Gershom Scholem and the Mystical Dimension of Jewish History

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CHAPTER 5

THE ENIGMATIC BOOK

BAHIR

I

Among the riddles that Jewish mysticism presented him with, none bothered Gershom Scholem more than the enigma of the book Bahir, the first book of the kabbalah, which became known in southern France at the end of the twelfth century. Scholem wrote his Ph.D. thesis at the University at Munich on this book, preparing a German translation of the work and a commentary which included an analysis of the sources and kabbalistic works that used sections from it.\(^1\) Scholem, however, was very far from satisfied with the work he had done in his early twenties on this subject. He later reopened the whole problem of the emergence of the kabbalah in medieval Europe and wrote his first detailed description of the nature of the book Bahir and its place in the history of Jewish mysticism. A lengthy paper was published in 1945,\(^2\) summing up the results of this examination. That paper was the basis of a small book published in 1948 entitled *The Beginnings of the Kabbalah.*\(^3\) The book had several
important appendices dealing with central problems of the early kabbalah, concerning the works of the Iyyun circle and quotations from the ancient Jewish mystical work *The Great Secret (Raza Rabba)*, which had an important bearing on the understanding of the book *Bahir*.

Scholem continued to work on the book *Bahir* while completing his major work on the Sabbatian movement. In 1960 Scholem began a four-year lecture series on the beginnings of the kabbalah, using the notes he had prepared for a revised and enlarged version of *The Beginnings of the Kabbalah*. (The revised work was published in Berlin in 1962.) Between 1960 and 1963, four volumes of his edited lectures on the early kabbalah were published in Jerusalem. The enigma of the book *Bahir* was central to all these works.

Scholem also dedicated a two-year seminar to a systematic reading of the *Bahir*.

Scholem based his 1920 translation of the *Bahir* on the Munich manuscript of the book. This proved to be the oldest and one of the most reliable manuscripts of this work. Much later Scholem discovered that the manuscript carried the emblem of Pico de la Mirandola, a great Italian scholar and philosopher of the late fifteenth century, who was the founder of the Christian kabbalah and probably the first non-Jew to learn Hebrew in order to read kabbalistic texts in the original. With luck and intuition Scholem identified the book *Bahir* as the first work to contain kabbalistic symbolism. He thus rejected Adolf Jellinek's suggestion that the earliest work of the kabbalah was *Masechet Azilut (A Tractate on the Divine Emanations)*, which Scholem proved to be a much later work.
Scholem faced an interrelated combination of chronological, literary, historical, and ideological problems concerning the Bahir. For example, any conclusion concerning literary style immediately influenced the ideological side; chronology and history were very closely interconnected. Still, when presenting Scholem's conclusions in this chapter we shall try to deal with them one after another, and in the final section we shall present a general picture of the book and its impact on the history of Jewish mysticism.

The book Bahir is written in the form of a traditional Midrash. It is divided into many sections, each of which is a complete literary and thematic unit that could be presented as a brief independent treatise, even though the units are often connected, in ideas, terminology, or literary form, to the preceding or following sections. Scholem arranged the book into 130 such sections in his translation because the manuscripts and the traditional printed versions did not contain any systematic division of the text.

In each section there is a speaker, a rabbi to whom the homiletical interpretation of a biblical verse, of which almost every section contained at least one example and often more than one, is attributed. Some of these rabbis are prominent tannaim, like Rabbi Akiba; many sections are attributed to fictional characters, like "Rabbi Amora," who is probably a generalized representative of all of the amoraim.

The first section in the book is attributed to Rabbi Nehunia ben ha-Kanah, a relatively obscure tanna who earned a prominent place in the early mystical work Hekhalot Rabbati.
as the teacher of Rabbi Ishmael. He therefore was reputed to be the leader of the circle of mystics of *Hekhalot* literature. Because of this attribution, the book *Bahir* as a whole was thought to be by Rabbi Nehunia, and some kabbalists referred to it as the “Midrash of Rabbi Nehunia ben ha-Kanah.”

The chronological problem, therefore, begins with the question of whether or not the *Bahir* was an ancient mystical Midrash. Scholem decided that the *Bahir* was a twelfth-century work and not an ancient Midrash, based on the works of two of the greatest Jewish writers in Spain in the first half the twelfth century, Rabbi Abraham bar Hijja, the philosopher whose neo-Platonic material was used by the Ashkenazi Hasidim, and the great halachist from Barcelona, Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai, who wrote a detailed commentary on *Sefer Yezirah*. Scholem discovered a close connection between a homiletical interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis in bar Hijja’s book, *Hegyon ha-Nefesh* (*Contemplation of the Soul*) and the description of the creation of matter and form in the opening paragraphs of the *Bahir*. Both understand the biblical phrase *tobu va-bobu* (*Genesis 1:2*, “null and void”) to refer to the creation of matter and form in the Aristotelian sense of these terms. Creation necessitated the combination of matter with the spiritual element, the form. These are the true philosophical meanings of the terms *tobu* and *bohu*, according to Abraham bar Hijja.

The *Bahir* explained the creation as the result of the combination of matter and spirit, using the same homiletical elements—the traditional Midrashic connection between *tobu* and “nothing” (“*davar ha-matheh bnei adam*”) and the medieval interpretation of *bohu* as “spirit.” According to the struc-
ture of bar Hijja's homily this seems to have been his original contribution. Therefore, the Bahir as we have it today cannot be earlier than the second half of the twelfth century.

While his comparison between bar Hijja and the Bahir rested on positive proofs, Scholem's analysis of the relationship between Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai and the Bahir rested on an argument ex silentio. Rabbi Judah was one of the greatest scholars of his time. He was not only interested in Talmudic exegesis, but also with the collection of ancient material pertaining to every problem he dealt with. His halachic works contain a deep knowledge of the literature of the gaonim, and his commentary on Sefer Yezirah is a vast anthology of ancient material and medieval sources related to the problems associated with the book. Rabbi Judah included in this work large sections from Rav Saadia Gaon's commentary on the same work, as well as many quotations from Saadia's other works (some of them unknown from any other source), which elucidated the Gaon's understanding of the problems of creation, revelation, and cosmology. Similarly, he included large sections from the Hekhalot mystical literature, and from early Jewish works on scientific and cosmological matters. Some of the works used by Rabbi Judah have been lost, and his quotations from them are our only remaining source. It is evident that Rabbi Judah saw his main duty as a commentator on Sefer Yezirah to collect all the material he could that had any bearing on mystical, cosmological, or cosmogonical problems in ancient and medieval Hebrew literature. He had the resources to be as exhaustive as possible.

Scholem thus came to the conclusion that it was unimaginable that a whole sphere of Jewish mystical, cosmogoni-
cal, and cosmological thought could be completely unknown to Rabbi Judah ben Barzilai in Barcelona. He might not have been exhaustive concerning every detail, but if the basic kabbalistic terminology and the major ideas of the *Bahir* existed when he was working on his commentary on *Sefer Yeẓirah*, they would have been included in one way or another. This omission from such a major work seemed to Scholem to substantiate the conclusion that the *Bahir* as it is known to us could not have existed before the second half of the twelfth century.

The dating of the parts of the *Bahir* was also based on a close philological analysis of the various sections of the *Bahir*. But this could date only the analyzed sections and not the book as a whole. Scholem decided that the *Bahir* should be studied section by section, term by term, so that while the book was undoubtedly edited only a short time before it began to be used by the early kabbalists in southern Europe, its terminology and ideas could have been the product of much earlier periods. Scholem thought that some of the innovative ideas and terms used by the *Bahir* must have an early, Eastern source.

Some such sources are obvious. Some selections in the *Bahir* include terms and exegeses used in the *Sefer Yeẓirah*; whole sections from the ancient book of cosmogony were interwoven into the fabric of the *Bahir*, although a word or a term might be changed to alter the meaning of the sections to some extent. In a similar way, the *Bahir* included many paragraphs taken from, or based on, the *Hekhalot* mystical literature, beginning with lists of names of supreme powers to the characteristic terminology of the “descenders to the chariot.”
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Ancient mystical and cosmological Midrashim were used extensively in the *Bahir*. But, Scholem insisted, the *Bahir* must have had some other Eastern sources which were not preserved in the *Hekhalot* or Midrashic literatures. Philology revealed the impact of Arabic in several cases on the homiletical interpretations of biblical verses in the *Bahir*, and the study of its ideas revealed that some gnostic sources, which did not leave any other impression on Hebrew mystical works, were known to the *Bahir* and influenced its terminology and theology.

Scholem, again, described the book *Bahir* as a medieval work of Jewish mysticism, edited in the second half of the twelfth century in the form that it became known to the early kabbalists in Europe and is known to us today. But this relied on a series of ancient sources, many of them now lost to us. These sources included the gnostic tendencies which formulated kabbalah as a gnostic mystical school of thought.

III

The gnostic character of the book *Bahir* is based on the conception of the divine tree, the *ilan*. It has ten branches, one above the other. They constitute the divine *pleroma*, which the *Bahir* calls by the Hebrew term *male* or *milo*, a very probable translation of the Greek term. This concept, which cannot be found in any of the earlier Hebrew sources, is what allows us to call the book *Bahir* "kabbalistic" and claim it to be the first kabbalistic work in the history of Jewish mysticism. The system of the ten divine emanations, which the
kabbalists usually called sefirot, using the Sefer Yezirah terminology even though the meaning is completely different, is presented here for the first time. The later formulations of this system rested, completely or in part, on the cryptic homiletical paragraphs of the Bahir.

Scholem was convinced that this system of ten divine powers organized in the form of a pleroma symbolized by a divine tree was not an invention of a twelfth-century Jewish mystic in Europe. He felt that the medieval editor of the Bahir must have received it from an earlier Eastern source. His view was strengthened by his discovery of an Ashkenazi Hasidic commentary on the Shiur Komah, written in Germany in the thirteenth century, which includes quotations from a book called Sefer ha-Sod ha-Gadol, or, in Aramaic, Raza Rabba (The Great Secret). This work, of which we have only these very late quotations, is mentioned in lists of esoteric works that had been written in the gaonic period. There is no doubt, therefore, that this work, which is quoted in the thirteenth-century commentary on the Shiur Komah, is an ancient one, originating in the East, and by chance was not used by other, earlier writers in works which reached us.

The extant quotations from the Raza Rabba, or Sefer ha-Sod ha-Gadol, are identical or similar to some of the sections of the book Bahir. The relationship is unmistakable. However, the few quotations that we have from the Raza Rabba cannot answer all our questions concerning the date of the Bahir because the author of the Ashkenazi commentary on the Shiur Komah was familiar with the Bahir itself and quoted it very often (sometimes he even combined quotations from the Raza Rabba with those from the Bahir). Indeed, in some cases it is
difficult to be completely sure whether the Bahir is being quoted or the Raza Rabba. This problem is especially crucial concerning the system of the ten divine emanations which constitute the divine tree. There is a possibility that the Raza Rabba included a reference to the divine tree, but the text itself prohibits us from stating that as an established fact. Could this quote be interpreted syntactically, it could determine whether the system of the ten emanations is known to us only from later twelfth-century sources, or if it existed within Judaism many centuries earlier.

Several references to the basic symbols of the book Bahir, like keter elyon, "the supreme crown," for the highest divine power, or the way that the shekhinah is described, are found in the works of Rabbi Eleazar of Worms and other Ashkenazi writers. In addition, kabbalists in the second half of the thirteenth century described the history of their tradition as being brought from Eretz Israel to Germany, and then transferred from the sages of Germany to Provence and to Spain. Gershom Scholem, with these facts in mind, proposed that the tradition of the book Bahir might have been transmitted to southern France via the Jewish esoteric circles in Germany. The scarcity of early Ashkenazic references to terms and quotes from the Bahir makes this a very difficult conclusion, but we do not have as yet a better alternative.27

Scholem felt that the picture of the divine tree and its ten divine branches attested to the reliance of the sources of the Bahir on ancient gnostic mythology and theology. He was very careful not to accept the obvious alternative: the influence of the contemporary gnosticism of twelfth-century southern France, namely the Catharist, or Albigensian, gnos-
tic movement. While taking into account the chronological connection between this major spiritual upheaval in Christian society and the emergence of gnostic mythology in Jewish academies, Scholem still sought more evidence of connections between the Catharist movement and the Bahir or the early kabbalists. Though he spent much effort in an analysis of our meager knowledge of the Cathars' theology, he found no conclusive proof of a direct historical connection between them.²⁸ Scholem concluded that the gnostic symbols of the pleroma and others were not transmitted to the kabbalists from the gnostics around them, but were received from the East in works like Raza Rabba. They were transmitted, probably via the esoteric schools of the Ashkenazi Hasidim, to the mystics of southern Europe, who were ready to absorb them because of the great impact of the Catharist religious insurrection.

IV

The most important gnostic element in the Bahir is the list of the ten ma'amaro, or logoi, which constitute the divine pleroma in the Bahir, which is similar in many respects to the gnostic myth of the aeons.²⁹ But Scholem, when studying the Bahir, emphasized another intriguing myth—the myth of the shekhinah.

The early kabbalists, and certainly the later ones, especially the Zohar, concentrated an important part of their mythical descriptions and their theological speculations on the feminine power within the divine realm, called by them malchut or shekhinah. This power was the tenth and lowest of
the divine emanations, but the closest to man and to religious and visionary contact. This power is described in kabbalistic texts as the heavenly mother, as the bride and wife of the Godhead, as the divine daughter, as both the opponent of the evil powers and their first victim, and in many other ways. The concept of the shekhinah is central to ancient Jewish theology and mysticism. In early Talmudic and Midrashic sources the shekhinah is described only as one of the names, or one of the aspects, of the supreme Godhead itself, and not as a separate power. When it later began to be described as a separate, lower power, identified with the revealed divine glory, it still did not have any feminine characteristic. It is the kabbalah alone which first presented the concept of male-female dualism within the divine realm and thus created the mythology of love, sex, and family within the pleroma.

The gnostic origins of this myth are quite obvious, even though the details do not always correspond to the many aspects of the divine feminine figure in ancient gnostic mysticism. The kabbalists received it from their Eastern Judaized gnostic sources. Scholem presented the possibility that the Bahir was the first work to reach us that contained the main elements of this most profound symbolism.

The analysis of the role of the feminine power in the symbolism of the Bahir is extremely difficult because of the literary character of the book. The Bahir is full of parables in the classic format of the Midrashic parables, especially those which compare God to an earthly king. In classical Talmudic and Midrashic literature many theological problems, discussing the relationship between God and the world, in-
clude parables beginning with “mashal le-melech basar va-dam . . .” “it is similar to a king of flesh and blood . . .” Sometimes, in these ancient parables, the figure of knesset Yisrael, “the congregation of the people of Israel,” is mentioned in relationship to this flesh-and-blood king; it assumes feminine attributes within the narrative of the parable. The authors—or the sources—of the Bahir included many parables that followed this pattern. Several of them describe the figure of the matronit, “the queen,” or the bat-melech, “the princess,” as a divine power, the daughter or wife of the king, which is always the Godhead itself.

The problem of determining how much can be learned from the narrative and details of a parable concerning the reality it intends to convey is very pertinent in this juncture. If the parables in the Bahir—which are undoubtedly most profound and central to its innovative symbolism—are to be transferred accurately to the realm of the divine powers which they intend to describe, there can be no doubt that the Bahir contains a myth of a feminine divine power, very similar to some of the gnostic descriptions of such a power. However, if we remember that in the classical Talmudic parables of this genre a feminine figure is often found in the narrative even though there is nothing feminine in the real counterpart of that figure, much care and hesitation are called for before concluding that a myth of a feminine divine power existed. Scholem was very circumspect when discussing it. He relied heavily on some unusual descriptions of the feminine power in the Bahir, such as the image of the shekhinah as the “daughter of light” (bat ha-or, which is almost literally the same as the gnostic nurea), who is in exile from the source of light, to
suggest that it is very probable that the Bahir is the first Jewish mystical text to describe a feminine divine power in mythological terms, thus serving as a source for later kabbalistic speculation and the enormous eruption of mythological and sexual symbolism which is one of the most prominent characteristics of the kabbalah as a whole.

V

Another theme in the book Bahir, which had great impact on later kabbalists, is the dualism of good and evil elements within the Godhead or its messengers. Many of the paragraphs in the Bahir which deal with this are extremely obscure in language and symbolism. Scholem did not describe the theology of the Bahir as being dualistic in the full religious meaning of the term, namely that there is a mythological struggle between good and evil within the Godhead itself. It seems that in the Bahir evil is a divine messenger which serves a divine purpose, emanating from the divine tree like all other phenomena which constitute the celestial and earthly reality. The dualism has, however, some symbolical formulations which laid the basis for the development of much more radical and profound dualism in the kabbalah of the late thirteenth century on.

The Bahir finds the source of all evil in the feminine aspect of existence. The editor of the work included in its concluding paragraph an adapted version of the story of Satan, called here Samael (the ancient appellation for Christianity and the Roman Empire in the Hekhalot texts), and the orig-
inal sin of Adam and Eve in Paradise, as described in the eighth-century Midrashic narrative, the "Pirqey de-Rabbi Eli-

ezer." This is the earliest and clearest description of an independent satanic force in Hebrew before the development of the kabbalah. It is also the source of the profound symbolism of the snake, which became central to Zoharic and later kabbalah. The Bahir described the evil powers in the created world as the fingers of the left hand of God, serving as agents for every deed of evil needed by the divine program.

This character of the evil powers in the mythology of the Bahir proves that the last element of classical gnosticism to be accepted by Judaism in any way was the dualistic myth of good and evil. Hekhalot mysticism did not adopt it. The first appearance of the stark, gnostic dualism familiar from Marcionite, Ophitic, and Manichaean sources cannot be found in the kabbalah until the second half of the thirteenth century, and then it is expressed in ways which are very difficult, if not completely impossible, to explain as resulting from external influences. It seems that Jewish symbols and mystical drives independently produced an extremely close parallel to ancient gnostic dualism.

Another concept in the book Bahir, which Scholem presented and discussed in all its perplexing aspects, is the belief in the transmigration of souls. According to the Bahir (in a section attributed to Rabbi Akiba), the souls of every new generation are those of the older, departing one. This belief is stated without any qualification or hesitation, as a well-known, traditionally accepted truth. It is, however, the first positive expression of such a belief in Jewish literature. Previous Jewish writers (most prominently Rav Saadia Gaon)
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categorically and unhesitatingly rejected that belief when they referred it, which they did very seldom. It is, therefore, most peculiar to find a Hebrew work accepting and praising an idea so vehemently denied by all previous Jewish sources.

The belief in transmigration raised a basic question concerning the circles of mystics which produced and transmitted the Bahir. Were they a part of any Jewish center? Did they belong to the mainstream of Jewish culture? Or were they perhaps scattered and lonely half-educated people, on the remote fringes of Jewish culture, who did not know anything about the central developments in the great academies where Jewish culture was created and developed through the ages?

Scholem discussed these questions repeatedly because he felt they were crucial to understanding the role of Jewish mysticism, as well as of its sources, within the historically unfolding fabric of Jewish culture.\(^{42}\) He concluded that even though its position concerning the transmigration of souls was peculiar, it was not enough to outweigh the considerable evidence which led toward the opposite conclusion. The authors of the Bahir and its sources could be neither ignorant nor marginal, because they were aware of current Jewish ideas and attitudes (like bar Hijja’s interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis), as well as being erudite and versed in all aspects of classical Jewish culture. The Bahir contains many traditional Jewish literary genres. They range from ancient interpretations of the forms of the Hebrew letters ("Otiot de-Rabbi Akiba," the Midrashic compilation of the Gaonic period presented as an exegesis of the forms of the Hebrew alphabet),\(^{43}\) to commentaries on the Hebrew vocalization signs

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and many other such elements, to commentaries on the commandments and the reasons for them (ta'amey ha-mizvot). The utilization, in a creative manner, of so much ancient material (like the relatively unknown Midrashim Tadsheh and Konen), and the appearance of medieval forms of terms which were used by Jewish philosophy all serve as conclusive proof that the Bahir is the product of a central group within Jewish culture. Even the most obscure and seemingly strange ideas in it should be regarded as constituent parts of Jewish religion of the Middle Ages.

Gershom Scholem’s analysis of the Bahir changed to a very large extent the previously held ideas concerning the character of Jewish religious thought and religious culture both before the Bahir and after it. Scholem’s proofs that the Bahir is evidence for the existence of unknown and unsuspected undercurrents within Jewish culture, which preserved and transferred ancient gnostic mythology probably for generations until they surfaced in the medieval kabbalah, change our conception of the Gaonic period. The halakhah was not the only aspect of Jewish culture at that time, and the material preserved in the works and responses of the gaonim should not be treated as the complete expression of all that Jews thought and felt at that time. There were many aspects to early medieval Judaism. The mysticism of the Hekhalot and Merkabah literature continued to develop, and most probably the scholars dealing with that were open to accept, preserve, and transmit other myths, symbols, and ideas. There was a mystical and mythical dimension of Judaism in the Gaonic and early medieval culture of the Jews in Europe, a more profound, rich, and radical aspect than anyone suspected before.
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Notes


3. G. Scholem Reshit ha-Qabbalah (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1948).

4. Concerning this thirteenth-century circle of Jewish mystics, see below ch. 6, pp. 173–74. Scholem’s appendix includes a list of 32 treatises which he considered to have been written by members of this circle. See G. Scholem, Reshit ha-Qabbalah, pp. 255–62.


7. See above, ch. 1, p. 22 and n. 28 there.


9. The date, which is clearly mentioned in the colophon of the manuscript, is 1298.


14. On the relation between bar Hijja and the Ashkenazi Hasidim, see above, ch. 4, p. 104 and n. 30 there.

15. See Judah b. Barzilai, Perush Sefer Yeẓirah, edited by S. J. Halberstam (Berlin, 1885).

16. This book includes four sermons, probably delivered on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The first of these begins with a detailed expo-

17. See R. Margaliot, ed., Sefer Babir (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1978), sec. 2 and 135 [G. Scholem, Das Buch Babir, par. 2 and 93].

18. The homiletical interpretation is based on dividing the word "bohu" into two: "bo" and "hu," i.e. "It is within it." This was regarded as a description of form within which all existence was to be found.


20. See, e.g., R. Margaliot, ed., Sefer Babir, sec. 95 [G. Scholem, Das Buch Babir, par. 64], in which a section from Sefer Yezirah is quoted but related to the Babir's own gnostic concept of the divine tree.

21. A list of celestial powers, following Hekhalot mysticism, is included in R. Margaliot, ed., Sefer Babir, sec. 112 [G. Scholem, Das Buch Babir, par. 81].

22. A striking example is the fact that the Babir copied a legend concerning Samael, Adam, Eve, and the serpent from chapter thirteen of the midrashic compilation Pirqei de-Rabbi 'Eliezer in the concluding section, no. 200, though the editor introduced many changes in the version included in the Babir.

23. Based on Deuteronomy 33:23.

24. Concerning the nature of the sefirot in Sefer Yezirah, see above, ch. 2, pp. 64–66.

25. The most important quote from Raza Rabba, which denotes the existence of the concept of sefirot, was printed by Scholem in G. Scholem, Reshit ha-Qabbalah, pp. 234–45.

26. One of the important considerations concerning the date of the emergence of the idea of the pleroma in sources of the Sefer Babir is the question whether some Ashkenazi Hasidic texts contained elements of such symbolism. See above, ch. 4, pp. 116–18.

27. Scholem supported this conclusion through an analysis of several sources, some of them found in the commentary on the Bible by
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R. Ephraim ben Shimshon, an Ashkenazi author whose work is found in its entirety only in manuscript (Munich 15, for example; there are two printed editions which contain only part of the commentary). See G. Scholem Reshit ha-Qabbalah, pp. 39-40; G. Scholem, Ursprung, pp. 91-93. Cf. J. Dan, The Esoteric Theology of the Ashkenazi Hasidim [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1968), p. 117.

28. Some more recent attempts have been made to discover a connection between the early kabbalah and the Catharist movement. See, e.g., S. Shahar, "Catharism and the Beginnings of the Kabbalah in Languedoc" (Hebrew), Tarbiz, 40 (1971), pp. 483-507. These attempts have not uncovered any conclusive proof concerning a possible influence of the Cathars on the kabbalah, either in the Bahir or amongst the circle of Provencal kabbalists.

29. The sections of the Bahir which discuss the ten emanations, here called ma'amarot (logoi), begin at sec. 141 [G. Scholem, par. 96]. The ten divine powers are discussed in order, but there are many interpolations which disrupt the systematic exposition.


31. Concerning the concept of the shekhinah in talmudic and midrashic literature, see the studies cited above, ch. 3, n. 14. These studies include detailed bibliographies.

32. Some literary studies have been made on talmudic and midrashic parables. None of them, however, compares them with the use of parables in the Bahir.

33. Scholem discussed the nature of parables in the Bahir in Ursprung, pp. 43-58.


35. One of the important problems in this context is the question whether there is in the Bahir an identification between matter and evil; see sec. 161-64 [G. Scholem, Das Buch Bahir, par. 107-10].


38. R. Margaliot, ed., Sefer Bahir, sec. 163 [G. Scholem, Das Buch Bahir, par. 109], describes the evil messengers as fingers called "evil, evil" ("ra ra"). These fingers probably represent the left hand of God.

39. On the later developments concerning the concept of evil in kabbalah, see below, ch. 7, pp. 213-17.

40. R. Margaliot, ed., Sefer Bahir, sec. 121 [G. Scholem, Das Buch Bahir, par. 86].


43. Concerning this work, see above p. 81, n. 6.