depiction of the Godhead), Rashi cites material from a text called *Midrash Aggadah Ma'aseh Merkavah*. According to the late Gershom Scholem, Rashi's comment here is taken from a version of *Hekhalot Rabbati* that was cited subsequently by both R. Eleazar of Worms and R. Zedekiah b. Abraham *ha-Rofe's* *Sefer Shibbolei ha-Leqet*.¹⁴ As the leading student of R. Yehudah *he-Hasid* and an important Ashkenazic mystic in his own right, R. Eleazar was intimately familiar with *Hekhalot* texts. The mid-thirteenth century halakhic compendium *Shibbolei ha-Leqet* also displays a clear interest in mystical teachings.¹⁵

¹¹ David Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, Tübingen 1988, p. 210, 534, n. 1. See *ibid.*, p. 184, 219–20, 243 for other instances in which Rashi's commentary follows an approach that is similar to that of *Hekhalot* literature. Cf. *Mahzor Vitry*, ed. S. Hurwitz (repr. Jerusalem 1963), p. 323, sec. 291.

¹² Rashi. *Sanhedrin* 113a (*Pereq Heleq*), s. v. *shalosh maftehot lo nimseru*. Cf. L. H. Schiffman/M. D. Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantations from the Cairo Geniza*, Sheffield 1992, p. 159. On the attribution of this commentary to *Pereq Heleq* to Rashi, see Yonah Fraenkel, *Darko shel Rashi be-Perusho la-Talmud*, Jerusalem 1980, pp. 304–08, and Shama Friedman, *Perush Rashi la-Talmud – Haggahot u-Mahadurot*, in: *Rashi - 'Iyyunim bi-Yezirato*, pp. 164–66.

¹³ Rashi, *Hagigah* 13a, s. v. *sitrei Torah*. See also Rashi's commentary to Ecclesiastes 1:9; J. Dan (above, n. 1), 262, n. 13; and below, n. 41. Rashi was also influenced by the *Otiyyot de-R. Aqiva*, another post-talmudic work that exhibits a mystical dimension. See, e. g., I. Ta-Shma (above, n. 4), 307; Abraham Berliner, *Rashi 'al ha-Torah*, Frankfurt 1905, p. 427 (addenda to Numbers 14:4). On the *Otiyyot de-R. Aqiva*, cf. Dan, *Otiyyot de-R. Aqiva u-Tefisat ha-Lashon ha-Hadashah*, in: *Da'at* 55 (2005), pp. 5–30.

¹⁴ Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkavah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, New York 1960, pp. 101–02. The work *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is cited by *Tosafot 'Avodah Zarah* 2b, s. v. *zo Romi*. (In *Tosafot Rabbenu Elhanan* ad loc., this citation is attributed to Ri.) See also ms. Paris BN 1408, fol. 75d: "I Elqanah [the scribe, a student of R. Meir of Rothenburg] saw this [passage] in *Ma'aseh Merkavah*."

¹⁵ See my *Mysticism and Asceticism in Italian Rabbinic Literature of the Thirteenth Century*, in: *Kabbalah* 6 (2001), pp. 135–49.

Rashi was also familiar with *Shiur Qomah*¹⁶ and with other works of the *Hekhalot* corpus including the *Baraita de-Massekhet Niddah*.¹⁷ In his commentary to tractate *Hullin* (that is parallel to his comment on Ezekiel 1:5), Rashi writes that the aspect of the Merkavah Chariot referred to as the image or face of Jacob (*denut/parzuf Ya'akov*) corresponds to the male aspect of the Merkavah.¹⁸ Although later mystics saw a feminine aspect of the Godhead in this phrase and concept, Rashi's approach was again repeated by Eleazar of Worms and others who belonged to the Ashkenazic mystical circle called 'The Circle of the Special Cherub' (*Hug ha-Keruv ha-Meyuhad*).¹⁹ All of this suggests that Rashi was quite familiar with at least parts of the *Hekhalot* corpus and with mystical teachings more broadly, and that he did include them in his biblical and talmudic commentaries.

What other mystical ideas did Rashi cultivate, and from whom did he learn them? We can get a good idea about the first question if we begin with the second. A number of Rashi's predecessors in Mainz were heavily involved in the study of mysticism and mystical teachings and rituals.²⁰ R. Shime'on b. Isaac *ha-Ṭadol*, who taught in Mainz in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries (in the days of Rabbenu Gershon), wove a number of mystical ideas and constructs into his liturgical poetry, as well as excerpts from *Hekhalot* passages. The mystical constructs include a discussion of the seventy (or seventy-two) letter name of God and its powers, and the names and functions of those angels who array themselves around the Chariot or throne of God.²¹ In a *yozer* for the festival of *Shavu'ot*, R. Shime'on describes the esoteric relationship between the masculine Godhead and the feminine Torah (including the placement of the Torah near his feet and knees of God, and his interaction with it).²² All of these conceptions evolved into full-fledged kabbalistic notions in later periods.

In a manuscript passage, R. Shime'on describes how he ascended to the Heavens using an esoteric technique. During that ascent, he received a special ineffable name of God that was involved in the Creation of the world,²³ and during

¹⁶ See Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, (above, n. 14), p. 129 (and in a note to p. 40, line 2).

¹⁷ See I. Ta-Shma, 'Miqdash Me'at – ha-Semel voha-Mamashut, in: *Knesset Ezra* [Studies in Honor of Ezra Fleischer], ed. Shulamit Elizur et al., Jerusalem 1995, pp. 359–60, and my 'Peering through the Lattices', (above, n. 6), p. 127–30.

¹⁸ Rashi, *Hullin* 91b, s. v. *be-diyuqno shel ma'alah*.

¹⁹ See Elliot Wolfson, *Demut Ya'akov Haquqah be-Kisse ha-Kavod – 'Iyyun Nosaf be-Torat ha-Sod shel Hasidut Ashkenaz*, in: *Massu'ot* [Memorial Volume for Ephraim Gottlieb], ed. M. ●ron/A. Goldreich, Jerusalem 1994, pp. 137–41, 154–56, 162, 229–30, 293, 390–91.

²⁰ See A. Grossman, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim*, (above, n. 4), pp. 76–80, 86–88, 94, 100–01, 162–64, 229–30, 293–95, 390–91.

²¹ See *Piyyutei R. Shim'on b. Yizhaq*, ed. A. M. Habermann, Jerusalem 1938, pp. 43, 58–59, 98, 160.

²² See *Mahzor le-Shavu'ot*, ed. Y. Fraenkel, Jerusalem 2000, p. 97, lines 5–6; E. Wolfson, *Images of God's Feet: Some Observations on the Divine Body in Judaism*, in: *People of the Book*, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, Albany 1990, p. 154; idem., *The Mystical Significance of Torah-Study in German Pietism*, in: *JQR* 84 (1993), p. 58, n. 59; and above (n. 19), 174, n. 90, 177, n. 209.

²³ See ms. Bodl. 1960, fol. 102r; ms. British Museum 752, fol. 96r; and cf. G. Scholem, *Ha-Im Nigleh 'Izzavon ha-Sodot shel Abu Aharon ha-Bavli*, in: *Tarbiz* 32 (1963), pp. 255–57.

another such journey, he received a liturgical tune of the angels.²⁴ R. Shime'on also describes a mystical ritual and technique for posing (and receiving the response to) a dream question (a *she'elat halom*) while in a state of waking, *she'elat halom be-haqiz*.²⁵ Such experiences could be used either to know future occurrences or to receive Heavenly guidance. In R. Shime'on's view, prayer ought to be directed to specific angelic stations since they have the capacity to bring these prayers directly to God's throne of glory.²⁶ R. Shime'on is described in *Mahzor Vitry*, a book of prayers and rituals that was produced in Rashi's circle (*sifrut devei Rashi*), as 'schooled in miracles' (*melummad be-nisim*), a reference perhaps to his ability to achieve results through the use of the various mystical techniques and formulae that we have described.²⁷

One of R. Shime'on's successors in Mainz was R. Eliezer *ha-Gadol* (d. 1060); Rashi perhaps encountered him there directly. Like R. Shime'on, R. Eliezer was a central figure in the mystical chain of tradition of the German Pietists.²⁸ He is also linked to a number of 'white magic' techniques. One of the better known of these is the long-standing Ashkenazic tradition or custom to spill sixteen drops of wine all told during the recitation of the plagues as part of the Passover hag-gadah. The explanation of this custom, attributed first to Eliezer, is that the sixteen drops of wine (or blood) represent the so-called sixteen-sided sword of the Almighty that in turn corresponds to the sixteen times that the word pestilence (*dever*) is mentioned in the book of Jeremiah the prophet. According to Rabbi Eliezer, it is possible to hold back all forms of pestilence and other agents of more esoteric destruction (referred to as *maziqin*) if this great sword of God is activated by this (and other) ritual techniques.²⁹

²⁴ See ms. Bodl. 1153, fol. 167r–168r: וקבלתי שהגיון מסר לו בעל החלום הוא. אופן לרבינו שמעון הגדול בניגון. בעין גיון שיר של מלאכים. For esoteric interpretations of the liturgy authored by R. Shime'on, see ms. Parma 540, fol. 19; ms. Cambridge Add. 647/9, fols. 30–39; ms. British Museum 752, fol. 7r.

²⁵ Ms. Sasson 290, fol. 612, שמעון הגדול, ה"ר שאלה בהקיצ אמיתית ומנוסה בקבלה מפי ה"ר שמעון הגדול. This passage also describes a series of preparations (to be undertaken over three days) that includes purification of the body through immersion, donning white garments and reciting adjurations that employed various Divine names. These preparations betray the influence of *Hekhalot* literature. See, e.g., Michael Swartz, *Like the Ministering Angels: Early Jewish Mysticism and Magic*, in: *AJS Review* 19 (1994), pp. 135–67.

²⁶ See *Seder ha-Selihotke-Minhag Lita*, ed. Daniel Goldschmidt, Jerusalem 1965, pp. 166–68, 189–90, and the editor's introduction, 11–12.

²⁷ See *Mahzor Vitry*, 364; *Shibbolei ha-Leqet* (ed. S. Buber), sec. 28; and cf. A. Grossman, *Zemihat Parshanut ha-Piyyut*, in: *Sefer Yovel li-Shelomoh Simonsohn*, ed. A. ●ppenheimer et al., Tel Aviv 1993, p. 69.

²⁸ See *Perush Siddur ha-Tefillah la-Roqeah*, ed. Moshe Hershler, Jerusalem 1992, vol. 1, pp. 225–29.

²⁹ See *Sefer Amarkal in Hamishah Quntresim*, ed. N.N. Coronel, Vienna 1864, fol. 27a; ms. Bodl. 1103, fol. 34v; ms. British Museum 610, fol. 17r (in the margin); ms. Frankfurt 227, fol. 67r; Grossman, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim*, (above, n. 4), pp. 230–31; Y. Y. Yuval, *Ha-Neqem voha-Qelalah, ha-Dam voha-'Alilah*, in: *Zion* 58 (1993) pp. 38–39. See also ms. Bodl. 945 (a Torah commentary by the grandson of R. Yehudah *he-Hasid*), fol. 72v, that adduces the number sixteen from the first and last letters (*yod* plus *vav*) in the verse 'The Lord is a being of war, the Lord is His name (Exodus 15:3). ● on the significance of the number six-

Eliezer *ha-Gadol's* grandson, R. Qalonymus b. Isaac of Mainz (who was himself the grandfather of R. Yehudah he-Hasid, as well as a slightly younger contemporary of Rashi) also refers to the powers of the sixteen-sided sword, citing formulation from *Sefer Hekhalot*.³⁰ His colleague in Mainz, R. Meshulam b. osheh, described the mystical completion of the name of the Almighty (that had been originally diminished by the actions of Amalek) through the recitation of the Kaddish prayer, an Ashkenazic esoteric tradition that was first mentioned in R. Shime'on *ha-Gadol* and R. Eliezer *ha-Gadol*.³¹

Rashi was himself familiar with a number of esoteric traditions related to divine Names, and with magical and theurgic techniques as well. In his commentary to tractate *Sukkah*, Rashi identifies a source for the Divine Name of seventy-two letters, as it emerges from several verses that precede the Song of the Sea (*Shirat ha-Yam*).³² This same derivation is found in *Sefer ha-Bahir*,³³ and it is cited by Nahmanides in the last part of the introduction to his Torah commentary, as evidence for the kabbalistic doctrine that there are permutations within every verse and letter of the Torah that yield Divine Names (over and above those that are recorded explicitly).³⁴ At the same time, Rashi notes in his commentary on *Kiddushin* that he did not receive traditions or interpretations for the Divine Names of twelve or forty-two letters.³⁵

Rashi explains that the Amoraim who created calves or other beings through the combination of various Hebrew letters and divine Names (as described in the *sugyot* in tractate *Sanhedrin*) did so on the basis of *Sefer Yezirah* or a text that he refers to as *Hilkhot Yezirah*.³⁶ A German contemporary of Rashi offered the same explanation in a manuscript passage.³⁷ Although *Sefer Yezirah* is mentioned in one of these *sugyot*, Moshe Idel has shown that the specific techniques suggested by Rashi, which closely resemble those that are found in the writings of Isaac the Blind, are not mentioned at all within the talmudic corpus. Indeed,

teen in texts associated with the German Pietists, see, e.g., *Sefer Gematriot le-R. Yehudah he-Hasid*, ed. Daniel Abrams, Los Angeles 1998, p. 29, and Moshe Hallamish, Be-Ayot be-Heqer Hashpa'at ha-Qabalah 'al ha-Tefillah, in: *Massu'ot* (above, n. 19), p. 215. See ms. Parma 541, fol. 266v, sec. 68. Cf. P. Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur*, (above, n. 9), sec. 49.

See ms. Jerusalem-JNUL 8° 3037, cited in Haviva Pedaya, Mashber ba-E-lohut ve-Tiqqun ha-Te'urgi be-Qabalat R. Yizhaq Sagi Nahor ve-Talmidav, (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1989), p. 261, n. 52. Pedaya also cites this teaching of R. Eliezer *ha-Gadol* from ms. Jerusalem-JNUL 8° 4199, fol. 35. See also Pedaya, *Ha-Shem veka-Miqdash be-Mishnat R. Yizhaq Sagi Nahor*, Jerusalem 2001, chapter four, esp. 196. R. Shime'on's formulation is found in ms. B.M. 752 (above, n. 23).

Rashi, *Sukkah* 45a, s.v. 'ani va-ho. *Sefer ha-Bahir*, ed. Daniel Abrams, Los Angeles 1994, secs. 76, 79 [= ed. R. Margoliot, Jerusalem 1978, secs. 106, 110].

Cf. Moshe Idel, Tefisat ha-Torah be-Sifrut ha-Hakhalot ve-Gilgulenhah ba-Qabalah, in: *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981), pp. 52–53.

Rashi, *Qiddushin* 71a, s.v. *Shem ben sheteim 'esreh*. See also Rashi, *Sanhedrin* 60a, s.v. *Shem ben arba 'otiyot*; 101b, s.v. *u-vileshon*; and the responsum of R. Hai in *Teshuvot ha-Geonim ha-Hadashot*, ed. S. Emanuel, Jerusalem 1995, pp. 134–35.

Rashi, *Sanhedrin* 65b, s.v. *bara gavra*, and 67b, s.v. 'aspei be-hilkhot yezirah. See M. Idel, *Golem*, Albany, 1990, p. 40, n. 19.

these techniques cannot even be replicated on the basis of the extant version of *Sefer Yezirah*.³⁸

Thus, Rashi's commentaries on these matters do not simply reflect talmudic or rabbinic material that he had at his disposal. Rather, they indicate that Rashi was aware of esoteric materials and teachings, and perhaps even developed or extended some of these concepts on his own. In this connection, it is important to note that Rashi's major teacher in Mainz, R. Jacob b. Yakar, authored an esoteric commentary to *Sefer Yezirah* of which we possess several manuscript fragments.³⁹ Rashi mentions *Sefer Yezirah* (which he held, like his teacher R. Jacob, to be a fundamentally esoteric work) within his talmudic commentaries on a number of additional occasions, usually in connection with letter combinations and related issues. In at least one other place, he cites material from a version of *Sefer Yezirah* that is no longer extant, but that was available in northern France and Germany at least through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁴⁰

Rashi comments that the four Tannaim who entered *pardes* 'ascended to the firmament by invoking a Divine Name' ('*alu 'al yedei Shem*').⁴¹ Rashi explains the talmudic passage in tractate *Berakhot*, that R. Yishma'el received a teaching from the angel Suri'el, by noting that R. Yishma'el ascended to the firmament through the use of a Divine name, as attested in the so-called *Beraita de-Ma'aseh Merkavah*.⁴² Similarly, Rashi proposes that the *kefizat ha-derekh* discussed by Rava in tractate *Yevamot* was to be undertaken through the use of a Divine Name.⁴³ The talmudic assertion that R. Hananyah b. Tradyon (inappropriately)

³⁸ See Idel, *Golem* (Hebr.), Tel Aviv 1996, pp. 66–67, 77–78. Cf. G. Scholem, *Pirquei Yesod be-Havanat ha-Qabalah u-Semalehah*, Jerusalem 1976, p. 391; Yehudah Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah shel Sefer Yezirah*, Jerusalem 2000, pp. 65–71. On the esoteric aspects or dimensions of *Sefer Yezirah*, cf. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, Princeton 1987, pp. 24–35; E. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, Princeton 1994, pp. 70–72, 138–43; J. Dan, Ha-Mashma'ut ha-Datit shel Sefer Yezirah, in: *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 11 (1993), pp. 7–35.

³⁹ See ms. Rome Angelica Or. 45, fols. 118–19. See A. Grossman, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim*, (above, n. 4), p. 357; Idel, *Golem*, (above, n. 37), p. 58. Professor Idel discussed this commentary and its implications at a conference on Rashi sponsored by Merkaz Shazar, that was held at Machon Van Leer in Jerusalem in July 2005.

⁴⁰ See Rashi, *Berakhot* 55a, s.v. 'otiyot; *Shabbat* 104a, s.v. 'amar lei; *Menahot* 29b, s.v. 'ahat be-heh; Avraham Epstein, *Mi-Qadmoniyot ha-Yehudim*, Jerusalem 1965, pp. 226–31; Nicholas Sed, Rashi et le Pseudo-Sepher Yezirah, in: *Rashi* (above, n. 1), 237–50; *Mahzor Vitry*, ed. Hurwitz, 108 (and cf. *Tosafot Hagigah* 3b, s.v. u-mi, and *Shibbolei ha-Leqet*, sec. 125); Liebes, *Torat ha-Yezirah*, 286, n. 4; and below, n. 55.

⁴¹ Rashi, *Hagigah* 14b, s.v. *she-nikhnesu la-pardes*. Cf. M. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, Albany 1987, pp. 14–17; E. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, (above, n. 14), p. 111; Y. Liebes, *Het'o shel Elisha*, Jerusalem 1990, pp. 4–5; and Rashi to Ezekiel, 40:2. Note that *Tosafot Hagigah*, ad loc., asserts that these scholars did not actually ascend upward, but merely imagined that they had done so.

⁴² Rashi, *Berakhot* 51a, s.v. 'eimatai yavo 'adam. Cf. R. Margoliot, *Mal'akhei 'Elyon*, Jerusalem 1988, p. 146, sec. 189; and Gottfried Reeg, *Die Geschichte von den Zehn Märtyrern*, Tübingen 1985, pp. 19*–32*.

⁴³ Rashi, *Yevamot* 116a, s.v. *bi-qefizah*. Cf. *Hiddushei ha-Ritva*, ad loc.; M. Verman and S. Adler, Path Jumping in the Jewish Magical Tradition, in: *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1 (1993–94), p. 134; and Rashi, *Shabbat* 81b, s.v. 'amrei 'inhu milta.

recited the Divine Name according to its letters (*hayah hogeh 'et ha-Shem be-otiyvotav*, for which he was subsequently punished) is understood by Rashi to mean that R. Hananyah derived (or perhaps understood) the Divine Name of forty-two letters and utilized it to achieve or do whatever he wished.⁴⁴ Rashi interprets the talmudic prohibition not to gaze at the hands of the *kohanim* while they recite the priestly blessing as a result of the fact that 'the *Shekhinah* rests on the edge of their fingers', an idea similar to one found in the writings of both the German Pietists and subsequent kabbalists.⁴⁵

To be sure, there are instances in which Rashi interprets a phrase or idea in the Bible or in the Talmud in a manner that conflicts with esoteric or kabbalistic approaches. We must remember that Rashi was primarily a *peshat* exegete who studied in the talmudic academies at both Mainz and Worms.⁴⁶ Moreover, as Eleazar Touitou has cogently suggested, Rashi's Torah commentary was fundamentally anthropocentric rather than theocentric. Thus, even as Rashi was familiar with an array of esoteric doctrines, he interpreted the creation narrative in Genesis and other sections of the Torah on the basis of the principle that the Torah was interested mainly in transmitting the ethical and religious imperatives that were to be learned from these narratives rather than focusing on Divine powers, descriptions or achievements.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, Rashi's clear awareness of and interest in various esoteric doctrines and dimensions, as we have seen, helps to explain not only the fact that Rashi's comments are often found in esoteric and kabbalistic works such as *Sefer ha-Maskil* (whose author was a descendant of Rashi living in Troyes in the second half of the thirteenth century),⁴⁸ the *Zohar*, and *Ma'arekhet ha-E-lohut*, but

⁴⁴ Rashi, 'Avodah Zarah 17b, s.v. 'alav li-serefeh. Cf. *Tosafot* (and *Tosafot R. Elhanan*) 'Avodah Zarah 18a. s.v. *hogeh ha-Shem* (who interpret that R. Hananyah simply read the letters of the special Name in question, perhaps the Tetragrammaton, as one reads other Hebrew words, a practice that is not permitted); Rashi, *Sukkah* 5a, s.v. *yod heh*; Ithamar Gruenwald, Ha-Ketav, ha-Mikhtav v'ha-Shem ha-Meforash—Mageyah. *Ruhaniyyut u-Mistiqaq*, in: *Massu'ot*, (above, n. 19), p. 92; Rashi to Exodus 2:14 (based on *Midrash Tanhuma*, loc. cit., sec. 10).

⁴⁵ Rashi, *Hagigah* 16a, s.v. *u-mevarkhin 'et ha-'am*. Cf. E. Wolfson, Sacred Space and Mental Iconography: *Imago Templi* and Contemplation in Rhineland Jewish Pietism, in: *Ki Baruch Hu* [Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch Levine], ed. Robert Chazan et al., Winona Lake 1991, p. 626. Note that *Tosafot Hagigah*, ad loc., once again offers a thoroughly exoteric explanation of this prohibition.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Elliot Ginsberg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah*, Albany 1989, p. 105, 122; E. Wolfson, Metatron and Shi'ur Qomah in the Writings of Hasidei Ashkenaz, in: *Magic, Mysticism and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism*, ed. K.E. Grözinger/J. Dan, Berlin 1995, p. 79, n. 86; R. Margoliot, *Mal'akei 'Elyon*, (above, n. 42), 179, sec. 289, nn. 103. See also the comparative study of the commentaries of Rashi and R. Eleazar of Worms to the Song of Songs in Ivan Marcus, The 'Song of Songs' in German Hasidism and the School of Rashi: A Preliminary Comparison, in: *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume*, ed. B. Walfish, Haifa 1993, pp. 181–89.

⁴⁷ See E. Touitou, Bein Parshanut la-'Etigah: Hashqafat 'Olam shel ha-Torah Lefi Perush Rashi, in: *Ha-Miqra bi-Re'el Mefarshav* [Memorial Volume for Sarah Kamin], ed. Sara Japhet, Jerusalem 1994, pp. 312–24. See also idem., Ha-Reqa ha-Histori shel Perush Rashi le-Sefer Bereshit, in: *Rashi – 'Iyyunim bi-Yezirato*, (above, n. 8), p. 102; and below, n. 54.

⁴⁸ See I. Ta-Shma, *Sefer ha-Maskil – Hibbur Yehudi-Zarefati Bilti Yadua' mi-Sof ha-Me'ah ha-Yod Gimmel*, in: *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2 (1983), p. 418; Gad Freudenthal, Ha-

also the assertion of later works such as the fifteenth century *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, R. Mordekhai Yaffe's late sixteenth-century commentary *Levush ha-Orah*, and the writings of Hida (d. 1806), among others, that Rashi was conversant with mystical teachings and was involved in their study as his commentaries were being written.⁴⁹ Since Rashi was familiar with esoteric material, the attribution of these kinds of teachings and practices to Rashi is not farfetched, although there are at least two instances of *segulot* and other techniques attributed to Rashi (in manuscript) that originate with either later or geographically distant figures.⁵⁰

We should note that Rashi's interests in *torat ha-sod* are limited to precisely those areas that were represented in the rabbinic literature of early Ashkenaz: the use of divine Names and adjurations for either magical or theurgic purposes, the esoteric interpretations of intentions of Divine Names, and *torat ha-malakhim*, the parameters and realms of angelic functions and power. Like R. Shime'on ha-Gadol, Rashi supports the notion that prayer should be directed to the angelic being or beings who oversee it.⁵¹ They will, in turn, transport and transmit the prayers before the Divine throne. Rashi does not really engage in theosophy, just as his rabbinic colleagues in pre-crusade Ashkenaz did not.

Avir Barukh Hu u-Varukh Shemo be-Sefer ha-Maskil le-R. Shelomoh Simbah mi-Troyes, in: *Da'at* 32–33 (1994), p. 205, n. 46, 221, n. 120; Ephraim Gottlieb, *Mehqarim be-Sifrut ha-Qabbalah*, ed. Joseph Hacker, Jerusalem 1976, p. 203, 319. Cf. E. Wolfson, Peshat and Sod in Zoharic Hermeneutics, in: *The Midrashic Imagination*, ed. Michael Fishbane, Albany 1993, pp. 182–83; Y. Liebes, de Natura Dei – 'al ha-Mitos ha-Yedudi v-Gilgulo, in: *Massu'ot*, (above, n. 19), pp. 284–88. See also the introduction by Menahem Ibn Zerah (c. 1270) to his *Zedah la-Derekh*, ed. N.H. Herzog (repr. Jerusalem, 1977), 6: ושרתה רוח הקודש על רבנו שלמה וגברה ... אשר לפניו לא קם כמוהו ירו בגמרא וחבר פירושים על הבבלי ...

⁴⁹ See Avraham Gross, Rashi u-Massoret Limmud ha-Torah she-Biktav bi-Sefarad, in: *Rashi – 'Iyunim be-Yezirato*, (above, n. 8), pp. 50–53; Raphael Halperin, *Rashi – Hayyav u-Perushav*, Jerusalem 1997, 1:256–58; M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven 1988, pp. 237–39; idem., 'Iyyunim be-Shitav Ba'al Sefer ha-Meshiv, in: *Sefunot* n.s. 20 (1983), pp. 39–41; Boaz Huss, 'Al Adnei Paz – *ha-Qabbalah shel R. Shelomoh ibn Lavi*, Jerusalem 2000, pp. 35–36; and the studies cited in A. Grossman, *Hakhmei Zarefat ha-Rishonim*, Jerusalem 1995, p. 205, n. 248.

⁵⁰ Grossman, (above, n. 4), p. 142, 181, correctly notes that the magical technique attributed to Rashi in (the eighteenth-century) ms. Warsaw 285 (to thwart armed robbers) was not composed by Rashi. Similarly, the techniques attributed to R. Solomon *ha-Zarefati* in ms. JTS Mic. 7928, for protection on the road, to protect one who has been summoned to appear before a ruler, for a *she'elat halom*, and to ease the lot of a woman in childbirth, were not composed by Rashi, although the precise identity of R. Solomon *ha-Zarefati* in this manuscript remains unclear. The manuscript is part of the Cairo Geniza and the magical techniques in it are to be found in other Geniza manuscripts. See Abraham Marmorstein in *Me-Assef Zion* 1 (1931), 31, and Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Magical Spells and Formulae*, Jerusalem 1993, pp. 149, 162, 185–86, 215, 217.

⁵¹ Rashi, *Sanhedrin* 44b, s.v. *le-'olam yevakesh 'adam rahamim*. Cf. *Shibbolei ha-Leqet*, sec. 282 (in the name of R. Avigdor Katz), and above, n. 26. On magic and *maziqim* (demons) in Rashi's commentaries, see, e.g., Rashi, *Shabbat*, (above, n. 43), and the parallel passage in Rashi to *Hullin* 55a; M. Catane, Le Monde Intellectuel de Rashi, in: *Les Juifs au regard de l'histoire*, ed. Gilbert Dahan, Paris 1985, pp. 83–84. Regarding divination, see Rashi, *Sanhedrin* 101, s.v. *mazlaihu*; E. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, pp. 208–09, nn. 75, 81; 266, n. 334.

Esoteric ideas and teachings can also be found among the writings that emerged from Rashi's circle or school (the so-called *sifrut de-vei Rashi*). Passages in the twelfth-century *Mahzor Vitry* (and in sections from other works of this school that can be shown to have emanated specifically from the study hall of Rashi or from his closest students) describe the Sabbath as the betrothal of *knesset Yisra'el* and their Father in Heaven, in a manner that was later expanded upon in kabbalistic literature. They characterize the power of the Sabbath to repel the forces of the *maziqin* in terms that subsequently appear in *Sefer ha-Bahir* (and later in the *Zohar*). These works also discuss at some length how the *Kaddish* prayer completes the Divine name (a notion first discussed in Ashkenaz, as noted, by both R. Shime'on ha-Gadol and R. Eliezer ha-Gadol). They suggest that various additional Divine and angelic names should be written on the parchment of the mezuzah. Magical adjurations to prevent forgetfulness, a technique that emerges from the *Hekhalot* corpus, are included in the *Havdalah* service and the educational initiation ceremony found in *Mahzor Vitry*, and in several parallels within Ashkenazic rabbinic literature.⁵²

The interest in *torat ha-sod* expressed by Rashi and several of his Ashkenazic predecessors was not maintained, however by some of Rashi's key successors and heirs. Rashi's grandson Rashbam, as indicated by a passage in his commentary to the end of tractate *Pesahim*, was clearly familiar with the magical powers attributed to Divine Names and even with their roots within various esoteric texts.⁵³ Nonetheless, in at least two significant instances, Rashbam distances himself (and his readers) from delving into these matters. As the late Sarah Kamin noted, Rashbam systematically avoided any reference to cosmogony or theosophy in his commentary to Genesis. In this vein, he writes that the Creation story begins only from the point of the revealed creations in order to indicate that it is inappropriate for the typical reader to attempt to understand the more hidden or esoteric stages and aspects of Creation (that, as Rashbam suggests, most certainly existed). Similarly, in his commentary to *Qohelet*, Rashbam stresses in two places that man need only involve himself in revealed forms of wisdom. Additional aspects of more esoteric wisdom (*hokhmah 'amukah vi-yeterah*) that exist, according to Rashbam, in the works *Ma'aseh Merkava* and *Sefer Yezirah*, need not be pursued by man and are fundamentally unnecessary in order to lead a felicitous spiritual life.⁵⁴

⁵² On these issues, see my *Peering through the Lattices*, (above, n. 6), pp. 153–57.

⁵³ Rashbam, *Pesahim* 109a, s.v. *sitrei Torah*: מנישה מרכבה ומעשה בראשית ופירושו של שם. See also Haviva Pedaya, *Pegam ve-Tiqqun shel ha-E-lohut be-Qabbalat R. Yizhaq Sagi Nahor*, in: *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6 [13–4] (1986), p. 257, n. 1, and cf. E. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, p. 235. A similar passage appears in the commentary to *Pirquei Avot* found in *Mahzor Vitry*, pp. 554–555. On Rashbam's role in the composition of this commentary, see I. Ta-Shma, 'Al Perush Avot shebe-Mahzor Vitry, in: *Qiryat Sefer* 42 (1977), pp. 505–06.

⁵⁴ See Kamin, *Rashbam's Conception of the Creation in Light of the Intellectual Current of His Time*, in: *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 31 (1986), pp. 91–92. See also *The Commentary of Rashbam to Sefer Qohelet*, ed. S. Japhet/R. Salters, Jerusalem 1985, pp. 52–53. Joseph Davis has suggested that Rashbam influenced the thirteenth-century German rabbinic figure R. Moses Taku, who denied all attempts to understand the secrets of the Creation. For R. Moses, any attempt to understand the metaphysics of the world and its Creator is forbidden. See

More recently, Sara Japhet has compared the approaches of Rashbam and Rashi to esoteric teachings, as part of her study of the commentary of Rashbam to the book of Job. Whereas Rashi commented (in Job, chapter 28) that a basis for the wisdom and understanding employed by the Almighty in the creation of the world can be found in *Sefer Yezirah*, Rashbam, following his penchant for elucidating *peshuto shel miqra*, completely rejects the esoteric nature of this wisdom. (Japhet further describes the rationalistic approach of Rashbam to the book of Job, which precluded his inclusion of angels, *shedim*, and other heavenly forces in his interpretation of the events that occurred to Job.) Interestingly, Japhet notes that although 'the accepted view is that Rashi did not deal with mystical issues, Rashi's commentary to Job (chapter 28) casts doubts about this view'.⁵⁵ The findings presented here not only support her assessment but effectively turn the regnant view on its head.

Rashbam's younger brother, Rabbenu (Jacob) Tam, and their German contemporary Rabbi Eliezer b. Nathan (Raban) of Mainz, two of the most important early Tosafists, also preferred to downplay any involvement in *torat ha-sod*.⁵⁶ In the second half of the twelfth century, however, as the careers of Rashbam, Raban and Rabbenu Tam were winding down, R. Samuel b. Qalonymus *he-Hasid*, his son R. Yehudah *he-Hasid* and then Yehudah's leading student, R. Eleazar of Worms (and others who were linked to the circle of these German Pietists) began to spread anew and to expand the *torat ha-sod* (including a highly developed theosophical perspective) that they received from their predecessors (and ancestors) who had studied in Mainz.⁵⁷

Although the talmudic methodology developed by Rabbenu Tam held sway in northern France throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries northern France (and, to a lesser extent, in Germany as well), there is ample evidence in the varied and substantial literature produced by the Tosafists (including many texts that are still in manuscript) that not everyone accepted the position of Rabbenu Tam and his allies with respect to the ongoing relevance of mystical and magical teachings and techniques. A number of Rabbenu Tam's leading students, including R. Isaac of Dampierre (Ri, who was also Rashi's great grandson), R. Eliezer of Metz, R. Isaac b. Mordechai (Ribam) of Bohemia and others were involved in

J. Davis, *Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenazic Judaism*, in: *AJS Review* 18 (1993), p. 213, n. 67.

⁵⁵ See S. Japhet, *The Commentary of Rashbam on the Book of Job* [Hebrew], Jerusalem 2000, pp. 153–59.

⁵⁶ See my *Peering through the Lattices*, (above, n. 6), p. 161–85. Note also the several *Tosafot* passages that held, against Rashi, that esoteric considerations should not be utilized to interpret and understand talmudic passages. See above nn. 41, 44.

⁵⁷ The significance of Mainz in this regard should not be underestimated. Indeed, it is possible that Rashbam and Rabbenu Tam did not pursue this discipline because their method of talmudic interpretation and dialectic stemmed from pre-Crusade Worms in particular (where esoteric studies were generally not pursued in the pre-Crusade period), as preserved by their father and Rashi's son-in-law, R. Meir b. Samuel. Cf. my *Jewish Education and Society in the High Middle Ages*, Detroit 1992, pp. 69–70, 168–72; Grossman, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim*, (above, n. 4), p. 343, 412–15, 437–38; idem., *Reshit shel ha-Tosafot*, in: *Rashi – 'Iyyunim bi-Yezirato*, (above, n. 8), pp. 57–68; idem., *Hakhmei Zarefat ha-Rishonim*, pp. 437–54.

the study of these disciplines following the lead of pre-Crusade Ashkenaz. This involvement intensified in both Germany and northern France during the thirteenth century, due in no small measure to the influence of the German Pietists as well. I have described these developments at length in my *'Peering through the Lattices': Mystical, Magical and Pietistic Dimensions in the Tosafist Period*.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Above, n. 6. For Ri, see *ibid.*, pp. 192–95; for R. Eliezer of Metz, see pp. 195–97; for Ribam, see pp. 201–02.

Raschi und sein Erbe

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