

Boaz Huss

FORWARD, TO THE EAST: NAPHTALI HERZ IMBER'S PERCEPTION OF KABBALAH

Naphtali Herz Imber is famous as the author of the Jewish national anthem, "Hatikvah" ("The Hope"). He is also quite well known for his non conformism, vagabond lifestyle, and excessive drinking. However, his interest in the occult and Kabbalah are much less known. Imber wrote several articles on Jewish mysticism, translated some kabbalistic texts, and published the first journal on Kabbalah Uriel: A Monthly Magazine Devoted to Cabbalistic Science (of which only one issue appeared). Although much scholarly literature has been devoted to Imber and his famous poem, his interest in the occult and Jewish mysticism has not been investigated. This article will discuss Imber's encounter with late nineteenth century esotericism, specifically the doctrines of Laurence and Alice Oliphant and the Theosophical Society. It presents Imber's notions concerning Jewish mysticism and examines the impact that the Theosophical Society and the Oliphants' principles had on his perception of Kabbalah. Finally, it discusses the connection between Imber's Zionism and his interest in Kabbalah and shows that his perception of Jewish mysticism, which was greatly influenced by Western esoteric ideas, was shaped in the framework of fin de siècle Orientalism and Jewish nationalism. Imber's positive evaluation of Jewish mysticism and its nationalistic interpretation anticipates the position of later Zionist scholars of Jewish mysticism, whose vision of Kabbalah and Hasidism largely shaped the way Jewish mysticism is perceived and studied today.

As long as deep in the heart,
The soul of a Jew yearns,
And forward to the East,
An eye looks to Zion

Naphtali Herz Imber, "Hatikva"

Naphtali Herz Imber was born on 27 December 1856, in Zloczów, in Galicia. At a young age, he became close to the maskilim (followers of the Jewish Enlightenment) in his hometown; later, in Brody and Lemberg, he began to write Hebrew poetry. In his early twenties, he left Galicia for Budapest and travelled through Bulgaria and Romania,¹ where he probably became familiar with the ideas of the early Zionist group *Hovevei Zion* (Lovers of Zion). According to Imber, during his stay in Iași, Romania in 1878, he wrote the first version of the poem "Hatikva," that brought him fame when it became the anthem of the Zionist movement, and later, of the State of Israel.

Imber continued his travels and arrived in Istanbul, where he met the English writer, politician, and mystic, Laurence Oliphant (1829–1888), who hired him as his secretary.² Laurence Oliphant was engaged at the time in his plan to obtain concessions from the Turkish government for Jewish settlement in the northern part of Palestine.³ Although his plan—which was accepted enthusiastically by the Jews—failed, Laurence decided to settle in Haifa with his wife, Alice le Strange (1846–1886).

Imber arrived in Palestine with the Oliphants in 1882, the time of the first wave of Zionist inspired immigration (the first *Aliyah*) and the establishment of the first Zionist colonies. Imber remained in Palestine for five years, part of the time in the Oliphants' residence in the German Templar colony in Haifa and possibly also in their summer residence in the Druze village, Dalia, on Mount Carmel. In 1883, Imber left the Oliphants and moved to Jerusalem, where he became ill and spent several months at the Missionaries hospital. Later, he stayed for a few months in the Jewish colony of Rishon Lezion. Although Imber quarrelled with his benefactor,⁴ Oliphant nevertheless tried to secure him work as a watchmaker in Haifa and later tried to register him at the agricultural training school, Mikve Israel.⁵ During 1885–1886, Imber travelled for a few months in Egypt with Professor Paul Vernier and Dr Johannes Lepsius.⁶ After his return from Egypt, Imber stayed in Jaffa and visited the new Zionist colonies, composing several poems in praise of these settlements.⁷ During this period, Imber was implicated in the revolt of the Jewish farmers in the new colonies against Baron Rothschild's inspectors. In the last months of his stay in Palestine, Imber once again stayed with Laurence Oliphant in Haifa (Oliphant's wife, Alice, died in 1886, while Imber was in Egypt).⁸

During his stay in Palestine, Imber lived in abject poverty. He was notorious for his excessive drinking, eccentric behaviour and questionable contact with Christian missionaries; yet he became renowned as a Hebrew poet, and his song "Hatikva" became popular in the new colonies. He published several poems and articles in the Jerusalem Hebrew newspapers, *Havatzelet* and *Hazvi*. In 1886, he published his first book of poems, *Barkai* ("The light of dawn" or "The morning star"), which he dedicated to Laurence Oliphant.⁹

In the summer of 1887, Imber left Palestine and arrived in London, where he stayed for five years.¹⁰ During his stay in London, he gave lectures for the Zionist organization Kadima and published articles—mostly in the Anglo Jewish Orthodox paper, *The Jewish Standard*.¹¹ Some of these articles, in which Imber claimed discoveries such as the Eiffel Tower being mentioned in the Talmud and the Talmud predicting the discoveries of Louis Pasteur, were included in Imber's *Topics of Today in the Talmud*, published in 1889.¹² Imber continued to publish poems and articles in *Havatzzelet*; he was engaged in a fierce controversy with Eliezer ben Yehuda, the editor of *Hazvi*, concerning Imber's association with the Christian missionaries during his stay in Jerusalem.¹³ Imber was supported by the author Israel Zangwill (1864–1926) who portrayed him as the "neo Hebrew" poet Pinchas Malchitsedek, in his novel, *The Children of the Ghetto* (1892). Zangwill's portrayal of Pinchas captures Imber's character very well:

The same bent of mind, the same individuality of distorted insight made him overflow with ingenious explanations of the Bible and the Talmud, with new views and new lights on history, philology, medicine—anything, everything. And he believed

his ideas because they were his and in himself because of his ideas. To himself his stature sometimes seemed to expand till his head touched the Sun but that was mostly after wine and his brain retained a permanent glow from the contact.¹⁴

In 1891, Imber left England for America. He wandered through different locations, including Indianapolis, Philadelphia, Boston, Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. In 1899, he married a Christian woman (who, he claimed, converted to Judaism) in Denver, but the couple separated after less than a year.¹⁵ As in Palestine and England, Imber lived in great poverty and drank excessively. In 1898, while he resided in Los Angeles, he was arrested for disturbing the peace.¹⁶ He continued to receive financial support from Israel Zangwill and also managed to receive support from Judge Mayer Sulzberger (1843–1923) from Philadelphia.¹⁷ In 1894, he published a booklet entitled *The Keynote to Mystic Science* while in Indianapolis,¹⁸ and in 1895, during his stay in Boston, he published a journal entitled *Uriel: A Monthly Journal Devoted to Cabbalistic Science* (which only had one issue). In 1899, Imber published a pamphlet called “History of Money; or Sixteen to One of the Jewish Talmud,” which was written in the spirit of the American Populist movement. In 1900, his brothers in Złoczów published his second book of poems *Barkai Hahadash* (“The new Barkai”), and in 1904 Imber published, *Baraki Hashlishi* (“The third Barkai”) in New York. In 1905, he published *The Cup (Hakos)*, a Hebrew translation of some of Omar Khayyam’s *Rubaiyat*, based on Edward Fitzgerald’s translation. In his last years, Imber worked on several articles and translations from the Talmud, the Zohar, and other sources. These articles were published after his death as *Treasurers of Two Worlds*.¹⁹

Imber remained an ardent Zionist all his life. National sentiments are integral to his writing, especially his poetry, which is considered to be part of the early Zionist *Hibbat Zion* (love of Zion) literature.²⁰ Imber’s poem, “Hatikvah,” became popular during his lifetime. It was sung to the melody of a Romanian folk song in the Jewish colonies of Palestine, and in 1903 it was sung at the Sixth Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland. Despite the popularity of his poem, Imber never became part of any Zionist organization; due to his unconventional behaviour and drinking, he was rejected by the Zionist establishment. After meeting Imber at a Zionist convention in Philadelphia in 1901 Louis Lipsky, secretary and then Chairman of the Federation of American Zionists, wrote:

[Imber] was certainly not an attractive character. He had the head of an Indian, his face was bronzed, his hair was long and his clothes always in tatters. He was indescribably dirty, and always exuded the aroma of stale whisky.²¹

In 1909, Naphtali Herz Imber died in New York of complications related to his drinking. In 1933, at the 18th Zionist Congress, “Hatikvah” was declared the national anthem of the Jewish people and has functioned as the anthem of the State of Israel since its foundation (yet it was declared by law as such only in 2004). In 1953, Imber was reinterred in Jerusalem.

Laurence and Alice Oliphant's *Sympneumata*

Imber's fame rests on his poetry—actually, on one poem, “Hatikvah.” His interest in Jewish Mysticism is much less well known. Before turning to examine Imber's perception of Kabbalah and Hasidism, I would like to examine his acquaintance with late nineteenth century esoteric doctrines, which had a significant impact on his understanding of Kabbalah.

Imber became acquainted with *fin de siècle* esotericism through his close relationship with the Oliphants. The Oliphants had developed a mystical doctrine called “*Sympneumata*,” which was based on the teachings of the American prophet, Thomas Lake Harris (1823–1906).

Harris, a poet, a pastor of the Universalist Church, and a Swedenborgian, taught that God was androgynous, that Christ had a female counterpart (Christa or Yessa), and that all human beings should seek their true opposite sex counterparts in order to spiritually unite with them.²² Laurence Oliphant and his mother met Harris during his visit to London in 1860 and later joined Harris's community, known as “The Brotherhood of the New Life” in Brocton, New York.²³ In 1872, Laurence married Alice le Strange, whom he met in Paris. Alice also joined Harris's Brotherhood and lived for several years in the community in Brocton and later in the new commune, Fountain Grove, in California.²⁴ The couple parted ways with Harris in the early 1880s, yet they were still very much influenced by his ideas and developed their own version of his mystical teaching in the community they established in Haifa, which several other former followers of Harris joined.²⁵

In Haifa, Alice and Laurence wrote their book *Sympneumata, or Evolutionary Forces now Active in Man*, which was published in 1885. In the book, which, according to Laurence, was dictated to him by Alice, the couple presented their mystical doctrines of the Divine androgyne and its human counterparts. According to the *Sympneumata*, each human being has a spiritual and physical complement of the opposite gender that can be encountered in their inner selves. Following Harris, the Oliphants rejected sexual intercourse in favour of a spiritual communion with one's counterpart, which they believed would lead to the regeneration of the human race through a return to its androgynous Divine like nature.²⁶ After Alice's death in 1886, Laurence wrote another book entitled *Scientific Religion or Higher Possibilities of Life and Practice through the Operation of Natural Forces* in which he further developed these ideas. The book was published in 1888, shortly before his death.

The Oliphants were very interested in Judaism and especially in Kabbalah, which they perceived as a doctrine that preserved the truth of the androgynous Deity. The Oliphants cited various biblical, talmudic, and kabbalistic sources in the fourth chapter of the *Sympneumata*, “The Testimony of the Ages.” At the end of the chapter they concluded:

The Kabbala, that whispering from primeval knowledge, the most jealously enshrouded with the darkness of mysticism and concealment, palpitates amidst its gloom with white heat of the truth that in shards it has transmitted. The duality of every mental form and force animates its every assertion ... Its cosmogony conceives of all creation as arising out of the opposite sexes of royalty, “the crowned king and queen,” who emanated from that “Ensof,” and it patterns in

all things the mystery of the first created earthly man, after the mystery of the heavenly man.²⁷

In *Scientific Religion*, Laurence Oliphant developed a unique form of Christian Zionist Kabbalah, which is based on Harris's ideas of the androgynous Deity and Christ's dual sexual nature. According to Oliphant, the Jews were entrusted with the mission of guarding the sacred mystery of the Divine feminine principal. This secret, which they believed was the intrinsic meaning of Jewish law—concealed in Christ's androgynous character—was previously recognized only by the Jewish mystics. The fulfillment of the law is the advent of an androgynous being that ensures his complete union, through the Divine feminine, with his own feminine complement. Oliphant states that Christ, whom the Jews failed to recognize as the first Messiah, was such a being, and the second messianic advent—according to the books of Kabbalah—will comprise the descent of the Divine feminine: "The whole of these obscure and mystical writings, which are replete with the most profound inspiration . . . are full of arcana containing the mystery of both the first and second advents of the Son and the Bride."²⁸ Further, Oliphant states,

The second coming of Christ . . . not now far distant . . . should be especially heeded by the Jews . . . because, they, as the custodians of the mysteries contained in Christ and in their law, are called to lead into the world the full revelation of them.²⁹

According to Oliphant, this mission was entrusted to the Jews because Jewish law contains not only the mystery of Christ's dual sexual nature, but also the method for the construction of a messianic society, which will solve the social and political problems of contemporary civilization:

The task of the reconstruction of this new society will be committed to the Jews. To be built up by them in conformity with the instructions concealed in the hidden meaning of their law, for it is thus and thus only, that the temple can ever be rebuilt in Zion.³⁰

Imber was acquainted with the doctrines of Harris and the Oliphants and mentions them with admiration and respect, emphasizing that the doctrine of a Divine androgyne was revealed in the Talmud and in Kabbalah. In the introduction to *Uriel*, which was published in Boston in 1895, Imber writes about Laurence Oliphant:

He was a queer genius. Twenty five years ago he abandoned Christianity, under the influence of his friend, Mr. Harris, an American ex clergyman. Mr. Harris is a man of extraordinary poetical powers. His chief doctrine is that God is bisexual, a dual conception, not unknown to Talmud and to the Kabbalah. As is the Maker, so is his creation . . . Mr. Oliphant took up these ideas and developed them. Working heart and soul for others was declared by him to be the best and only true method of worship. "The Religion of Labor" was the name he gave the new faith, and he and his wife worked here for seven years in manual labor, eating only bread and potatoes, so as to purge themselves of earthly desires and prepare themselves for absorption into the Divine Essence.³¹

Imber claims that his own “Cabbalistic mysticism” had its influence on Oliphant. He says that he helped Laurence and Alice write the outline for *Sympneumata*³² and that he contributed to the book the chapter he calls “Hebrew Testimony” (but which is actually entitled “The Testimony of Ages”).³³ In a letter to Zangwill, Imber claims that he helped Oliphant write the outline for his last book, *Scientific Religion*, and that they quarrelled about the place of Christ in it:

I am obliged to give you a little hint of the reason why I left Mr. Oliphant ... When he [Oliphant] began his work “Scientific Religion” he ordered me to draw up a sketch of the histoire of the divine word. I passed silence about Christ he ask [sic] me why? As he regard [sic] him as the great Jewish rabbi. I answer that in my opinion he did not exist [why] therefore do I have to allot to him a role in sacred histoire word by word. I gave him notice.³⁴

It is hard to assess Imber’s contribution to the writings of Laurence and Alice Oliphant. As far as I know, the couple’s interest in Kabbalah was developed only during their stay in Haifa, after they met Imber, and it is, indeed, possible that they benefited from his first hand knowledge of Jewish sources and that he, indeed, contributed to *Sympneumata*. Nonetheless, much of the Oliphants’ knowledge and perception of Kabbalah were based on written sources. Some of the citations of kabbalistic sources in *Sympneumata* are derived from Christian David Ginsburg’s *Kabbala* (or from another source that borrowed from Ginsburg’s influential book, such as Kenneth R.H. Mackenzie’s *The Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia*).³⁵ In *Scientific Religion*, Oliphant cites many passages from S. L. MacGregor Mathers’s *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, which was published in 1887. Moreover, it seems that the central place given to Kabbalah in *Scientific Religion* was dependent on the concurrent publication of Mathers’s influential book.

It is clear, as we shall see, that the ideas of the Oliphants had a major impact on Imber. Yet, before turning to examine Imber’s perceptions of Kabbalah, I would first like to examine his relationship to other *fin de siècle* esoteric movements, especially the Theosophical Society, which also had a considerable impact on his understanding of Kabbalah.

The Theosophical Society

Apart from his acquaintance with the esoteric ideas of Harris and the Oliphants, Imber was familiar with several other contemporary esoteric movements; for example, he mentions Freemasonry a few times. His kabbalistic journal *Uriel* bears the sub title “Masonic Edition,” and in it he included an enthusiastic greeting to the 26th Triennial Conclave of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States, which was held in Boston in August 1895.³⁶ There, Imber wrote, “The ancient masonic order... has a glorious past, a bright present, and a great future.”³⁷ He claimed that tal mudic sages were Masons³⁸ and used masonic notions (such as the “lost word”).³⁹

Imber also had some connections with the Koreshan Unity, headed by Cyrus Teed (1839–1908), a mystic and self proclaimed Messiah who developed a Christian esoteric doctrine, which included the belief in cellular cosmogony (i.e., that the earth encases an inner space in which we live). He established a utopian community in Estero, Florida. In

1893 Imber published an article in the Koreshan's journal *The Flaming Sword* entitled "Salam Aleikum: An Open Letter to the Religious Congress, by a Jewish Poet."⁴⁰

Imber was familiar with the ideas of the Theosophical Society and had contacts with members of the Society during his American period. Although he was critical of Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society, he was influenced by their ideas and adopted several key concepts, which he used in his presentation of Kabbalah. The Theosophical Society, which was founded by Madame Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Colonel Henry Steel Oclott (1832–1907) in New York in 1875, became very influential in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although the founders of the Society were especially interested in Hindu and Buddhist spirituality, they also found much interest in Kabbalah, which played an important role in the writings of Blavatsky, especially in the *Secret Doctrine*.⁴¹

In 1883, the book *Esoteric Buddhism*, written by Alfred Percy Sinnett, one of the leading figures in the Theosophical Society, reached the Oliphant's residence in Haifa and stimulated much interest amongst their friends.⁴² Laurence Oliphant, who related that he had met Blavatsky and Olcott in New York and was asked to join their movement, was very critical of the book and of the Theosophical Society in general.⁴³ It is probable that Imber became aware of the Theosophical Society during this period and adopted Laurence Oliphant's critical stance towards it. Yet, it was only after his move to America that Imber mentioned Theosophy in his writings and made contacts with fellows of the Society.

After his arrival in the United States, Imber met, in Indianapolis, two "prominent theosophists," Judge Macbride⁴⁴ and Dr Atkinson,⁴⁵ who enabled him to publish *The Keynote to Mystic Science*, which he dedicated to his "Supneuma" (*sic*),⁴⁶ Leila G. Thayer, a girl he fell in love with in Boston in 1893.⁴⁷ According to Imber, Mr Ayers (George D. Ayers), who was at the time president of the Boston Theosophical Society, and Rabbi Schindler (Rabbi Solomon Schindler) tried to form a society that would enable him to translate the Zohar.⁴⁸ In 1895, Imber attended the convention of the Theosophical Society in Boston, a convention in which Annie Besant, the president of the Society, accused the general secretary of the American section, William Q. Judge, of forging letters from the Mahatmas (a charge that created the schism between the Adyar based Theosophical Society and the later Pasadena based Theosophical Society). Imber, who described the Theosophical Society as "an organization that lives more in the past than in the present,"⁴⁹ was very critical and wrote that he had "never witnessed a more disgraceful convention."⁵⁰ In an interview with *The San Francisco Call* in 1896, Imber said: "I am opposed to Theosophy, as it is a misconception of the truth ... Mme. Blavatsky was misled willfully or otherwise I do not know but she failed in her effort to secure the truth."⁵¹

Imber's attitude toward the Theosophical Society was ambivalent. Notwithstanding his criticism, he regarded Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophical Society, as one of the "great ones" who walked in the line of Occultism and thus suffered the "purgatory of slander and crucifixion caused by the mob, who cannot and never will understand nobility."⁵² In an article entitled "Madam Blavatsky Unveiled," he exclaimed:

All respect to Madam Blavatsky. Shut your mouths ye scandalmonger and slanderers, for this alone is proof how great was Madam Blavatsky! Indeed she did

more for the elevation of mankind than many of the ministers, for she was the pre-
parer of a new age.⁵³

Yet Imber claims that “she was only a pointer – as some may be able to point out the
way to a city in which they themselves be strangers.”⁵⁴ In his “History of Mysticism
The Mahatma of the Essenes,” Imber is more critical of Blavatsky and claims that she
based her ideas of the Mahatmas on the Jewish Hasidim:

Madam Blavatzsky [*sic*], the founder of the Theosophists, was a shrewd Russian
woman, familiar with the ways and doing of the Mahatmas or “Good Jews,” as
are all the Russians, and she must have taken her cue from some “Chasid”
(a pious Jew, who believes in the occult power of the Mahatmas).⁵⁵

Further, Imber criticized Blavatsky’s references to Kabbalah in *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret
Doctrine*, saying that she could never have read or understood kabbalistic texts.⁵⁶ Imber
saw a similarity between Theosophy and Kabbalah but declared, “Cabbala ... is older
than and superior to Theosophy, as the latter mentions the former, while the
Cabbala does not mention the latter.”⁵⁷ Despite his criticism, Imber was influenced
by the ideas of the Theosophical Society and employed Theosophical terminology in
his exposition of Kabbalah, referring to the hasidim as the “Jewish Theosophists” and
to talmudic, kabbalistic, and hasidic masters as “Mahatmas.”⁵⁸ In his lectures in
San Francisco, Imber juxtaposed the false Mahatmas of Madame Blavatsky to the 36
hidden Jewish masters: “The thirty six masters of the Cabbala are not like the mahatmas
of the Theosophists, sitting in idleness on the top of Thibet’s rocky mountains meditating
like fools.”⁵⁹ It was the true 36 masters, says Imber, “that have chosen him to go forth
and preach the real truth.”⁶⁰

Kabbalah

Imber presented himself during his American period – and probably before that – as an
expert in Jewish esotericism. He wrote and published articles on Kabbalah, translated
texts, published a journal, and attempted to open a circle for Kabbalah studies.

According to Imber, he had been interested in Kabbalah and mysticism as a youth in
Zloczów: “an old, unknown Cabbalist, who felt the approach of life’s end, gave him the
key note to mystic science – the Cabbala.”⁶¹ Yet there is no indication that Imber was
interested in Kabbalah during his travels throughout Europe and his stay in Palestine.
He did not write about Jewish mysticism and did not include kabbalistic imagery in
his poetry. The only exception is his song “Giluy Shekhina” (“Revelation of the Divine
Presence”), which he said he wrote in Cyprus before arriving in Palestine. In the
song, the Shekhina (a term that denotes the Divine Presence in talmudic literature
and the tenth, feminine, divine emanation in the Kabbalah) is identified as the national
spirit (Ruah hale’um) that inspires his poetry:

I saw the Shechina weeping,
as she touched my lips with her hand,
and with great passion, longing,

my poem's spirit was roused.
 Between the broken lines of my song
 to this day she moves.
 Would you know her?
 She is the nation's soul.⁶²

It seems that Imber's interest in Jewish mysticism developed during his stay in London.⁶³ In Zangwill's novel *Children of the Ghetto*, the neo Hebrew poet, Pinchas Malchitsedek (based on Imber) is trying to sell his book of poems entitled *Metatoron's Flame*, about which he says:

Is it not a beautiful title? When Enoch was taken up to heaven while yet alive, he was converted to flames of fire and became Metatoron, the great spirit of Cabalah. So am I rapt into the heaven of lyrical poetry and I became all fire and flame and light.⁶⁴

This fictional episode alludes to Imber's attempts to publicize his book of poems, *Barkai*, in London.⁶⁵ Zangwill's choice of the book title *Metatoron's Flame* is not entirely a figment of his imagination.⁶⁶ Imber was, indeed, interested in the Hebrew book of Enoch (Third Enoch) and translated it into English. The translation was not published until 1910, in *Treasures of Two Worlds*,⁶⁷ but it is possible that Imber began work on it during his stay in London. In a letter to Zangwill, from 1889, Imber mentions a 70 page narration on Kabbalah that he submitted to *The Jewish Chronicle*, which was rejected.⁶⁸

Kabbalah became much more central for Imber after he arrived in the United States, in 1891. He attempted to open a class for Kabbalah in Boston in 1893, and as mentioned before, said that he was offered funds to translate the Zohar into English. Later that year he visited Indianapolis, where he published, with the help of local theosophists, *The Keynote to Mystic Science*, which probably dealt with Kabbalah (as we shall see, Imber identified Kabbalah as Mystical Science). In Boston, in 1895, at the back of *Uriel*, Imber printed a notice about the opening of a "Cabbalistic class" for people interested in joining the "inner circle" and practising "self elevation." In 1896, Imber arrived in San Francisco and gave a lecture on Kabbalah at the Temple Emanu El.⁶⁹ On 12 April 1896, *The San Francisco Call*, informed:

Prof. Imber has come into the West to found a new cult. After 2000 years of silence and mystery concerning it, the Cabbala is to be expounded ... The thirty six Cabbalists there are but thirty six, and have ever been in the world but thirty six have chosen him to go forth and teach the real truth. This is his word for it.⁷⁰

Imber's last book, *Treasure of Two Worlds*, which appeared in print shortly after his death, included an article on "History of the Mysticism The Mahatmas of the Essenes,"⁷¹ as well as translations and commentaries of passages from the Zohar⁷² and Third Enoch entitled, "The Great Mahatma of the Ancients Ishmael's Biography."⁷³

In spite of Imber's claim to have studied Kabbalah in his youth, it is clear that he did not have a thorough knowledge of it. He was acquainted with some kabbalistic texts and was capable of reading and translating the Zohar from Aramaic into English. Similarly,

he probably did not have much knowledge of the Kabbalah research of the period, although he may have read or heard about contemporaneous scholarship on Kabbalah. A major source for his knowledge and understanding of Kabbalah were the doctrines of Laurence Oliphant and the Theosophical Society. On the basis of his limited knowledge of kabbalistic texts and the Western esoteric perceptions of Kabbalah, Imber developed his own theories concerning the meaning and history of Jewish mysticism.

Following Laurence Oliphant notion of “Scientific Religion,” Imber presents Kabbalah as “Mystical Science:”

The Cabbala is the only science which has an established unit, and the laws which govern it are still in force, as in the by gone ages, at the time of Melchisedec.⁷⁴

This science leads to experiential knowledge and elevation of man to a divine state:

The truth of the science must be felt through all the senses of the body. You must hear, feel, see its truth. All its books are only mentor, teaching us by what way we can reach that standard where the man terminates and the God begins.⁷⁵

Further, Imber presents the Kabbalah as universal knowledge, an idea that was current in nineteenth century Western esoteric groups:

[The] Cabbala is the Divine Science which will be welcomed in every home, reaching every class of people without any distinction of denomination, for it bears on its face the sacred sign of Truth. The Popes in the Vatican were students of that sacred science as well as the Jews in the various countries and ages. And every spiritual scrutinizer is pointing to the Cabbala.⁷⁶

Imber writes, “In the Cabbala the Christ principle, as well as those of Buddha and Zoroaster, who were called to uplift humanity, are represented.”⁷⁷ As such, the Kabbalah can form a basis for the unity of all religions, since “[o]nly through the Cabbala can we solve the religious question and establish a unit in thought and feeling, so that a common brotherhood may be established on earth, as the Fatherhood is already established in Heaven.”⁷⁸

Although Imber emphasized that Kabbalah is a universal mystical science, he nevertheless followed Laurence Oliphant in believing that it is the Jews who have “the mission to preserve the truth of higher spirituality.”⁷⁹ As Oliphant stated, “A special destiny was reserved, however, for the race which was intrusted [sic] with the guardianship of the Sacred Mystery.”⁸⁰

Reading Kabbalah under the impact of Harris and Oliphant’s ideas, Imber identified its principles with those of the Sympneumata and accentuated the notion of the feminine aspect of the Divine, the Shekhina, which he calls the “Divine Womanhood.” According to Imber, the regulations of Kabbalah and Hasidism:

Extend over eating, drinking, business and other social obligations. If a man or woman has gone through all the training and he or she be still single, they cannot reach the highest station of perfection, and the Schechina (divine womanhood) cannot rest upon him or her, as only through woman we get divine

inspiration. The reason for it is, as the being in its perfection must resemble the creator who is Two in One, hence he or she who is single he or she is not a perfect being, and the attraction of the forces from spherical to the material cannot take place ... The Cabbala does not advocate marriage so as to fulfill the Biblical command ... The reason for advocating marriage is only to those who are desirous of living a better life and to travel on the road to perfection in accordance to the laws of the "Sypneuma."⁸¹

Imber, who identified Kabbalah with the worship of dual male female Divinity, claimed that the "primitive Hebrews of the patriarchal age" preserved the "primordial conception of a dual God in all its purity" and "worshiped the combined dual deity, male and female, under the name Elohim."⁸² According to Imber, Moses introduced the Hebrews to the new cult of Jehovah and "tried in vain to uproot the former cult from the heart of the Hebrews, but was obliged to compromise and to retain the traditional views of the primitive men side by side with his own doctrines."⁸³

Since the time of Moses, there have been two approaches to Judaism: the way of the priests, who followed the legalistic Mosaic doctrines, or the way of the spiritual and mystical prophets, who followed the primordial cult of the dual Divinity. "As the priests delivered orally their laws to the nation so, likewise, did the prophets communicate to their disciples the secrets of the higher science and spirituality..."⁸⁴ The heirs of the priests in the Second Temple period were the Pharisees, whereas the heirs of the mystics were the Essenes, who were "the strongest in support of the idealistic adoration of the Schehina (Divine Motherhood)."⁸⁵ The Essene mahatmas were divided into two sects—the Christians and the Mystic Rabbis of the talmudic period, who adhered to the primal faith in the Divine Motherhood:

While the succession of the early Christians gradually became more and more complete, the old party of the Essenes adhered steadfastly to their primal faith in the Schehina (Divine Motherhood). Among the later we find many men famous for their mystic learning—such men as Rabbi Simon Bar Jochai and his son Rabbi Eliezer. These men lived just after the destruction of the second temple and were the original Mahatmas, to whom is described the preparation of the famous book (the "Zohar")...⁸⁶

The Zohar, according to Imber, contains the spiritual meaning of Judaism, which, he argues, is opposed to the rabbinical, legalistic tradition:

They [the Jews] celebrate the death of Rabbi Simon Bar Yohai, the author of the Zohar, without knowing that to some extent that book is in opposition to Rabbinical tradition: as it explains the laws according to their esoteric meanings and spiritual solutions, which are in conflict with the dim, dogmatic dead letter.⁸⁷

According to Imber, the revival of mystical Judaism occurred only in the sixteenth century: "Isaac Lurya, that great Mahatma ... outlined a system for obtaining spiritual power (known as the Lurya system) by bringing one's body into subjection to the mind, through fasting and abstinence from earthly pleasures."⁸⁸

A different, life affirming mystical school, Hasidism, was founded later:

About one hundred and fifty years ago, a man named Israel Bal Shem Tov (man of a good name) appeared in Russia as a Mahatma and became the founder of the Chasidim (pious ones), a sort of Jewish Theosophists who believe in their Mahatmas, the Wonder Rabbis, who are known in the Jewish world as the Good Jews. The system of Israel, the great Mahatma, conflicts with that of Lurya. His idea is that a man cannot attain the highest station of spirituality except by a happy disposition idealized as Joy. His theory makes joy the ladder up which man can climb heavenward, and there converse with the angels.⁸⁹

Imber compares Luria to John the Baptist and Israel Baal Shem Tov to Jesus Christ:

To use the Cabbalistic expression of reincarnation, I am inclined to think that Lurye had a spark from John's soul, while Christ's spark was kindling in the heart of Israel Bal Shem Tow [sic] ... Like the famous forerunner of Christ, Lurye lived in the forests, spending week after week in fasting and meditation. Like John, Lurye preached to the people the gospel of repentance, telling to the hypocrites their hidden sins. Like Christ, Israel Bal Shem Tow preached to the people the gospel of love ... Like the son of the carpenter, he was persecuted by the stubborn Rabbis, and like his antetype he showed a humility, a meekness which resembles Him who was nailed to the cross.⁹⁰

The Baal Shem Tov, according to Imber, continued the spiritual direction of the primitive Hebrews, the Essenes, and the early kabbalists:

It seems that he tried to introduce the ancient cheerful Elohist cult among his people. He pictured to them the beauties of life and nature with the most rosy colors. That life is an unbroken chain of joyful activity and death has no power to lead us out of this happy place. For we are again and again returning to our playground the earth and the Law of Reincarnation till, through a spiritual process, we reach our destiny to be merged in the Ensof (the Endless One).⁹¹

As we shall see later, Imber presents the founder of Hasidism, who offered hope to the Jews who suffered from the dry legalism of halakhic Judaism, as the catalyst for the modern Jewish national revival.

Imber's expositions of Kabbalah in *Uriel, The Treasures of Two Worlds* and a few other articles, combines his first hand knowledge of some Jewish kabbalistic texts with Western esoteric perceptions of the Kabbalah, which were prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Imber accepted the Western esoteric perception of Kabbalah as a perennial universal wisdom, the notion of the Chaldean origins of Kabbalah, the perception of the Essenes as proto kabbalists, and the belief that Christ and his followers were acquainted with Kabbalah. He also adopted the division, which originated in Christian Kabbalah, between the legalistic Judaism of the talmudic rabbis and the spiritual tradition of the Jewish kabbalists. Although he was critical of Madame Blavatsky and her ideas on Kabbalah, Imber adopted some Theosophical terminology, first and foremost, the term "Mahatmas," which he applied to rabbinic and kabbalistic masters.

Imber's exposition of Kabbalah highlights the influence of Western esotericism on the public perception of Kabbalah in the *fin de siècle* period, including its influence on Jewish scholars, who had first hand knowledge of Jewish kabbalistic sources.⁹² Further, Imber's interest in Kabbalah and his ideas concerning its history and significance were also related to his Jewish national ideology. Imber's exposition of Kabbalah (as well as that of his patron, Laurence Oliphant) reveals a significant nexus between Western esoteric perceptions of Kabbalah and early Zionist ideology. I would like to conclude with a discussion of the connection between Imber's Western esoteric notions of Kabbalah and his Zionist convictions. I suggest that the link between Western esotericism, Kabbalah, and Jewish nationalism was created in the context of *fin de siècle* Orientalism and the appropriation of esoteric and neo Romantic perceptions of the mystical East in the formation of modern Jewish national identity.

Kabbalah, Zionism, and the mystical East

Imber's perceptions concerning the antiquity of Jewish mysticism and his positive evaluation of Kabbalah and Hasidism are very different from the dismissive attitude to Kabbalah, which was prevalent among the followers of the Jewish Enlightenment in the nineteenth century. This negative stance was still common among Western educated Jews in the *fin de siècle* (and later), who regarded Kabbalah as an alien intrusion into Judaism and disparaged the hasidic movement. Yet, since the mid nineteenth century, a few Jewish scholars (such as Adolph Franck, Meyer Heinrich Landauer, Adolph Jellinek, and others) have related to Kabbalah in a much more favourable light. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the positive evaluation of Kabbalah and Hasidism became more prevalent, especially in Jewish national circles; some of these scholars were influenced by the neo Romantic and Western esoteric enthusiasm for Jewish mysticism.

Imber's interest in Kabbalah emerged in a similar context. Although he may have been aware of the new appreciation of Kabbalah among Jewish scholars of his time, his perception of Jewish mysticism was informed by his encounter with late nineteenth century non Jewish Western esoteric groups who regarded Kabbalah as one of the most important sources of occult knowledge. Imber adopted this stance and integrated the Western esoteric notions of Kabbalah within his Zionistic ideology.

As previously described, Imber accepted the universalistic perception of Kabbalah, which was prevalent in nineteenth century Occultism. Yet, in contrast to Madame Blavatsky and other occultists, who downplayed the connection of Kabbalah to Judaism,⁹³ Imber (similar to his patron Oliphant) emphasized that Kabbalah "sails under the Jewish flag" and the "Jewish race" is its preserver.⁹⁴ For Imber, the idea that the Jews were the preservers of the universal spiritual science was a source of national pride: "That the Jews had the mission to preserve the truth of higher spirituality, can be readily discerned by reading the history of this wonderful race."⁹⁵

Imber accepted the idea that originated in Christian Kabbalah and was developed in nineteenth century esoteric movements (and which still prevails today) that juxtaposes the spiritual and mystical character of the Kabbalah with the legalistic nature of rabbinic Judaism. According to Imber, these two trends originated in the two schools of ancient Judaism. Perhaps comparing the early Jewish mystics to contemporary Jewish settlers in

the agricultural colonies of Palestine, Imber portrays the early Jewish prophet as “a farmer, a shepherd, or a mere laborer, supporting himself by dint of daily toil ...” The priests revelled in luxuries and had honours thrust upon them, whereas the prophets were subjected to “revilings, persecutions, and mockeries.”⁹⁶

Imber gives a Jewish national interpretation to the perception of Kabbalah as the expression of spiritual Judaism. In an article published in *Menorah* in 1903, Imber portrays Kabbalah as the ancient, vital, power of the Jewish race, which sparked through the hasidic revolt against the rabbis the Haskalah, Modern Hebrew literature and the Jewish national revival:

The stern rabbis of the Talmud made religion a dry mechanism according to whose regimen the Hebrew walked in his Ghetto, devoid of any hope and cheer ... At that time, our hero [i.e., the Baal Shem Tov B.H.] appeared on the Jewish stage, and by his actions he saved our national hope, and blew new life into the dead bones of the scattered children of Israel ... I am an admirer of our above mentioned hero, for he was the indirect factor and cause of our modern advanced Jewish knowledge. Through the friction between his followers and those of the sturdy Talmudists, a new electric life came into action and the party of the Maskilim (Enlightened) came into existence ... The era had produced the tremendous treasure of the modern Russian Hebrew literature, which woke up its slumbering nation from its delusive dreams, to realize what it was and what it ought to do become a nation again.⁹⁷

Imber regards the Jewish mystical tradition as representing the national spirit of the Jewish people. This tradition, which originated with the “Elohistic” cult of the Hebrews of ancient Palestine and was continued by the Prophets, Essenes, early Christians, and kabbalists, culminated in the hasidic movement, which stimulated the modern Jewish national revival.

Imber’s perception of Kabbalah and Hasidism as representations of the spiritual power of Judaism which is opposed to legalistic rabbinic Judaism and is the expression of Jewish national vitality anticipates the perceptions of Kabbalah and Hasidism of Zionist Jewish scholars of the early twentieth century. In 1906 Martin Buber (1878–1965), published a short essay entitled “Jewish Mysticism,” as an introduction to *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*. In this essay, Buber describes the Baal Shem Tov and his followers in a similar vein to Imber’s:

The teaching of the Baal Shem soon found access to the people ... The piety of this people was inclined from of old to mystical immediacy; it received the new message as an exalted expression of itself. The proclamation of joy in God, after a thousand years of a dominance of law that was poor in joy and hostile to it, acted like a liberation ... the people up till then had acknowledged above them an aristocracy of Talmud scholars, alienated from life ... now the people, by a single blow, were liberated from this aristocracy...⁹⁸

Similar to Imber before him, Buber regards Jewish mysticism as the creative, subterranean element of Judaism, which was forever persecuted by the official Judaism of the rabbis.⁹⁹

Imber regards the hasidic movement and its friction with rabbinic Judaism as the stimulant for Jewish enlightenment and Jewish national revival, which inspired the Jews “to realize what it was and what it ought to do to become a nation again.”¹⁰⁰ Imber’s idea that Jewish enlightenment and Jewish nationalism could be seen as a continuation, rather than an opposition, of Kabbalah and Hasidism anticipated the position of Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), the founder of modern Kabbalah studies. Scholem perceived Jewish mysticism as the expression of Jewish national vitality in the diaspora and regarded the Haskalah and Zionism as the dialectical continuations of Kabbalah.¹⁰¹

The nexus between the interest in Kabbalah and the occult on the one hand, and Jewish national ideology on the other, which is expressed in the life and work of Imber, was created in the framework of *fin de siècle* neo Romantic Orientalism. In the late nineteenth century, interest in the Orient, and especially in Oriental spirituality, was in vogue in Western Europe and the United States and became prominent in Western esoteric circles, first and foremost in the Theosophical Society.¹⁰² Although the neo Romantic enthusiasm of the “Mystical East” was fraught with ambivalence, and the contemporary “East” was portrayed many times as decayed and deteriorated, the symbolic value of the Orient’s glorious past was high at the turn of the century.

The romanticized evaluation of the Orient had a significant impact on contemporary attitudes to Judaism (especially to Kabbalah) and particularly on the self perception of Jews who embraced the neo Romantic ambivalent vision of the Orient. As David Biale observed:

Jewish Orientalism, as opposed to non Jewish, involved constructing an object which was also in some sense ostensibly one’s self, the subject which was doing the construction ... Jewish Orientalism involved a complex dialectic of projection and displacement of oneself onto an object that was never really other.¹⁰³

The complexity of Jewish Orientalism comes to light in Imber’s invitation to his reader:

To accompany me to my native land of “Half Asia” as my famous country man, Karl Emil Franzos, has dubbed it. Indeed, “Half Asia” is to Asia as its preface is to a book: it is the a, b, c school in which to prepare for the great Semitic college. Asia. The sight of the rapid movement of the Galician Jews as they run along the streets of Cracow and Lemberg in their long black caftans will prepare the traveler to understand the analogous, if slower, movement and gestures of our Ishmaelitish brethren parading the streets of the Orient in their long talars and their gay turbans.¹⁰⁴

The Oriental character of Jews that was used in anti Semitic discourse as a basis for polemical characterization came to be perceived by some Jews of the late nineteenth century as a source of ethnic pride. Whereas previously, enlightened Jews sought to distance themselves from their ostensible Oriental character, at the turn of the twentieth century, many Jews enthusiastically embraced their supposedly Eastern heritage and Asiatic provenance.

The re evaluated Asiatic provenance of the Jews, constituted, first and foremost, the land of Israel, the Bible, and the Hebrew language. Yet, Eastern European Jewish folklore, Hasidism, and Kabbalah were also re evaluated as an expression of the Jewish Oriental heritage. Indeed, Kabbalah, which was despised by the Jewish

Enlightenment as a late, foreign intrusion to Judaism, came to be considered by Jewish scholars as an element of an original ancient Jewish mystical tradition that originated in the East.

Jewish Orientalism and the positive neo Romantic evaluation of the East played an important part in the Zionist construction of Jewish national identity. Elements perceived as part of the Jewish Oriental heritage became fundamental in the construction of modern Jewish national identity. Some Zionist scholars, such as Buber and Scholem, regarded Jewish mysticism as part of the authentic Jewish national heritage. Kabbalah and Hasidism were perceived as originating from the Jewish Eastern past and as representing the national, vital and Oriental spirit of Judaism. For such scholars, the aspirations for the return of the Jews to the land of Israel and the revival of Jewish national culture were interconnected with their study and positive evaluation of Jewish mysticism.

Before Zionist scholars of the early twentieth century had done it, Imber allotted a major place to Kabbalah in his construction of Jewish national identity. For Imber, the return of the Jews to their homeland in the land of Israel was part and parcel of the return to the mystical ideas that were created there and which preserved Jewish national vitality and hope in the diaspora. "Forward, to the East" for Imber was both a return to Palestine, as well as a return to the heritage of Jewish mysticism.

Notes

1. Kabakoff, *Master of Hope*, 39.
2. Kabakoff, *Naphtali Herz Imber*, 4–7. For Imber's description of his meeting with Laurence Oliphant see: Kabakoff, *Master of Hope*, 58–9. In a letter from October 1882, Alice Oliphant mentioned "a little Polish Hebrew and Hebrew Scholar, that helped Laurence with his Hebrew, German and Roumanian correspondence." She further writes: "The Hebrew must learn English to fit on to some other work Laurence will want him for later on, so I give him a daily lesson through the German... then Laurence takes lessons in the rudiments of Hebrew." M. Oliphant, *Memoir*, 323.
3. Taylor, 190–214; Moruzzi, "Strange Bedfellows," 64–5.
4. Rogel, *The Imber File*, 51–3, 57, 86–7.
5. Kabakoff, *Naphtali Herz Imber*, 12–21; Rogel, *The Imber File*, 43–57.
6. Rogel, *The Imber File*, 58–65. On Paul Vernier see also *ibid.*, 27–8. Imber described his visit to Egypt in two articles published in *Havatzelet*, volumes 27–28, March 1886.
7. Rogel, *The Imber File*, 76.
8. *Ibid.*, 86–87.
9. For a list of Imber's publications in the Hebrew press during his stay in Palestine and shortly thereafter, see Rogel, *The Imber File*, 112–13.
10. *Ibid.*, 88.
11. Kabakoff, *Naphtali Herz Imber*, 27–38; *Master of Hope*, 12; Einav, "Naphtali Herz Imber Israel Zangwill," 188–9; Rogel, *The Imber File*, 88–9.
12. In 1890, Imber wrote an article on the question of women's wigs in the Talmud and was fiercely attacked for his dilettante scholarship and the resulting misunderstandings. See Einav, 199–200, n 3; *On The Main Line Blog*, March 28, 2011. <http://onthemainline.blogspot.com/2011/03/great-wives-and-wigs-controversy-of.html>

- See also the discussion of Imber's article on the origin of the Aramaic poem *Chad Gadya*, published in *The Jewish Standard* in 1889; *ibid* (January 14, 2011), <http://onthemainline.blogspot.com/2011/01/naftali-herz-imber-plays-historian-in.html>
13. Rogel, *The Imber File*, 90–108. Ben Yehuda published a Hebrew translation of an article by the missionary Herman Friedlander, first published in 1884, which described his contact with Imber (whose name is not mentioned explicitly) during his illness in Jerusalem in 1883. See *Ibid*, 45–47.
 14. Zangwill, *Children of the Ghetto*, 216.
 15. Rogel, *The Imber File*, 30–31. According to the marriage and divorce documents, which Rogel located, Imber's wife was named Amanda Davisson (Davisson being the name of her first husband) and her maiden name was Margaret A. Lippeid.
 16. *Los Angeles Herald*, February 4, 1898, 6.
 17. Kabakoff, *Naphtali Herz Imber*, 34.
 18. I have not been able to locate a copy of this publication. Imber mentions it in *Uriel* 8 and in an interview with *The San Francisco Call*, April 12, 1896, 17.
 19. On Imber's life and literary activities in America, see Kabakoff, *Master of Hope*, 13–21.
 20. Shoham, *Poetry and Prophecy*, 49–55.
 21. Lipsky, *A Gallery of Zionist Profiles*, 33.
 22. Versluis, "Sexual Mysticism," 337–48.
 23. Taylor, 113–45.
 24. *Ibid*, 168–86.
 25. *Ibid*, 213–30.
 26. Chayes, *The Esoteric Symbol*.
 27. L. Oliphant, *Sympneumata*, 74.
 28. L. Oliphant, *Scientific Religion*, 300.
 29. *Ibid*, 307.
 30. *Ibid*, 310.
 31. Imber, *Uriel*, 11. See also his discussion of Oliphant and Harris in his "Leaves from My Palestine and Other Diaries" (first published in *The Jewish Standard*, London, 1888–89); Kabakoff, *Master of Hope*, 59–61.
 32. Imber, *Uriel*, 5, 10, 24. See also *The San Francisco Call*, April 12, 1896, 17.
 33. Imber, "Salam Aleikum," 187.
 34. Einav, "Naphtali Herz Imber Israel Zangwill," 194. As Einav suggests (*ibid.*, 188), Imber's declaration of religious zeal and his denial of Jesus' existence may be related to his attempt to hide the relationships he had with Christian missionaries. See also Rogel, *The Imber File*, 87. As we shall see below, in his later writings Imber did not deny the existence of Jesus and allotted him an important place in the history of Jewish mysticism.
 35. Thus, the citation in Oliphant's *Sympneumata*, 58, note 1, from Zohar II, 229b is probably taken from Ginsburg, *The Kabbalah*, 111–12, or from Mackenzie, *The Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia*, vol. 2, 411. The reference to the Kabbalistic prayer "For the reunion of the Holy blessed be His name, and His Schehina: I do this in love and fear, in fear and love, for the union of the name [masculine] הוּא with הַי [feminine] into a perfect harmony" (Oliphant, *Sympneumata*, 73–4) is dependent on Ginsburg, 122 (or Mackenzie, vol. 2, 414).
 36. Imber, *Uriel*, 53–7.
 37. *Ibid*, 54.

38. Ibid, 56, 91.
39. Ibid, 23 5.
40. I am grateful to the librarian of the Koreshan State Historic Site archives, who kindly sent me a photocopy of the article.
41. Pasi, "Oriental Kabbalah," 155 62; Hall, "The Concept of Reincarnation in Theosophy," 209 31.
42. M. Oliphant, *Memoir*, vol. 2, 343 4. Oliphant published a satire on the book, entitled "The Sisters of Tibet" in the journal, *The 19th Century*. It was later republished in his *Fashionable Philosophy and Other Sketches*. It was recently republished by Meyer, *Laurence Oliphant*, 99 123.
43. In a letter to Miss Hamilton, Oliphant wrote: "You are not the only one of my friends who has been fascinated by 'Esoteric Buddhism' indeed one of them is going out to India to become a Mahatma himself if he can. When the Theosophical Society was first founded by Madam Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, both of whom I know, and others, I was asked to become a member of it; but I had reasons at the time, which I have since found to be sound, which prevented me from identifying myself with it in any way. I believe the whole thing to be a delusion and a snare." M. Oliphant, *Memoir*, vol. 2, 344.
44. Judge Robert W. McBride was a member of the Indianapolis Theosophical Society and was later elected as a member of its executive committee. See *Theosophical Quarterly* 12, 1914, 96.
45. Imber probably refers to Dr W. J. Atkinson, who wrote in occult periodicals in the 1870s (and should not be confused with the famous Occultist and member of the New Thought movement, W. W. Atkinson, who had not yet published in the early 1890s). I am grateful to Philip Deslippe for this information and to Janet Kerschner, the archivist of the Theosophical Society in America, who queried Mr Deslippe on this question on my behalf.
46. Imber, *Uriel*, 8. Rabbi Schindler was, indeed, interested in Kabbalah and dedicated a chapter to it in his *Messianic Expectations*, published in 1886 (118 33). Nonetheless, his attitude toward Kabbalah was very negative ("a disease which was caused by the unhealthy atmosphere in which Judaism was compelled to live, a cancer which had slowly but steadily spread over its whole body, and almost caused its death"), Schindler, *Messianic Expectations*, 116. See also his disparaging portrayal of the Zohar, *ibid*, 126 9. This may cast doubt on Imber's story that Schindler wanted to endorse a translation of the Zohar.
47. The dedication is cited in an interview with Imber in *The San Francisco Call*, April 12, 1896, 17. There, Imber relates his love affair with Leila, who was not Jewish, and of the objections of her parents as well as the Boston Jewish community to their relationship. See also *Uriel*, 7 8.
48. Imber, *Uriel*, 19. Elsewhere he said that he was offered by them \$2000 to translate the Zohar, but refused. See *The San Francisco Call*, April 19, 1896, 21.
49. Imber, *Uriel*, 54. See also Imber, *Treasures*, 93.
50. Imber, *Uriel*, 58 9.
51. *The San Francisco Call*, April 7, 1896, 16. See also, April 8, 1896, 7; April 12, 1896, 17; April 19, 1896, 21.
52. Imber, *Uriel*, 4.
53. *Ibid*, 57.
54. *Ibid*.

55. Imber, *Treasures*, 10–11. Imber claims that Blavatsky based her writings on a manuscript of DePalm and says that his friend, Miss Farrington, showed this in her book, *A Mystic Society*. Imber refers to Marie L. Farrington's *A Mystical Society of Universal Row*, published in San Francisco in 1890. Farrington was expelled from the Theosophical Society for publishing a "grossly defamatory pamphlet upon the Theosophical Society, its founders, and members:" see *Lucifer*, VII, 1891, 88.
56. Imber, *Treasures*, 11.
57. Imber, *Uriel*, 60.
58. *Ibid*, 61.
59. *The San Francisco Call*, April 19, 1896, 21.
60. *The San Francisco Call*, April 8, 1896, 7.
61. *Ibid*, 4. See also the article "Dr. Imber on Kabbalism," in *The San Francisco Call*, April 8, 1896, 7.
62. Imber, *Mivhar kitvei*, 134. I am grateful to Peter Cole, who kindly translated these lines for this article.
63. During his stay in London, Imber was in contact with Natahan L.D. Zimmer, a Jewish scholar known for his intense piety and interest in Kabbalah. Imber mentions "my friend, the Cabbalist Mr. Zimmer" in his article about Zangwill. Kabakoff, *Master of Hope*, 99. See also his references to Zimmer in his letters to Zangwill, Einav, "Naphtali Herz Imber Israel Zangwill," 202, 204. Zimmer is depicted in Zangwill's novel as Froom Karlkammer.
64. Zangwill, *Children of the Ghetto*, 137.
65. In his article on Zangwill and *The Jewish Standard* (published in *The Jewish Exponent* in 1892), Imber describes his first meeting with Zangwill, at the office of *The Jewish Standard* in London, where he went to distribute *Barkai*: Kabakoff, *Master of Hope*, 96.
66. Probably the choice of the name Malchizedek reflects Imber's interest in this biblical figure, which, in his later writings, he refers to as an early Kabbalist (an idea which is based on Oliphant's *Scientific Religion*). See, for instance, Imber, *Uriel*, 20.
67. Imber, *Treasures*, 161–9.
68. Einav, "Naphtali Herz Imber Israel Zangwill" 198.
69. Kabakoff, *Master of Hope*, 16–17.
70. *The San Francisco Call*, April 12, 1896, 17.
71. Imber, *Treasures*, 1–14.
72. These include a passage from Zohar Vayakhel (Zohar 2, 195b–196a), Imber, *Treasures*, 77–79, Midrash Eicha (Zohar Hadash, 91a–93b), *ibid.* 82–5, and Midrash Ha Ne'elam (Zohar Hadash, 92b), *ibid.* 99–105. See Huss, "The Translations of the Zohar," 66.
73. Imber, *Treasures*, 161–9.
74. Imber, *Uriel*, 20.
75. *Ibid*, 17–18.
76. *Ibid*, 2.
77. *Ibid*, 22.
78. *Ibid*, 15–16. See also Imber, "Salem Aleikum," 187–8.
79. Imber, *Treasures*, 5. See also Imber, *Uriel*, 15–16.
80. L. Oliphant, *Scientific Religion*, 290.
81. Imber, *Uriel*, 22–3.
82. Imber, *Treasures*, 86.
83. Imber, *Treasures* 87.

84. Ibid, 5.
85. Ibid, 92.
86. Ibid.
87. Imber, *Uriel*, 16.
88. Imber, *Treasures*, 8.
89. Ibid.
90. Imber, *Uriel*, 22. Imber goes on to compare the Baal Shem Tov's disciple, Dov Baer of Mesritch, to Christ's disciple, Paul.
91. Kabakoff, *Master of Hope*, 272 (first published in *Menorah*, January 1903).
92. Another interesting example, from the same period, is A.D. Ezekiel's interest and perception of Kabbalah, which were stimulated by the Theosophical Society; see Huss, "The Sufi Society," 184–7.
93. Pasi, "Oriental Kabbalah," 159; Hall, "The Concept of Reincarnation in Theosophy," 207–23.
94. Imber, *Uriel*, 15–16.
95. Imber, *Treasures*, 5.
96. Ibid, 5–6.
97. Kabakoff, *Master of Hope*, 271–273.
98. Buber, *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*, 15.
99. Mendes Flohr, *Divided Passions*, 88.
100. Kabakoff, *Master of Hope*, 273.
101. Biale, *Gershom Scholem*, 162–3; Raz Krakotzkin, "The Nationalist Representation of the Diaspora," 132; Huss, "Ask No Questions," 143.
102. Mendes Flohr, *Divided Passions*, 77–80; Goodrick Clarke, "The Theosophical Society," 3–28.
103. Biale, "Shabbtai Zvi," 88.
104. Kabakoff, *Master of Hope*, 32–3.

Bibliography

- Biale, David. *Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah, and Counter History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Biale, David. "Shabbtai Zvi and the Seductions of Jewish Orientalism, The Sabbatian Movement, and its Aftermath: Messianism, Sabbatianism and Frankism." *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 17 (2001) (special issue): 85–110.
- Buber, Martin. *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman*. New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1988.
- Chayes, Julie. *The Esoteric Symbol of the Divine Androgyne and "The Woman Question" in Alice and Laurence Oliphant's Sympneumata and Scientific Religion* (forthcoming).
- Einav, Yitzhak. "Naphtali Herz Imber Israel Zangwill: A Correspondence." *Journal of Israeli History* 2 (1981): 185–213.
- Ginsburg, Christian David. *The Kabbalah: Its Doctrines, Development, and Literature*. London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1865.
- Goodrick Clarke, Nicholas. "The Theosophical Society Orientalism the 'Mystic East:' Western Esotericism and Eastern Religion in Theosophy." *Theosophical History* 13 (2007): 3–28.
- Hall, Julie. "The Concept of Reincarnation in Theosophy." PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2011.

- Huss, Boaz. "Ask No Questions: Gershom Scholem and the Study of Contemporary Jewish Mysticism." *Modern Judaism* 25 (2005): 141–58.
- Huss, Boaz. "The Sufi Society from America: Theosophy and Kabbalah in Poona in the Late Nineteenth Century." In *Kabbalah and Modernity, Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, edited by Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi, and Kocku von Stukrad, 167–93. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Huss, Boaz. "The Translations of the Zohar." *Teuda* 21–22 (2007): 33–110 [in Hebrew].
- Imber, Naphtali Herz. *Mivhar kitvei*. Tel Aviv, Israel: Ahdut, 1929.
- Imber, Naphtali Herz. "Salem Aleikum: An Open Letter the Religious Congress, by a Jewish Poet." *The Flaming Sword* (1893): 187–188.
- Imber, Naphtali Herz. *Treasures of Two Worlds*. Los Angeles, CA: Citizens Printing Shop, 1910.
- Imber, Naphtali Herz, ed. *Uriel: A Monthly Magazine Devoted to Cabbalistic Science*. Boston, MA: The Cabbalistic Publishing Company, 1895.
- Kabakoff, Jacob. *Master of Hope: Selected Writings of Naphtali Herz Imber*. London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1985.
- Kabakoff, Jacob. *Naphtali Herz Imber "Baal Hatikvah"*. Lod, Israel: Haberman Institute for Literary Research, 1991 [in Hebrew].
- Lipsky, Louis. *A Gallery of Zionist Profiles*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1956.
- Mackenzie, Kenneth R. H. *The Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia of History, Rites, Symbolism and Biography*. London, 1877.
- Mendes Flohr, Paul. *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1991.
- Meyer, T. H. *Laurence Oliphant, When A Stone Begins to Roll*. Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2011.
- Moruzzi, Norma Claire. "Strange Bedfellows: The Question of Lawrence Oliphant's Christian Zionism." *Modern Judaism* 26 (2005): 55–73.
- Oliphant, Laurence. *Scientific Religion, or the Higher Possibilities of Life*. Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood, 1888.
- Oliphant, Laurence. *Sympneumata, or Evolutionary Forces Now Active in Man*. Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1885.
- Oliphant, Margaret. *Memoir of the Life of Laurence Oliphant and of His Wife Alice Oliphant*. Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood, 1891.
- Pasi, Marco. "Oriental Kabbalah and the Parting of East and West in the Early Theosophical Society." In *Kabbalah and Modernity, Interpretations, Transformations, Adaptations*, edited by Boaz Huss, Marco Pasi, and Kocku von Stukrad, 151–66. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Raz Krakotzkin, Amnon. "The Nationalist Representation of the Diaspora: Zionist Historiography and Medieval Jewry." PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 1996 [in Hebrew].
- Rogel, Nakdimon. *The Imber File: In the Footsteps of N.H. Imber in Eretz Israel*. Jerusalem, Israel: Zionist Library Press, 1997 [in Hebrew].
- Schindler, Solomon. *Messianic Expectations and Modern Judaism*. Boston, MA: S. E. Cassino, 1886.
- Shoham, Reuven. *Poetry and Prophecy*. Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2002.
- Taylor, Anne. *Laurence Oliphant 1829–1889*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Versluis, Arthur. "Sexual Mysticism in Nineteenth Century America: John Humphrey, Noyes Thomas, Lake Harris, and Alice Bunker Stockham." In *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, edited by J. Wouter Hanegraaff and Jeffrey J. Kripal, 337–48. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Zangwill, Israel. *Children of the Ghetto: A Study of a Peculiar People*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998.